

Dear Friends,

My text comes from the Gospel According to Henry Ford:

Whether you think you can or you think you can't, you're right.

It's a quote I've known for many years, but it returned to my thinking this week when I re-read a blog post from three or four years ago by the Canadian pastor I have enthused over in this column before, Carey Nieuwhof. It was entitled, '5 Small-Thinking Mindsets that Stunt Your Church's Potential.'¹ I share it with some hesitation, because I am only too aware of people in our churches who are putting in crazy hours keeping the show on the road, many of whom are at the frontline of the financial and numerical problems assailing our congregations.

Nevertheless, I think we should ponder the small thinking that Nieuwhof writes about. His five examples are the ones that his church in Ontario had to battle; maybe not all of them apply to all our churches, but equally there are doubtless other examples that do apply to us.

What Works There Won't Work Here We claim that the examples of 'successful' churches elsewhere won't translate to our culture. Well, the odd tweak might be needed but human nature is the same the world over. People scorned the Alpha Course as having been developed for young middle-class professionals and it wouldn't work for other people. But it works in all sorts of places, even if the odd amendment might be needed.

My Context Is Different Maybe, but there is still a lot in common. And in any case, why is this used only by those who are small? You never hear this used in reverse by those whose churches are growing: they never attribute their growth to their context.

If You Build It They Will Come That might have been a great line from the movie *Field Of Dreams*, but it's bad theology. Put a poor church in a good building and it won't grow. Do the reverse and it probably will. And in any case, the Gospel gives us no freedom to wait for people to come to us: we are to go to people!

People Don't Give Nieuwhof's church offered members training in how to budget, and now many have enough to give generously to the church and to save for family needs, both short-term and long-term. It helps to have a

kingdom of God vision, rather than simply saying, 'Please give in order to keep the boat afloat.'

People Don't Like Big Churches Some of our folk would rather just retain the small 'club' atmosphere where we know everyone. But if a church grows numerically, there are ways to maintain the close relationships with small groups. Good grief, we're Methodists, and we have the inheritance of John Wesley with his genius for small groups such as classes and bands. We of all people have no excuse!

Behind all this is, I think, one failure to rule them all. It's the error where we evaluate everything on whether we can do it. Yet if God calls us to a venture we won't be able to do it unless we rely on him. The glory must be his alone.

And so having opened with a quote, I close with one. This is from James Hudson Taylor, the nineteenth century missionary pioneer to China. In these words he is primarily referring to money, but the application can be taken much wider:

Depend on it. God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply. He is too wise a God to frustrate His purposes for lack of funds, and He can just as easily supply them ahead of time as afterwards, and He much prefers doing so.

May God bless you and stretch you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dave Faulkner". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Dave Faulkner

¹ <https://careynieuwhof.com/5-small-thinking-mindsets-that-stunt-your-churchs-potential/>