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REVITALIZING AND CHANGING CULTURE  
AT NORTH BAPTIST CHURCH IN  
PHOENIX, ARIZONA

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Oscar Noe Garcia  
May 2018

**APPROVAL SHEET**

REVITALIZING AND CHANGING CULTURE  
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This work is dedicated to my wonderful wife, Clancey, who has supported me and sacrificed so much during my time of study and research while raising four incredible children, Baylen, Mamie, Hallie, and Fallon. I would also like to thank North Phoenix Baptist Church for all of their support and encouragement during this process.

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## PREFACE

This project is written and motivated by the love and commitment that I have to the Gospel, North Phoenix Baptist Church (NPHX) and the City of Phoenix. There is a deeply rooted burden that God has given me for the amount of lost people in Phoenix. To think about people dying and going to hell is the very thing that motivated me to surrender to the call of being the senior pastor at NPHX.

This work is dedicated to my wonderful wife, Clancey, who has supported me and sacrificed so much during my time of study and research while raising four incredible children, Baylen, Mamie, Hallie, and Fallon. I would also like to thank North Phoenix Baptist Church for all of their support and encouragement during this process, and last but not least, Dr. Shane Parker, my faculty supervisor, for all of the encouragement, support, and advice during this project.

Noe Garcia

Phoenix, Arizona

May 2018



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

According to the North American Mission Board, Phoenix is the sixth largest city in the United States with a population of 5.59 million. Just 12.6 percent of those people identify themselves as Evangelicals, while an astonishing 62 percent claim to be unaffiliated with any religious group. Phoenix ranks 89<sup>th</sup> out of 96 as one of the least Bible-minded metro areas in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> North Phoenix Baptist Church is located in the heart of this city, on a 40-acre campus surrounded by one of the most established communities in Phoenix. Once a growing, thriving church with over 20,000 members, in 2016, NPHX was struggling to survive. The church needed revitalization, cultural change, and hope for the future. The focus of this project was to begin that process of revitalization.

#### **Context**

North Phoenix Baptist Church (NPHX) met together for the first time on June 26, 1946, in a small home with just a hand full of people who had a burden to reach the city of Phoenix for Jesus Christ. By the late 1960s, NPHX had become one of the most prominent churches in the Southern Baptist Convention and led the convention in the number of baptisms performed, with an average of one thousand a year for ten straight years. Every Monday night, hundreds of members would gather together to reach out to the Phoenix community, partnering with each other to make home visits. These visits, often referred to as door-to-door evangelism, proved to be incredibly effective.

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<sup>1</sup>North American Mission Board, “Phoenix,” accessed December 9, 2016, <https://www.namb.net/send-cities/phoenix/>.

In 1967, Richard Jackson, a gifted evangelist with a dynamic personality, became the pastor of NPHX and was largely responsible for the incredible growth of the church. Under his strong leadership and Gospel-centered preaching the church flourished and reached many for Jesus. Jackson commanded and demanded respect from people, and became the sole source of vision, direction, and drive for NPHX.

By the mid-1970's, church membership had grown to over twenty thousand. Accordingly, the church moved into several progressively larger facilities over the years that could accommodate its rapid growth. In 1976, NPHX relocated for the last time to its current site, which covers 40 acres. The church built a beautiful sanctuary that holds over 7,000 people and several large buildings that would adequately host the twenty thousand members. The church maintained a high profile in the Phoenix area throughout the 1970s and 1980s, attracting community leaders such as United States Senator, John McCain.

In the 1984 book *The World's 20 Largest Churches*, John Vaughn gives three reasons for the incredible growth of NPHX in the 1970s and 1980s:

1. *The Sovereignty of God*. When Richard Jackson was asked a question, his response was such, "God's Sovereignty must meet with a people's willing response."
2. *A People Sold out to God*. The church established a phrase in 1982, *Whatever it Takes*. They wanted to be a "Whatever it Takes" kind of Church.
3. *Commitment to Personal Evangelism*. Soul winning was a huge emphasis for NPHX during that time.<sup>2</sup>

However, what Vaughn failed to recognize was the extent to which the church's identity and growth was tied to and dependent on the personality and person of Richard Jackson.

In 1992, after years of effective ministry and incredible church growth, Jackson decided to step down from church leadership and pursue other types of ministry. His unexpected departure left many in the church shocked and insecure about what the

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<sup>2</sup>John Vaughn, *The World's 20 Largest Churches* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 166.

future held for NPHX. During this time, many members chose to stop attending NPHX and join other churches in the Phoenix area.

Despite being one of the largest and most dynamic churches in Arizona for decades, during the 1990s NPHX entered a period of decline. While the city of Phoenix was growing at a rapid pace, NPHX's congregation was dwindling, along with its financial resources.<sup>3</sup> The city's culture was changing as well, and NPHX's place of influence and respect in the community came to a halt. Church leadership and long-time congregants found themselves in a panic about the future of the church.

The reasons for the decline of the church are many and varied—cultural changes, leadership changes, growth of other churches in the city, less of a focus on evangelism—the list could go on and on. An analysis of the history of NPHX offers a fascinating research opportunity, but one fact remained the same: the church continued to decline and needed to change in order to grow.<sup>4</sup>

In 2016, the buildings at NPHX looked untouched and the sports fields, once perfectly manicured and packed with both community and church families, looked as if they had been abandoned for years. Trash and overgrown tree roots dotted the landscape, and faded signs starkly highlighted the worn, abandoned feel of the entire campus. Once a bustling center of activity, NPHX showed few signs of life. What once was “the church” in Phoenix had become a shell of its former self, and the state of the grounds offered clear evidence that NPHX had gone through some trying times. Anyone unfamiliar with the history of NPHX could easily deduce that the church was no longer what it used to be, and may even be closed. It was not a surprise when people questioned the spiritual health

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<sup>3</sup>The city exploded in growth and NPHX quickly declined and stopped reaching people. In fact, NPHX had to remodel the sanctuary to make it smaller because they no longer needed the large sanctuary to host its congregants.

<sup>4</sup>The church went from a membership of around 20,000 in the 1980s to 1,000 in 2015. The church lost members by the droves each year and the church took a financial hit, which was the cause for many programs getting cut, and the buildings being neglected.

of the church when they saw what it looked like on the outside. Esthetics can certainly tell of the spiritual condition, it did for Nehemiah. The broken walls were a dishonor to God's name and that added to the burden Nehemiah felt. The condition of Jerusalem was telling of their spiritual condition.

A few years ago, a long-time removed church member posted a blog about NPHX and titled it, "Would Holiness and reverence please return to the building...you are desperately needed."<sup>5</sup> The blogger recalled a visit to the church in 2014 and her shock in finding that the once third largest church in the country was nothing like it used to be. While some may not agree with the critical tone of the blog, it certainly did convey what some legacy members may very well have been asking and thinking: "What happened to the excellence of the church?"; "What happened to the reverence?"; and "Jesus has left the building."

In 2016, twenty-five years after Richard Jackson's departure, NPHX remained a church filled with fond memories of the "Golden Years" under Jackson's leadership and a crippling fear of what the future held. Unfortunately, the focus that many legacy members had on the past success of the church was the very thing that kept NPHX from moving forward. Many believed that the church reached its pinnacle of ultimate success under the leadership, vision, and methods of Richard Jackson, and thus thought that future success would be achieved by applying those same ideas.

Looking to the past had become the only way these legacy members knew how to define and measure success. As the culture outside of the church changed, the church failed to see the value in exploring and using new methods to share the Gospel in the Phoenix community. Anything "new" was met with great resistance. A lack of trust and

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<sup>5</sup>Holly T. Ashley, "Would Holy and Reverent Please Return to the Building. . . . You Are Desperately Needed," accessed September 19, 2017, <https://hollytashley.com/2014/05/04/would-holy-and-reverent-please-return-to-the-building-you-are-desperately-needed/>.

respect for church leadership led to continual questioning and effectively halted any progress.

NPHX desperately needed revitalization, vision, health, and hope for the future, and because the church was filled with great people who love the Lord, these goals were achievable. Despite its struggles, the church was positioned to do great things in the city for the Kingdom of God. Every year the church coordinated with the city of Phoenix to host community events on its 40-acre property—parades, festivals, farmers markets and voting booths are several examples of their involvement with the community of Phoenix. With a tentative partnership already in place, the church was truly primed to do great things in the city.

However, making progress was not free of significant challenges. In order to move forward as a church, the many legacy members of NPHX had to let go of their idolatry of the past. They needed to begin to understand that their mindset was detrimental to the future of the church and that internal cultural change was desperately needed. They needed to begin to look to the future of the church with fresh eyes, to see the amazing possibilities of what God might have in store. Their “yes” needed to be on the table, their hearts needed to be willing, and their spirits needed to be yielding.

The goal of this project was to provide a practical starting point for significant internal change, and in turn, increased impact on the city of Phoenix.

### **Rationale**

Based on the history of the church shared above, several reasons existed for focusing on revitalization and cultural change at NPHX. First, the church membership had sharply declined. At one point, the church counted over 20,000 members; in 2015, that number had fallen to just over 1,000.<sup>6</sup> On Sunday morning, fewer than 1,000 cars occupied the parking lot which can accommodate 4,000. The church property appeared

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<sup>6</sup>These numbers are according to church documents.

empty and lifeless to those who were outside looking in. Numbers continued to decline, and without significant intervention, the church would have ceased to exist.

Second, the church was operating without a clear vision shared by the congregation. John Shillington, a pastor who had been on staff since the days of Richard Jackson, said he never saw a strategic plan formed and implemented at NPHX. Without a stated mission, the focus remained on the success of the past.

Third, the number of people who lived in Phoenix and did not know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior was sobering. If led correctly, NPHX could use its prime location and resources for incredible Kingdom impact and Gospel influence. Reaching the thousands of people dying and spending eternity apart from Jesus Christ motivated this revitalization project.

### **Purpose**

For the sake of both church health and community impact, the purpose of this project was to revitalize and fundamentally change the culture at North Phoenix Baptist Church (NPHX) by creating and implementing a strategic plan that focused on equipping current church members to reach their community for Christ.

### **Goals**

Three primary goals guided this project, with each goal building upon the last to promote cultural change within the church and in turn increasing the church's impact on the broader Phoenix community.

1. The first goal was to assess the current cultural perception of NPHX by conducting a "SWOT" survey of the church's Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats.
2. The second goal was to develop a workable strategic plan for NPHX.
3. The third goal was to develop and deliver a 10-week sermon series based on the biblical account of Nehemiah rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>See appendix 2 for a copy of the introduction sermon.

These goals were considered complete when the means of measurement outlined below were met to the defined level of success.

### **Research Methodology**

By focusing on achieving these three strategic goals, the ultimate goal of this project was to transform NPHX from a declining church into a healthy Gospel-centered church, committed to fulfilling the Great Commission found in Matthew 28. Throughout this process, twenty lay leaders provided regular feedback and ensured that the project maintained its focus and integrity. They each kept a rubric, which evaluated the clarity of the plan, its faithfulness to Scripture, and implementation.

The first goal was to accurately assess the current cultural perception of NPHX by conducting both an internal and external “SWOT” survey of the church’s perceived Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. A cross section of both members and non-members participated in this analysis, and provided a thorough understanding of the church culture and values of NPHX.<sup>8</sup> This goal was considered successful when 20 surveys were completed and the results summarized and presented to the chosen church leaders.

The second goal was to develop a workable strategic plan for the purpose of revitalizing NPHX to become a God-centered church that reaches people for Christ and equips its members for the work of the ministry. This goal was considered successful when the chosen key leaders were able to develop a specific strategic direction within six months and provided practical, achievable steps for the implementation of the strategy.<sup>9</sup>

The third goal was to develop and deliver a 10-week sermon series based on the biblical account of Nehemiah rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> Each staff member

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<sup>8</sup>See appendix 6.

<sup>9</sup>See appendix 1.

<sup>10</sup>See appendix 2 for a copy of the introduction sermon.

of NPHX evaluated the sermon series by using a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, relevance, and Gospel tone.<sup>11</sup> The goal was considered successful when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators was met.

### **Definitions and Delimitations**

*Burden.* A *burden* begins with a passion for the kingdom of God and is experienced through feelings of deep sorrow and pain when brokenness is prevalent, and the glory of God’s name is dishonored.<sup>12</sup>

*Church health.* A healthy church is a community of Jesus followers with shared vision, thriving ministry, and trusted leadership.<sup>13</sup>

*Culture.* Culture referred to norm behaviors and shared values among a group of people.<sup>14</sup>

*Revitalization.* Church revitalization is a process by which a church is redirected toward a healthy and sustained, exaltation of Christ, proclamation of the gospel to the lost, affirmation of the Scripture to be the guide for church revitalization, and expression God’s love in their communities.<sup>15</sup>

*Strategy plan.* A strategic plan provides both a logical and a first level of detail to show how a vision can be accomplished.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>See appendix 3.

<sup>12</sup>James M. Hamilton, Jr., *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Ezra and Nehemiah* (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 99.

<sup>13</sup>Jim Kitchens, “Just What Is a ‘Healthy Church?’” October 17, 2017, accessed February 6, 2017, <http://chchurches.org/just-what-is-a-healthy-church>.

<sup>14</sup>John Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business, 1996), 148.

<sup>15</sup>Bob Brown, “Defining Church Revitalization,” September 14, 2016, accessed December 20, 2017, <http://www.tnbaptist.org/2016/09/14/defining-church-revitalization/>.

<sup>16</sup>Kotter, *Leading Change*, 75.



*Vision.* The definition of a vision is taken from Andy Stanley's *Visioneering*. A vision is a clear mental picture of what could be, fueled by the conviction that it should be. Stanley describes a vision as being born in the soul of a man or woman who is consumed with the tension between what is and what could be.<sup>17</sup>

### **Conclusion**

NPHX experienced a significant decline in both membership and finances since the 1990s. In 2016, the culture at NPHX was one focused on past success and wary of what the future held. If nothing had changed, it is quite possible that NPHX's membership would have continued to decline, the church would have ceased to be effective in the city of Phoenix, and quite possibly would have closed its doors. This project was a response and battle cry to change the culture at NPHX and reverse its decline. God blessed this project and used it to revitalize His bride and magnify His Glory.

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<sup>17</sup>Andy Stanley, *Visioneering* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1999), 18.

CHAPTER 2  
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION  
FOR REVITALIZATION AND  
CULTURAL CHANGE

According to the North American Mission Board (NAMB), 1,000 churches disappear from the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) database every year. Many of those churches are closing their doors forever due to declines in attendance and an inability to connect to their communities.<sup>1</sup> In order to reverse this trend, Protestant churches across America must embrace revitalization and cultural change. This chapter will explore the biblical and theological foundation for revitalization and cultural change within the context of the local church.

**The Current State of the Church**

Over time, some churches, once committed to sharing the gospel in their communities, become dominated by a culture of complacency. They no longer have a sense of urgency to fulfill the Great Commission and the church goes into decline. In many cases, the church ceases to exist. In the article “Statistics and Reasons for Church Decline,” Richard J. Krejcir shares two sobering statistics about church decline:

1. Every year more than 4,000 churches close their doors compared to just over 1,000 new church starts.
2. Every year 2.7 million church members fall into inactivity. People are leaving the church. From our research, we have found that they are leaving as hurting and wounded victims-of some kind of abuse, disillusionment, or just plain neglect.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>NAMB, “NAMB Annual Ministry Report,” accessed October 15, 2017, <https://www.namb.net/about/annualreport>.

<sup>2</sup>Richard J. Krejcir, “Statistics and Reasons for Church Decline,” accessed October 5, 2017, <http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=42346&columnid=4545>.

These statistics offer a strong case for church revitalization. When churches close their doors, communities suffer. Unfortunately, church decline is often the result of long-term neglect, sin, or lack of leadership. The glory of God is cheapened and lost in that community.

The Southern Baptist Convention is not immune to church decline. According to the NAMB, 17 Southern Baptist Churches close their doors every Sunday. According to David Johnson, the Arizona SBC Director, 27 SBC churches in Arizona closed their doors in 2016 because of declining membership, making a total of 83 church closures in Arizona since 2013. Currently, Arizona is home to just over 400 SBC churches with an average membership of 70. Johnson believes that there are many that seem to be headed towards closure. If the current rate of closure continues, in 10 years Arizona will be home to only 100 SBC churches. The need for revitalization and cultural change is urgent and immediate.<sup>3</sup>

Revitalization and cultural change is a difficult, tiring, messy process, one that takes grit, perseverance, and above all, strength from God. The battle is not an easy one, but it is necessary, and good. As Brian Croft so eloquently states in his article “Church Revitalization: A Biblical Approach”:

It is good and right to be burdened by the reality of the extinguishing of once thriving local churches that previously were gospel lights in their communities. Pastors are quitting. Beautiful, historic church buildings are being auctioned to the highest bidder. No doubt, the burden that many who love Christ’s bride feel is a burden we too should feel. The weight of this burden has resulted in an unprecedented movement to do something about these dying churches.<sup>4</sup>

The decline of Southern Baptist Churches is a sobering reality that should draw believers in Jesus Christ to be prayerful, remain hopeful, and be willing to do the work required to reverse this trend.

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<sup>3</sup>David Johnson, the Executive Director for the Arizona Baptist Convention, provided these statistics during several in-person meetings.

<sup>4</sup>Brian Croft, “Church Revitalization: A Biblical Approach,” accessed December 22, 2017, <http://equip.sbts.edu/article/church-revitalization-a-biblical-approach/>.

## Defining Revitalization

The biblical theme of revitalization is evident throughout Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. In Hebrew, the word for *revive* is “chayah,” meaning to live, have life, remain alive, sustain life, be alive, be restored to life or health.<sup>5</sup> Death during the time covered by the Old Testament was viewed as an impossible situation from which there was no return. All who died went to a grave called *sheol* from which no one returned.<sup>6</sup> And yet, the impossible is God’s reality and revitalization is impossible without God.

The biblical roots for revitalization and rebirth are proclaimed throughout the Bible. For example, the widow of Zarephath’s son was raised from the dead (1Kgs 17); as was the Shunammite woman’s son (2 Kgs 4); the widow of Nain’s son (Luke 7), and Jarius’ daughter (Luke 8); and last but not least, Jesus was also raised from the dead, by the power of God (Matt 28).

Although the word *revitalization* is not found in Scripture, its implications and applications are woven throughout its pages (e.g., the lives of Ezekiel, Nehemiah, and Ezra). “Church revitalization is a process by which a church is redirected toward a healthy and sustained exaltation of Christ, proclamation of the gospel to the lost, affirmation of the Scripture as the guide for church revitalization and the expression of God’s love in their communities.”<sup>7</sup>

In Scripture, God reveals a clear design for the function of the local church—there is a specific biblical approach to how the church should work. Brian Croft argues that there is a biblical basis for having a local church be appealing to the community—

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<sup>5</sup>Blue Letter Bible, “Chayah,” accessed October 5, 2017, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H2421&t-NASB>.

<sup>6</sup>Lamar Eugene Cooper, *Ezekiel*, The New American Commentary, vol. 17 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 320.

<sup>7</sup>Bob Brown, “Defining Church Revitalization,” accessed October 2, 2017, <http://www.tnbaptism.org/2016/09/14/defining-church-revitalization/>

because the very elements that make a church attractive to outsiders are based on Scripture: passionate biblical preaching, loving sacrificial fellowship, practical gospel application, zealous soul care, intentional evangelism, and authentic Christ-likeness.<sup>8</sup>

Books like Ezra and Nehemiah show that revitalization is not only biblical but also necessary to restore God's name and honor. The content of Ezra and Nehemiah provides a solid approach for leaders to follow when trying to revitalize a church in decline. Both books are clear in stating that authentic, God-honoring revitalization begins with a God-given burden, a vision for the future, and a confession of sin. The means for achieving all of these is the power of God.

### **Revitalization Begins with a Burden (Neh 1:1-4)**

Revitalization begins with a burden—a burden that is much greater than the individual, a burden that drives a person to be willing to risk everything to accomplish the impossible. Close analysis of the first few verses of Nehemiah provides a framework for discovering and developing a God-given burden. Both the actions and attitudes of Nehemiah reveal how a God-honoring process for revitalization begins.

As God promised in 1 Kings 9, around 587 B.C. the Babylonians invaded Judah and destroyed the city of Jerusalem and along with it, Solomon's temple. The Babylonians did not invade just once, but three separate times. Because of their disobedience, three times the Israelites were taken captive, three times they faced opposition, three times they witnessed the devastation of Jerusalem. Fifty years after the Babylonians destroyed the walls and gates, and the temple of Jerusalem, a group of 50,000 Jews returned to Jerusalem to take part in rebuilding the temple.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Croft, "Church Revitalization."

<sup>9</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Determined: Standing Firm in the Face of Opposition: OT Commentary: Nehemiah*, BE Series (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 22.

## Now It Happened in the Month of Chislev

Nehemiah, watching this cycle continue, felt a burden for God's chosen people, his own people. He was hurting because of their brokenness and refusal to turn from sin. A trusted member of the Persian royal court, Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the king, Artaxerxes I.<sup>10</sup> The *cupbearer* (the same word as the 'butler' of the Joseph story, Gen 40:2ff.) was a high official in the royal household whose basic duty was to choose and then taste the wine to demonstrate that it was not poisoned. This task, which also included presenting the wine to the king, put Nehemiah in frequent contact with Artaxerxes, and potentially made him a man of influence.<sup>11</sup>

Around 444 B.C., during the month of Chislev, Nehemiah's day was interrupted by Hanani, one of his brothers, who had arrived with a group of men from Jerusalem. It had been about thirteen years since Ezra left Persia and set out for Jerusalem (Ezra 7:7).<sup>12</sup> Chislev would have occurred between mid-November and mid-December, probably during the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, who reigned from 464 to 423 BC.

The Judeans were in great trouble and in a state of disgrace because the walls of Jerusalem had been broken through in many places and the gates had been burned with fire (v. 3). Hanani's account sounds similar to the events in 586 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the first temple and left the walls of the city in ruins. The same destruction had been repeated as enemies of the Israelites prevented them from completing the restoration of the walls and temple.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Frank Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 151.

<sup>11</sup>Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary Series, vol. 12 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 86.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>13</sup>Louis Goldberg, *Nehemiah*, Evangelical Commentary on the Bible, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 313.

According to commentary by the ancient historian Josephus, Nehemiah, while walking around the palace walls, overheard some people talking in the Hebrew language. Having ascertained that they had lately returned to Judea, he was informed by them, in answer to his eager enquiries, of the unfinished and desolate condition of Jerusalem, as well as the defenseless state of the returned exiles. The commissions previously given to Zerubbabel and Ezra extended only to the repair of the temple and private dwellings. The walls and gates of the city had been allowed to remain a mass of shattered ruins, as they had been left by the Chaldean siege.<sup>14</sup>

More than likely Hanani approached Nehemiah because of his important position in hopes that Nehemiah would be moved to action.<sup>15</sup> From the moment that Nehemiah hears Hanani's account, he develops a burden for Jerusalem and the Israelites. Clearly, Hanani's account deeply affects "the patriotic feelings of this good man, and no comfort could he find but in earnest and protracted prayer, that God would favor the purpose, which he seems to have secretly formed, of asking the royal permission to go to Jerusalem."<sup>16</sup>

Nehemiah mourns for a number of days (Neh 1:4); he fasts and prays and weeps during this time. Nehemiah's burden is not a general feeling of sorrow or loss; it is a specific weight on his heart regarding the situation. His burden is two-fold: he mourns the brokenness and sinfulness of his people (God's chosen people) and he mourns their failure to show the glory of God to others. In short, he feels the burden of revitalization.

Since Nehemiah's natural bent is for swift, decisive action, his behavior here is remarkable. His patience and discipline show where his priorities lie, despite his depth of

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<sup>14</sup>Robert Jamieson, Andrew R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 1:294.

<sup>15</sup>Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 151.

<sup>16</sup>Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory*, 1:294.

emotional attachment to the situation. His actions, succinctly summarized in verse 4, also show the unhurried process and carefully formed foundation that leads to the famous ‘arrow prayer’ in 2:4 and to the events which follow it.<sup>17</sup> Nehemiah’s specific request of King Artaxerxes in chapter 2 is the direct result of significant time spent fasting and praying. Four verbs in these verses provide helpful insight into Nehemiah’s process.

### **The Prophet Sits Down**

Nehemiah knows that rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem will be a daunting task that can be accomplished only by the power and presence of God. The natural human impulse would be to take immediate action to remedy the situation. Instead, Scripture says that Nehemiah sits. He sits for days (Neh 1:4).

In Ezra 9, Ezra responds in a similar way to disheartening news. He receives a report that the officials of Israel are included in those involved in evil practices. When Ezra hears this news, that God’s people and lead officials are dwelling in sin, he tears his garment and cloak, pulls hair from his head and beard and sits.

This scenario in Ezra, and the terminology used to describe Ezra’s response, is very similar to what is recorded in Nehemiah 1. Nehemiah receives the news of the broken walls and burned gates and he mirrors Ezra’s response. His first action is to assume a posture of humility and repentance; in essence, agreeing with God that the Israelites are in a sinful place. He immediately turns to *heaven* (as the Lord’s prayer does), where the perspective will be right, and reflects in the character of God—not only for its encouraging aspect of staunchness and love, but first of all for the majesty which puts man, whether friend or foe, in his place.<sup>18</sup> Nehemiah begins his process of revitalization by making sure that his heart is in the right place before God.

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<sup>17</sup>Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 85.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.



## **The Prophet Weeps**

Scripture is filled with men and women weeping. Esau wept (Gen 27:38), Joseph wept (Gen 43:30), Saul wept (2 Sam 1:12), and Ezra wept (Ezra 10:1). After Nehemiah sits, the action he takes in verse 4 is to weep. After he hears Hanani's news, he falls and begins mourning and weeping.

Nehemiah's weeping was the labor pains from which his God-given burden was born. This burden, from God's heart to his, drives his actions for the next thirteen chapters. Had the burden not been from God, Nehemiah would not have had the drive or fortitude to accomplish his task of revitalization of the walls. No person can fully and successfully accomplish a God-sized task without this type of burden. Nehemiah was hurting deeply for God's people, for his people. He was hurting because God's name was being dishonored. He was hurting because his people's relationship with God was broken (Neh 1:6).<sup>19</sup>

Weeping and true mourning motivate the soul to take action. Nehemiah's burden revealed to him as he sat and wept, calls him to take on a task that appears impossible to accomplish: rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah's response to this burden is to spend even more time with God.

## **The Prophet Prays and Fasts**

Nehemiah displays a profound sense of concern. He was concerned and deeply burdened for God's honor and the sins of the people.<sup>20</sup> The normal response to identifying an important task is to immediately move into action. Nehemiah acts, but not in an expected way. Instead of rushing to talk with the king about his need to help the Judeans, he begins to fast and pray. Nehemiah begins his prayer and fasting in the month of

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<sup>19</sup>The broken walls and burned gates are an indication that Israel had forsaken God, causing their relationship to be strained, which led to their repentance for restoration with God (Neh 2:17)

<sup>20</sup>Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, The New American Commentary, vol. 10 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 170.

Chislev, but Scripture is not clear on how long this season of prayer and fasting lasted. If he fasted until he approached the king in the month of Nisan (chapter 2), four months would have passed.

Nehemiah needs God's wisdom to figure out how to respond to his burden. The steps he should take next are not clear. Despite Nehemiah's good standing in the royal household, King Artaxerxes is not sympathetic to the plight of the exiled Judeans.

Nehemiah realizes he has to appeal to a higher King for help, and asks God himself to intervene on behalf of his people.<sup>21</sup> After his period of mourning and weeping, he continues seeking the wisdom of God through prayer and fasting. This pattern of mourning followed by prayer and fasting is one found in Scripture quite frequently, as is the combination of prayer and fasting, particularly as a way to honor God and seek his guidance. Fasting was seen as abstaining from something, usually food because of religious commitment or as an expression of repentance.

The act of fasting can be found throughout the Old Testament, as well as in the New Testament. Fasting became a frequent practice among the Jews during the captivity and took a prominent place in the devotions of individuals. Jesus himself fasted in Matthew 4:1-2. Fasting is seen in the book of Esther (Esth 4:16), the book of Isaiah (Isa 58:6-7), in the book of Daniel (Dan 9:3; Dan 10:3), and in the book of Ezra (Ezra 10:6). Solemn fasts had been introduced on the anniversaries of the taking of Jerusalem, the burning of the temple, and the murder of Gedaliah (Zech 8:19).

The enemies of Jerusalem had come into the city and destroyed the temple and walls, again. The Jews are both stubbornly sinful and powerless. Feeling conflicted, Nehemiah weeps over the plight of his people but lacks the power and resources to do anything about the situation. Instead of throwing up his hands in defeat, he chooses to step into the presence of God. By fasting, he rejects the seeming impossibility of the

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<sup>21</sup>Goldberg, *Nehemiah*, 313.

burden he has been given and seeks the face of God. The command to seek God's wisdom and presence is a common thread found through Scripture. When God's people do not know what to do, when they are faced with obstacles much greater than themselves, they are directed to seek God. Jeremiah 19:13 says, "When you seek me with your entire heart, then you will find me." In Matthew 6:33, Jesus commands the disciples to "seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all else should be added to you." Nehemiah's response to Hanani's news in Nehemiah 1:3, and the resulting events that follow, show how the work for revitalization begins with a heart that is right before God and seeks heavenly wisdom before taking action. His future success as a leader comes as a direct result of his character and his commitment to God.

### **Revitalization of the Leader (1 Tim 3:1-7)**

The work of revitalization begins with a leader who is not just given a burden by God, but is also qualified to lead. Leadership is a gift, but it carries a heavy weight of responsibility and accountability. In 1 Timothy, Paul shares with Timothy a list of qualifications that a Godly leader should meet, and the list overwhelmingly deals with the leader's character and actions. Paul experienced problems with some strong-minded leaders in the Ephesians church (1 Tim 1:19), his instructions here were not merely a manual for church organization but were more of a guarantee that church leaders would have godliness and unity.<sup>22</sup>

Throughout this passage, Paul presents several different phrases to describe Christian leaders who should be mature and filled with integrity. Leaders have many responsibilities, such as leading, teaching, and providing hospitality, all while fighting against the snares of the Enemy (Ps 141:9).

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<sup>22</sup>Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 105.

The first requirement that Paul calls for is that *the overseer must be above reproach* (v. 2a). This requirement does not mean that the leader is without sin; otherwise, no child of Adam would ever qualify. It means rather “of blameless reputation” and “has to do with irreproachable *observable* conduct.”<sup>23</sup> The leader is one who gives no ground for accusation.<sup>24</sup> The verses that follow provide a rubric for determining if a leader fulfills this requirement—a checklist of the areas of a leader’s life that should be examined. Both the private and public life of a leader should stand up to scrutiny.

The next requirement Paul lists is for the leader to be the husband of one wife. The marriage relationship exposes a multitude of sins and Paul goes straight to the marriage to determine the character of the leader. Does he reflect purity, loyalty, and commitment to his marriage? If a man cannot be faithful to his wife, he may not be faithful in his duties as an overseer.

Paul’s statement that the overseer must be the husband of but one wife or ‘married only once’ has been the subject of long and anxious debate.<sup>25</sup> Though the Jews practiced polygamy, Paul is writing to a Gentile church, where polygamy was never allowed for any congregant.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the ancient interpretation that Paul is specifically prohibiting polygamy just for a candidate bishop is not correct. Instead, the restriction points to the fact that while laymen might lawfully marry again, candidates for the episcopate or presbytery were better to have been married only *once*.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 92.

<sup>24</sup>Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1887), 4:228.

<sup>25</sup>Stott, *Guard the Truth*, 92.

<sup>26</sup>Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory*, 2:409.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

The work of revitalization will most certainly put extra strain on the marriage of the leader, so this area must be one that is healthy and constantly monitored in order for the revitalization process to be effective and the marriage to remain strong.

Paul's next requirement is straightforward. A leader should be sober, serious about the task at hand and the responsibilities he carries. The person who takes on the task of revitalization should be aware of the weightiness of his decisions and actions. Maintaining a sober-mind will push the leader to stay connected to the Spirit of God and to receive wisdom and clarity of direction from God.

All leaders face opposition and unforeseen challenges, and trying to revitalize a church will open the door for increased spiritual warfare. How a leader responds to attacks both within and without is a measure of his qualification to lead. A leader who responds in the flesh and does not control his tongue, thoughts, and actions could significantly damage the process of revitalization. A lack of self-control may very well lead to self-destruction.

Paul's next requirement refers to both the inward mind being "*orderly*," and to the *outward* behavior, tone, look, gait, and dress. The Godly leader carries himself in a way that is "incompatible with all confusion, disorder, excess, violence, laxity, assumption, harshness, and meanness."<sup>28</sup> He will not be liked by all but should have a respectable and disciplined lifestyle and character, living a life that even his enemies respect, because they can find no flaw in it.

Next, Paul states that the leader must be a man who is hospitable to people. He is the kind of leader who wants to care for those in need.

Paul requires that a leader be a skillful, effective teacher. Overseers who meet this qualification are able to refute false teachers and protect the church community from

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<sup>28</sup>Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory*, 2:409.

unsound doctrine.<sup>29</sup> The leader must be able to appropriately teach and defend the doctrine of the Gospel and not lead anyone astray with false or misguided teaching.

Paul's next qualification seems quite obvious—drunkenness leads to recklessness—the opposite of self-control. The first negative qualification demands that a church leader controls his thirst. While Paul does not prohibit the use of wine (1 Tim 5:23), he prohibits being under its control.<sup>30</sup>

Using a phrase also found in Titus 1:7, Paul requires that a leader is gentle, without a short fuse or a violent temper. Some commentaries describe this negative quality as a *pugnacious* or *combative person*.<sup>31</sup> Leaders, especially leaders trying to create significant change, will often be challenged and questioned about their decisions. Their first responsibility is to introduce change with gentleness and grace. When challenged or criticized, they must not easily lose their temper or explode in anger.

Paul's next requirement is that leaders must not be gossips, trading scandal or using their inside information to harm people.<sup>32</sup> They must not use their power and authority for abuse with either hand or tongue; not as some teachers pretending a holy zeal (2 Cor 11:20).<sup>33</sup> They should not be the ones leading the charge in gossip and quarreling. Instead, the leader must be a peacemaker, fighting for unity among the congregation.

Paul moves to addressing the love of money. When Paul demands that the overseer not be a lover of money, he hints that a responsibility of the overseer would be

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<sup>29</sup>Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 107.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid*, 111.

<sup>31</sup>Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, 4:230.

<sup>32</sup>Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2001), 649.

<sup>33</sup>Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory*, 2:409.

the handling of the churches finances.<sup>34</sup> Like the young widows who put their desire to remarry before Christ (1 Tim 5:11), those who lose money allow their allegiance to Christ to be compromised because of selfish desires.

For the requirement of manages his own household, Paul reasons that if elders cannot manage their own households, they cannot manage the household of God. Paul demanded that the church leader be exemplary in controlling his own family. The verb for manage carries the idea of governing, leading, and giving direction to the family.<sup>35</sup>

Next, Paul disqualifies from leadership any person who is relatively new to the faith. Such people are particularly prone to becoming prideful, just as the false teachers were full of pride (1 Tim 6:4). The term “recent convert” means literally to be newly planted.<sup>36</sup> The great danger in appointing a new convert into leadership is that the leader may become a victim of pride and conceit.

Similar to Paul’s first requirement of being above reproach, his final requirement is that the leader must have a good reputation. As the representative of the church in the community, a leader’s good reputation is crucial to maintaining relationships and preaching the Gospel. If the behavior of the leader does not represent a credible witness, the devil can entrap the church by making outsiders wary of believing the gospel.<sup>37</sup>

The leader must not only meet the qualifications found in 1 Timothy but after spending time seeking the face of God, must move forward with a plan and vision to do something about the burden of revitalization. The continuing story of Nehemiah provides helpful insight into that process.

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<sup>34</sup>Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 111.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid*, 112.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid*, 113.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid*, 114.

### **Revitalization and a Plan (Neh 2:5)**

A burden met with prayer often leads to action, and Nehemiah is an excellent example of God working in this way. He receives a burden, repents, prays, fasts, and moves into action. Scripture is not clear as to why Nehemiah waited nearly four months to bring his request to the king, but it is possible that Artaxerxes spent the winter in Babylon rather than in Susa. The events began in Chislev, November/December in chapter one and in chapter 2 it begins in Nisan, March/April. Nehemiah had been praying for four months and by the way chapter two is written, it is clear that he had been making preparations.<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, Nehemiah is very strategic in his approach of the king. He does not mention Jerusalem specifically, but instead he refers to it as *the city where my ancestors are buried*. His words are chosen deliberately; he has a specific plan. Nehemiah's burden and calling carry such a weight of conviction that he is willing to take a radical and risky step. He finds it impossible to sit back and not act. Merely approaching the king without being summoned potentially puts his life at risk; the king has the authority take his life for such a radical move,

A closer analysis of the context of Nehemiah's request reveals another challenge that would have influenced how he phrased his request. Years before, as recorded in Ezra 4:18-23, Artaxerxes himself had sent out a decree which specifically stopped the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem:

Greetings. The letter you sent us has been translated and read in my presence. I issued a decree and a search was conducted. It was discovered that this city has had uprisings against the kings since ancient times, and there have been rebellions and revolts in it. Powerful kings have also ruled over Jerusalem and exercised authority over the whole region west of the Euphrates River, and tribute, duty, and land tax were paid to them. Therefore, issue an order for these men to stop, so that this city will not be rebuilt until a further decree has been pronounced by me. See that you not neglect this matter. Otherwise, the damage will increase and the royal interests will suffer. As soon as the text of King Artaxerxes's letter was read to Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their colleagues, they immediately went to the Jews in Jerusalem and forcibly stopped them.

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<sup>38</sup>James M. Hamilton, Jr., *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Ezra and Nehemiah* (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 103.



Examining the steps that Nehemiah follows in Nehemiah 2 provides a plan for church revitalization. Three main elements gave Nehemiah the courage and faith to move forward: he knew what his end goal was; he had a plan; and he believed that God was leading the entire situation.

### **Nehemiah Knew the End Goal**

In verse 5 Nehemiah approaches the king and states his request. His desired mission is clear as he makes his bold request: “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.” His months of fasting and praying have given him a specific vision of what God is asking of him.

Not only has God given Nehemiah a specific burden and end goal, he has also led him to visualize the operation in some detail, even to the building technique he will use to rebuild the wall.<sup>39</sup> Even before the king gives his approval, Nehemiah has developed a strategic plan.

### **Nehemiah Had a Plan**

When Nehemiah came before the king, it was clear that Nehemiah wanted to make a request. Nehemiah moved forward confident that the Lord was guiding His steps.<sup>40</sup> When the king asks Nehemiah what he wants, the cupbearer sends up the briefest of prayers and asks royal permission to rebuild the city. When Artaxerxes asks for more detail, Nehemiah answers without hesitation. He gives a timeframe, requests letters of safe conduct, and negotiates a supply of wooden beams for the various building. He knows what he needs because he has already developed a plan.

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<sup>39</sup>Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 88.

<sup>40</sup>Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 161.

Nehemiah requests letters to the governors of the Trans-Euphrates, the area west of the Euphrates including Judea, so that he might have safely travel to Jerusalem. In addition, he asks for letters to the keeper of the forest requesting enough lumber to make beams for the gates and city walls.<sup>41</sup> His detailed comprehensive plan is essential to future success. Progress and change does not happen by accident, and having specific, workable plan is essential to revitalization. But no plan can take the place of the most important element of revitalization: the blessing and presence of God.

### **Nehemiah Knew the Power of God**

The piety of Nehemiah appears in every circumstance. He seeks God’s wisdom and blessing on every step of his journey to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. After his request of the king is approved, Nehemiah is quick to attribute his success to the fact that *the good hand of my God is upon me* (2:8). “The conception of his patriotic design, the favorable disposition of the king, and the success of the undertaking are all ascribed to God.”<sup>42</sup> Without God’s favor and blessing, revitalization of the local church will be impossible.

### **Revitalization and the Power of God (Ezek 37)**

Ezekiel 37:1 provides a biblical and theological foundation for the importance of the power of God and its place in revitalization. The familiarity of this well-known chapter in Ezekiel can easily blind readers to its real meaning. The vision of the valley of dry bones has been taken by some as teaching an Old Testament doctrine of bodily resurrection, others view it as an analogy for spiritual regeneration. However, the key to correctly interpreting this chapter is examining its context.

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<sup>41</sup>Goldberg, *Nehemiah*, 314.

<sup>42</sup>Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory*, 1:295.

Ezekiel had been promising his people a change in their fortunes; new leadership a restored land, rebuild cities, and many of the features of the Messianic era.<sup>43</sup> In Ezekiel 37, he sees a giant outdoor ossuary, full of dry bones. The bones represent the Israelites, who have been in exile for over ten years. Any glimmer of hope for the future has been extinguished. Without hope, they are like the bones: very dry, lifeless.<sup>44</sup>

Ezekiel is staring at these bones and is faced with the question, “Can these bones live?” He knows that the answer rests in the fact that only God knows the answer, and only God has the power (v. 3). The power of God is seen from start to finish in this passage.

In order to fully grasp the events of the passage and their symbolism, it is important to understand how the ancient Israelites performed burials, as well as how they expected the resurrection of the dead to take place.<sup>45</sup> As a priest Ezekiel would have taken extreme caution in touching the dead, because it was forbidden in Levitical law (Lev 21:11). In regards to burial, the dead were buried twice. At the first, or preliminary burial, the family would place the dead in a large tomb cut out of rock. The family of the deceased would seal up the family tomb and leave it alone, perhaps until such time as someone else in the family was buried. After a certain amount of time had passed, the family would then reenter the tomb. At this point, only the skeleton of the deceased remained.<sup>46</sup>

At the second burial, the skeleton, or “dry bones,” would be taken from the wall chamber and placed in a common bone coffin. The common coffin was called an ossuary, and it held the bones of many persons, sometimes even dozens. The purpose of the ossuary was to group everyone in the family awaiting the resurrection, which would

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<sup>43</sup>John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 22 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1969), 227-28.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>45</sup>Douglas Stuart, *Ezekiel*, The Communicator’s Commentary, vol. 18 (Dallas: Word, 1989), 343.

<sup>46</sup>Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 228.

take place in reverse order of the desiccation.<sup>47</sup> In Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones, he comes to realize that something dead and dry cannot come to life without God's power. Without the power of God resurrection and revitalization cannot take place.

The opening sentence in Ezekiel 37 sets the tone for the rest of the passage: *the hand of the Lord was upon me*. Throughout Scripture, the hand of Yahweh symbolizes a physical manifestation of God's power and presence. Yahweh's hand comes on the prophet Elijah giving him physical power to outrun King Ahab's chariot in 1 Kings 18:46. The phrase also describes the power of prophecy coming on the prophet Elisha in 2 Kings 3:15.

In Ezekiel 37, Israel's very survival and revival is in God's hands. The situation is beyond human help. Only God can make these bleached and crumbling bones rise to form an army again. Only God can resurrect his people of Israel and restore to them their land and temple.<sup>48</sup> The same is true of the process of revitalization; it does not happen without the power of God.

In verse 4, God commands Ezekiel to prophesy to the dry bones. Throughout the passage, both God and Ezekiel use the term 'breath', which means 'wind' as well as 'spirit': invisible, powerful and life-giving. In Hebrew it is '*rûah*'—the wilderness wind; the image of the Spirit of God.<sup>49</sup> The Spirit of God must be present in the bones in order for them to live. This is the same word used in Genesis 1:2 at creation for the Holy Spirit. The earth was formless, empty and dark and the *ruah* of God was hovering over the waters.

In Ezekiel 37: 1-4, the Hebrew word *rûah* occurs no fewer than ten times. In verse 1 the word refers to the Spirit of the Lord, which transports and inspires Ezekiel. In verses 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10, *ruah* is rendered in the NIV as "breath," that is, the life-giving

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<sup>47</sup>Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 228.

<sup>48</sup>Knowles, *The Bible Guide*, 335.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

breath of the Lord. In verse 11 the plural of *rûah* occurs, designation the four “winds” of heaven. Finally, in verse 12 *rûah* refers to God’s Spirit as the life-giving Spirit.

Although the *phrase the hand of the Lord* is used here for the first time in Scripture, this is not the first occasion that Ezekiel has spoken of the restoration of God’s people to their land.<sup>50</sup> Without the breath and Spirit of God, revitalization and resurrection cannot happen. Ezekiel is giving the prophecy of the restoration, renewal and revival of Israel, through the power of God.

### **Revitalization and Changing Culture (1 Cor 5:1-10)**

#### **Changing Culture Means Confronting Culture**

A leader attempting to change the culture of a church and confront habitual sin is like a swimmer swimming against a strong current. It is hard, it is unusual and it is never easy. Confronting sin is never a pleasant task-most people find it easier to sweep sin under the rug than to confront it. Unfortunately, the seeds of sin ignored will produce the fruit of destruction.

Unconfronted sin in the church creates a culture of complacency. When sinful behaviors are accepted, they become the cultural norm. Eventually, like the Israelites, the church will experience what feels like death and the abandonment of God’s blessing (Ezek 37:11). When the acceptance of sin dominates the culture of a church, the sin must be confronted for the sake of the future health and effectiveness of the church as well as the souls of the sinners (Jas 5:19-20).

#### **Confront a Culture of Sin**

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul gives biblical instruction for confronting the culture of sin in the church. In this situation, a congregant is involved in sexual sin, and the situation

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<sup>50</sup>Victor P. Hamilton, *Ezekiel*, Evangelical Commentary of the Bible, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 583.

is well-known throughout the church. Paul uses the word πορνεία, *sexual immorality*, or *an illicit sexual relationship*, six times, of which five occur in 1 Corinthians 5-7. NRSV, REB, NIV, and NJB all render the term *sexual immorality* (AV/KJV, RV, *fornication*), because the term is a generic one which includes various subcategories such as μοιχεία, *adultery*. The word covers “every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse.”<sup>51</sup>

In this passage, Paul writes about a case of incest in the church at Corinth, and gives the church direction on how to deal with the long-term situation. He says more about the church’s error in countenancing it than he does about the offender’s guilt. He says nothing about the woman, which may mean that she was a pagan (v. 12).<sup>52</sup> The church has taken on a culture of complacency to sin and is accepting it within the body of believers. Despite a specific biblical mandate that a man is forbidden to have sex with his stepmother (Lev 18:8), the church fails to confront the situation.

In his letter to the church, Paul uses strong, direct language to confront their culture of sin. Not only is the church accepting sinful behavior, they are proud of it. Rather than feeling grief over a brother’s sin (v. 2), they feel *proud* (‘puffed up’; see 4:6). Their opinion of their superior standing, rather than decent Christian humility, has governed their behavior. Evidently they see their Christian freedom as a license for almost any kind of conduct.<sup>53</sup> In no uncertain terms, Paul tells them that this type of immorality would be frowned upon even amongst the pagans in their culture (v. 1).

With apostolic authority over the church, Paul’s solution to the problem is to direct the church to remove the man from the congregation (v. 2). This man must have

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<sup>51</sup>Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 385.

<sup>52</sup>Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1985), 86.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 87.

been unrepentant and Paul commands his removal as the best way to heal and protect the fellowship of God's people.<sup>54</sup> Using statements such as "I am present in spirit," and "I have already pronounced judgment on the one who has been doing such a thing" (v. 3), Paul makes it clear that his word is to be obeyed.

Protecting the health of the flock is of utmost importance to Paul. He knows that if this sin is not confronted and dealt with, it will negatively impact the entire church, even more significantly than it already has. Using the illustration of making bread, Paul describes how unconforted sin corrupts the body and infects the church. The *lump* mentioned is a significant term, suggesting the oneness of the church, and the consequent danger from evil-doers.<sup>55</sup> The leaven is not merely yeast, but a pinch of dough left over from the previous batch. This is how bread was commonly leavened in the ancient world, and a little pinch from the old lump could make a whole new lump of dough rise and puff up.

The work of the leaven is thought to be an illustration of the influence of individual sin and pride on the rest of the church. In the context of this passage, the leaven (yeast) represents the man's sexual immorality (v. 1) as well as the community's prideful tolerance of his sin. Paul urges believers to stop tolerating immoral behavior. The phrase "a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough," refers to the process of introducing fermented dough into a batch of unleavened dough in order to make the bread rise.<sup>56</sup>

As spiritual caretakers of the church, leaders must be willing to confront sin. Paul writes repeatedly to the church about dealing with sin, making it a regular part of his leadership role (Gal 6:1-5; 1 Tim 5:20). He consistently addresses the effect of sin within

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<sup>54</sup>Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 87. Unfortunately, the church failed to follow Paul's instructions.

<sup>55</sup>Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, 4:211.

<sup>56</sup>Mark Edward Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary, vol. 28 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2014), 139.

the body of Christ. He understands that sin not addressed and sin not confessed will affect the entire body of Christ.

When leaders become aware of sin within the church and fail to confront it, they put the entire church in jeopardy. As spiritual leaders, it is their duty, for the sake of people they lead and for the glory of God, to deal with sin and not run from or simply ignore it. Sin in the church never leads to the blessing of the people; it must be confronted (1 Cor 5:6-7). Protecting church culture by confronting sinful church culture is a crucial and biblical part of the leaders' calling. Such action is necessary for true revitalization and the future health of the church.

### **Conclusion**

Revitalization and cultural change always begin with God. Both require a calling and a burden from God that will carry the leader through the many challenges of revitalization. The character of such a leader is equally important (1 Tim 3). As seen in Nehemiah 1 and 1 Corinthians 5, a biblical view and response to sin in the church is necessary for God to move and restore.

To enter the process of revitalization and cultural change is to enter the school of sanctification. The task is not for the faint of heart but for those who have a strong and urgent sense of calling. The ones called to this task will often feel an overwhelming sense of inadequacy (Moses, Isaiah). There will be hours and hours of prayer and fasting (Neh 1). There will be hours of seeking God for clarity, and hours of fighting opposition (Ezra 4). There will be days of doubt and weariness and days of renewed strength (Isa 40:31) But authentic revitalization and cultural change can happen – through much repentance, prayer, planning, and action, all driven by the power of God.



CHAPTER 3  
THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR REVITALIZATION  
AND CULTURAL CHANGE

In the article “Why Churches Fail: Part 1,” Richard J. Krejcir presents the results after he tracked over 1,000 churches for ten years. The number one reason (91 percent) people left any given church was because of conflict and gossip (Jas 3:5-6), followed by un-confronted sin (62 percent). The members were fed up with a culture of accepted sin and the lack of confrontation of leadership.<sup>1</sup>

The North American Mission Board reports that “in an average year, 1,000 churches disappear from the Southern Baptist Convention database” and that another 10 to 15 percent are at risk of closing their doors.<sup>2</sup> Since 2013, 83 SBC churches in Arizona have closed, and the trend looks very likely to continue.<sup>3</sup> Several significant elements impact the health of today’s church, and effective revitalization requires dealing effectively with each of these issues.

**Elements of Decline**

The first element of decline, *complacency*, is a danger for any church. The leader can feel a sense of urgency but if complacency within the rest of the organization is high, the combination becomes a fatal one. When complacency enters the organization

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<sup>1</sup>Richard J. Krejcir, “Why Churches Fail: Part 1,” accessed December 20, 2017, <http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=42339&columnid=4545>.

<sup>2</sup>NAMB, “NAMB Annual Ministry Report,” accessed October 15, 2017, <https://www.namb.net/about/annualreport>.

<sup>3</sup>Information presented by the SBC Executive Director for Arizona, David Johnson, during the state convention meeting, November 17, 2017.

or a congregation, a slow death is set in motion. The elements of complacency sometimes hide in the areas of longevity and success, and cripple the long-term effectiveness of the church and its impact on the community. NPHX was a healthy, growing church for several decades, at one point baptizing 1,000 new believers each year for 10 years. The leadership of the SBC praised the success of the church and because Richard Jackson's sermons were broadcast across North America, the church became well known across the nation. However, after years of success, the church began to experience strong decline when Jackson stepped down from leadership. Complacency was the enemy's method for the church decline as many in leadership positions failed to see the need for change.

A second element of decline is *hiding the crisis*. Without a sense of a major and visible crisis, the church can slowly fade by falling into the same traps over and over again. The church must know and see the reality of the crisis. When no big indicators in the organization allow the people to fully comprehend the extent of the urgency, then the members will begin to believe that all is well in the church.<sup>4</sup> The only way to effectively combat this element of decline is to honestly confront the brutal facts.<sup>5</sup> This confrontation is often a painful time in the life of the church. The leader must share the reality of the situation, and many of the parties involved will not want to hear or deal with the truth. During this time, the leader can expect to receive backlash and brutal emails from disgruntled members of the congregation.

A third element of decline is related to *historical victories*. Past success often creates a false sense of security. Leaning on past success can lead to depending on too many resources, which reduces the sense of urgency and causes the organization to have an inward focus. For some leaders this can create ego problems and for organizations,

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<sup>4</sup>John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 1996), 39.

<sup>5</sup>Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't* (London: Random House, 2001), 65.

this can create cultural problems. A sense of misplaced pride and a large ego will often blind the leader and the organization to reality and when the issue finally becomes clear and unavoidable, they realize that the issue is much bigger than they ever suspected.<sup>6</sup>

NPHX struggled with this element of decline, as long-time members failed to acknowledge present struggles. During the 1980s, the church was one of the largest in Arizona and led the SBC in baptisms, baptizing one thousand people a year for ten straight years. Since that time, the church has lived off of this past success, or historical victory. They chose to focus on the way they used to do things, and while looking back, ended up in an unexpected destination of church decline and complacency. The church now finds itself in desperate need of revitalization and cultural change.

### **Preparing for Change**

When creating major change and leading any organization back to health, the leader can know the right words and formulas but still underestimate how difficult this effort will be. In *Leading Change*, John Kotter presents an eight-stage process for leading change in any organization.<sup>7</sup> Instead of immediately taking steps to create revitalization and cultural change, an effective leader must first lay the groundwork for future actions, and Kotter's outline provides the basis for an adapted process, presented in this section, that can be used specifically for church revitalization. However, before beginning this process, the leader should first be certain that he feels a strong burden that leads to a sense of urgency. The decline of the church and the lack of effectiveness in the community must create a sense of urgency that opens the door for change.

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<sup>6</sup>Kotter, *Leading Change*, 43.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 35.

## **Step 1: Personal Preparation**

Every organization needs a strong and bold leader who will lead them into the future, one who is willing to make the hard decisions and carry the team on his back. The leader must be the culture-setter, the culture-protector, and, if the time comes, the culture-changer. The leader is the key component to revitalization. This type of leader needs to have a sense of urgency to change the way things are and the courage to take them where they need to be. Leaders of change and revitalization must be the front-runners, the bulldozers, and the caretakers. They must own the end goal and make it part of their DNA before it can ever be the organization's DNA. The leader must be one who is willing to receive criticism and constant feedback. Any time change happens, even if it is change for the better, the leader and the leadership team will experience a variety of responses.

Some members will offer encouragement and share the excitement about necessary changes. Others will be more negative, openly sharing criticism and questioning every decision. The leader's job is to stay focused on the end goal despite the critics. The leader must take personal time for preparation, spending time before God to hear His voice, and dealing with personal issues and motivations that might impede the process. He must also take deliberate time to recharge physically and spiritually before embarking on the long road ahead.<sup>8</sup> After this time of preparation, the leader begins to communicate and create the sense of urgency within the church.

## **Step 2: Create the Sense of Urgency**

One of the biggest mistakes leaders make when trying to change organizations is that they move forward without first establishing a high sense of urgency among the

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<sup>8</sup>Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James Harold Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 30.

rest of their organization.<sup>9</sup> The sense of urgency, felt first by the leader, must push the leader to take action and do something about the problem. He must begin with the end in mind. The burden for revitalization must be so large, so heavy, that the leader cannot help but do something about it. The sense of urgency will drive the leader to take risks and take on the challenging task of revitalizing and changing church culture. When done correctly, creating urgency can establish a powerful early sense of positive momentum.<sup>10</sup> The word urgency alone can create a real sense of anxiety but is needed for organizational transformation, as it is often the very word that prepares and allows the way for change.<sup>11</sup> This message of urgency can be used for a positive engagement with the church. Creating a clear picture of the current state of the church is often what is needed to spark a sense of urgency.

Revitalizing and changing culture requires a strong leader with a strong burden who is willing to speak the truth. This person must have a high pain tolerance and strong emotional intelligence that will allow them to endure the pain of revitalizing.<sup>12</sup> For NPHX, creating the sense of urgency began with informing the congregation of the NAMB statistics on the city of Phoenix. Many in the congregation did not know that Phoenix was ranked 89<sup>th</sup> out of 96 least Bible minded cities. NPHX needed to hear the brutal truth about where the state of the church currently was and where they were headed. The urgency began with communicating the statistics of the city and the sobering reality of the state of the church. When the leader makes it known that the status quo is not acceptable, a sense

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<sup>9</sup>Kotter, *Leading Change*, 4.

<sup>10</sup>Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 37.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>12</sup>Brian Croft and Harry L. Reeder, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying & Divided Churches* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), 34.

of urgency is created.<sup>13</sup> Creating a sense of urgency often begins by speaking the truth and giving the brutal facts, which will be seen in the next section.

### **Step 3: Conduct a Church Assessment**

When a pastor enters the process of revitalization, one of the first things he should do to assess the culture is get to know the church and the people.<sup>14</sup> The pastor should meet with as many people from the congregation as he can. When things go wrong in an organization it is usually due to that fact that the leader is not in touch with his employees. Likewise, when a pastor fails to lead well, it is often due to the fact that he does not know the sheep he is trying to lead. To get an accurate assessment of the culture, the leader must live amongst the sheep. Being among the people is the best way to get an accurate feel of the cultural temperature. The pastor should begin as a listener and meet with as many people as he can. This process, which many leaders try to avoid, will allow the pastor to receive important, but sometimes painful, feedback.<sup>15</sup>

Another helpful tool for assessing the church and its culture is to conduct a congregational survey. A survey will highlight the areas of strength and health, and also pinpoint the areas that need the most attention.<sup>16</sup> Congregational surveys reveal the current state of the congregation and prove to be extremely helpful when implementing change.

### **Step 4: Be Brutally Honest**

Honesty is at the heart of organizational execution.<sup>17</sup> In order for churches to enter the process of revitalization, they must first come face to face with the reality of the

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<sup>13</sup>Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 40.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>Larry Bossidy, Ram Charan, and Charles Burck, *Execution: The Discipline of*

health of the church. Churches will often fail to face the reality of decline and will continue doing the same programs year after year. Even mediocre success will blind them to the reality of the slow decline.

Brian Croft, in the book *Biblical Church Revitalization*, writes, “If you are a pastor trying to revitalize a church holding to the hope suffering will not come, you should find another line of work now.”<sup>18</sup> The leader is choosing to expose the blind spots and ugly parts of the organization; a process that tends to be incredibly offensive to the people who have been a long-term part of the organization. For many, the leader speaking the harsh truth of reality will be heard as a personal attack, opening the door for backlash and opposition. However, it is imperative that the leader exposes and confronts the culture before any change can occur.

In a church, the confrontation will involve the pastor addressing the ‘hidden’ crisis as well as the sins that have been ignored for the sake of maintaining membership numbers or simply maintaining an illusion of peace and harmony. Croft writes, “There are plenty of battles to fight. The key is knowing what needs to be fought now and what needs to wait.”<sup>19</sup> The problems and sins within the culture are not confronted, the entire organization pays for it; small issues begin to take form and shape and grow strong roots.

Churches are filled with both pastors and members who try to avoid or hide from reality. Facing reality is a crucial but often neglected element of cultural change. Leaders do not want to face the reality of decline because it makes the situation even more uncomfortable. Sometimes leaders are in denial or are afraid to admit that they do not have the answer to the problem, or even worse, that they are the problem. However, in order for the organization to flourish, the leadership must come to a realistic view of

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*Getting Things Done* (London: Random House, 2011), 67.

<sup>18</sup>Croft and Reeder, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 47.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 48.

the organization, and then attempt to move forward with practical solutions.

Unfortunately, most leaders struggle to communicate their organizational strengths and weaknesses. Often, they can describe their strengths but have a hard time describing their weaknesses. If they are able to describe them, they often do not have realistic or practical solutions to make them better. Having a leader with a realistic view of strengths and weaknesses is essential to making realism a part of the larger organization. His commitment to realism helps to ensure that realism is the goal of the entire organizational structure.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, the pastor must take an honest look at the church and his own leadership and be a realist about the condition of the church and its cultural reality. The slogan for the church may be “we reach people,” but the pastor must be the voice that communicates the reality that the church is not currently reaching people.

The leaders who create effective transformation are honest with themselves and with the organization they are leading. Communicating the reality of the situation is crucial. Some congregants may be completely unaware of the true status of the organization and its direction. An effective leader understands that the best way to lead the church through tough times is to have a clear understanding of both his own and the church’s capabilities and shortcomings.<sup>21</sup> He will need to have brutally honest conversations about why the church is not growing. He will have heartfelt conversations with well meaning and dedicated leaders who are not being effective in their area of ministry. He will have to tell lay leaders or staff members that the curriculum they are using is outdated and ineffective. Leaders should begin to meet privately with current members and have very honest conversations about organizational health (or lack thereof). As the leader communicates this reality over and over again, the entire organization will be forced to deal with the severity of the situation. If they then choose to not get on board

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<sup>20</sup>Croft and Reeder, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 48.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 31-32.



with future changes, they will at least know why change must happen. It is the leader's responsibility to speak clearly about the organization's situation and create this sense of urgency. In fear of offending the church, the leader can make the mistake of making the changes without clearly communicating the reason behind the changes. In *Leading Congregational Change*, the authors point out that "being honest does not mean displaying the brutal candor and adversarial attitudes that abound elsewhere in our society."<sup>22</sup> In order to effectively conduct these conversations with key leaders of the church, the pastor must set the appropriate tone, because they are crucial for an accurate assessment of the church's culture and the values.

### **Step 5: Assess the Culture**

By assessing the culture of the church, the leader will gain a better understanding of the current state of the church. Good or bad the culture will have a greater impact on the congregation more than pastors realize. What the church community thinks about God, themselves, and others will dictate how they live and treat each other, ultimately creating culture. If the church culture is found to be a unhealthy one then the leader can guarantee that there is a theological problem.<sup>23</sup> When unhealthy culture is addressed and uprooted, new cultural seeds need to be planted to take the place of the old. Not only do new cultural roots need to be planted but they also need to be watered often.<sup>24</sup> This process will be a long one and will take patience and perseverance. Because culture is an internal force, made up of norms of behavior and shared values, it is incredibly powerful and influential.<sup>25</sup> Mission statements do not create culture; nice signs on the wall do not create culture. Culture is created by what values and behaviors are shared in the organization.

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<sup>22</sup>Croft and Reeder, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 38.

<sup>23</sup>Kevin Peck and Eric Geiger, *Designed to Lead* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 102.

<sup>24</sup>Kotter, *Leading Change*, 147.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 148.

The organization cannot move forward with a healthy new culture until the old unhealthy one is named and removed.

Culture in a church begins with the actual beliefs and values that undergird all the actions and behaviors. Changing the culture of a church is a difficult task, and developing a healthy church culture requires more than correcting behavior and changing programs.<sup>26</sup> A healthy, God-honoring church culture has the power to fulfill the Great Commission and change a community.<sup>27</sup> Geiger and Peck describe three layers of church culture: actual beliefs plus values, articulated beliefs plus values, and artifacts. “Church culture can be seen in three layers, each layer building and depending on the layer below it. These layers move from actual beliefs to articulated beliefs, to the expression of those beliefs (called artifacts). All three layers make up church culture.”<sup>28</sup> Examining each of these layers provides insight into the current state of the church, and each layer must be in a healthy place for the church to thrive. The three layers are good indicators of how to understand and evaluate a church culture before changing it.

**Actual beliefs.** Geiger and Peck describe actual beliefs as “a collected belief system that the community actually believes and not merely says they believe.”<sup>29</sup> At NPHX, posters around the church described a set of beliefs and values, but they did not match up to the actual culture that was at NPHX. Recognizing the disconnect between the ideal church portrayed in the posters and the reality at NPHX was an important part of the assessment.

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<sup>26</sup>Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 123.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 125.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 126.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 127.

**Articulated beliefs.** Actions will usually speak louder than words. “While not everything that is articulated is really believed, what is really believed is always articulated.”<sup>30</sup> Christ tells His disciples in John 13:34-35 to love one another and by this they will know they are His disciples. What they believed would be evident in how they articulated Christ’s love to others. The attitudes of their hearts would be revealed in what they said to others and how they treated each other. The same is true today.

**Artifacts.** Geiger and Peck describe artifacts as “the visible, tangible expressions of a church’s actual and articulated beliefs.” Artifacts also include systems like policies, organizational structures, meeting formats, and required procedures. Programs and church calendars are also artifacts of the church.<sup>31</sup>

#### **Step 6: Seek God for the Vision**

While a sense of urgency is important and needed for cultural change, it is not the proverbial silver bullet for major change. Out of all of the elements involved in revitalizing and changing culture, none are more important than having a vision.<sup>32</sup> Processing a vision statement is a critical step in this process.<sup>33</sup> Many people tend to underestimate the importance of a clear vision. Many pastors who are trying to revitalize and make changes make the mistake of not telling their staff or congregation why they are making changes and where they are leading them. Informing and including the congregation and staff in the vision will make the shift from the pastor’s vision to a

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<sup>30</sup>Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 127.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Kotter, *Leading Change*, 7.

<sup>33</sup>Bonem, Furr, and Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, 57.

shared vision.<sup>34</sup> The vision is the thing that will attract and drives the action to accomplish the plan.<sup>35</sup>

The vision is the “why” behind decision-making. The pastor should lead out of a very clear and concise vision. Not a secret known only by the leadership team, the vision should be known and understood by the entire church. People may not like or agree with the vision, but at least they will know what it is. The vision plays a major role in producing change in any organization by helping to direct and align people and inspire them to a common purpose. The bigger the dream that God has given the pastor, the greater the fear that the congregation will respond with astonishment and bewilderment.<sup>36</sup>

Andy Stanley asserts in his book *Visioneering* that “vision often begins with the inability to accept things the way they are. The leader is not satisfied with the status quo and this vision to see what it can become creates a sense of urgency and a sense of conviction.”<sup>37</sup> All visions need to be accompanied by a plan. The plan and strategy are the bones to the flesh of the vision. If a vision is born as part a plan, rather than a plan birthed out of a vision, the result is typically inactivity. When a vision in an organization is birthed but no plan follows, the vision dies. The excitement that was once instilled into the organization loses its impact and the organization becomes skeptical. Employees will eventually lose morale when a vision never leads to reality.

On the other hand, the vision comes alive and builds excitement into the DNA of the organization when the leader develops and presents a practical healthy plan that involves the employees. In the primary stages of change, leaders will often have a vision without a clear plan but the way to keep the vision alive is to have deliberate stages for

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<sup>34</sup>Bonem, Furr, and Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, 57.

<sup>35</sup>Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 136.

<sup>36</sup>Bonem, Furr, and Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, 57.

<sup>37</sup>Andy Stanley, *Visioneering* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1999), 17.

developing a plan. Vision without activity will lead to a lack of trust and low morale throughout the entire organization. Seeing visible results that are part of accomplishing the vision keeps the team engaged, excited, and moving forward. The plan is the lifeline to the vision.

### **Step 7: Form a Plan**

In Nehemiah 2, Nehemiah gave the people a very clear vision, “come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem” (v. 17), from this the plan came. Nehemiah knew what he wanted to do, and the “how” would soon follow. The right vision will not make the organization successful if clear goals and objectives are not set. A clear and attainable plan must be in place to serve as the roadmap to fulfilling the vision. For example, a pastor could preach every Sunday about the need to reach the city for Jesus. This is an honorable aspiration, a holy ambition, and exciting to preach. But without providing practical ways to reach the city, his words will be like throwing seeds on the garden without a plan for watering them and giving them the proper nutrients necessary for growth. The vision is the seed that cannot flourish without the essentials of a plan.

Giving clear objectives, providing resources, and empowering employees is essential. Major change within the organization will not happen unless people know their roles and goals and are empowered to accomplish them. Missing this essential step will only lead to frustrated and angry people, which in turn will lower staff morale and hinder fulfilling the mission.<sup>38</sup> The leader must develop short term and long term plans that are communicated regularly with the entire organization; the intentionality of this communication is crucial to its success and effectiveness.

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<sup>38</sup>Kotter, *Leading Change*, 103.

## **Communicating the Vision**

Communication is a continuation of the vision development.<sup>39</sup> When the pastor and the staff begin to publicly communicate the vision, the vision begins to take root in the congregation. Without this intentional communication, a vision is a mere dream. Also, the vision will be quickly stifled if the leader is communicating something different than what he is living.<sup>40</sup>

Repetition is an essential ingredient for clear and effective communication. The leader should not assume that the vision has been understood and internalized after the initial round of communication.<sup>41</sup> At NPHX, communicating the vision repeatedly proved to be beneficial in several ways. The first is that when the congregation understands the vision on a deeper level they have a deeper buy in. Second, it gives a strong indication to the congregation that change is coming and a new day has arrived. Third, it will weed out the “naysayers,” the group of people who tend to always find something wrong and want to combine their forces against the church. With repetition and consistent movement forward, these people will either have a change of heart and buy in to the vision or choose to leave the church. A final benefit of clearly and repeatedly communicating the vision is that people from within the church will step up in what seems to be miraculous ways. This has been true for NPHX. After the vision was shared, church members began to step up in numerous ways, offering their labor, finances, and prayer.

## **The “Why” of the Plan**

Nehemiah gave his clear “why” for the rebuilding of the walls, because Jerusalem was a disgrace (Neh 2:17). Along with a plan, the leader must also be able to communicate the reasoning behind it, being a disgrace was Nehemiah’s reason.

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<sup>39</sup>Bonem, Furr, and Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, 61.

<sup>40</sup>Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 137.

<sup>41</sup>Bonem, Furr, and Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, 66.

Knowing the “why” behind the decisions being made will reduce the level of frustration and confusion. When the “why” is not clearly communicated by the leader, the staff in the organization tend to create their own “why” which leads to organizational frustration and confusion and ultimately, halts progress.

Being clear about the “why” will usually eliminate staff who disagree with the plan and mission. This is crucial for the church. The church must have a very clear unapologetic plan that aligns with the biblical vision and mission of the church. While not all of the congregants will agree with the stated direction, they will at least have a clear understanding of the “why” behind all of the decisions.

### **The Roles in the Plan**

In Nehemiah 3, Nehemiah began to give people their roles in the plan. Rebuilding was a huge task and Nehemiah could not do it alone, he would need to enlist and empower others. Once the plan is established, everyone in the organization must have a clear understanding of how they fit into the plan, and their roles in helping to fulfill the mission. Giving employees very clear objectives, goals, and job descriptions is essential for the success of the organizational plan.<sup>42</sup> This may very well mean that some employees no longer fit the vision and direction or that some may be needed in a different capacity. The plan must be more than a sheet of paper hanging on the wall; it needs to be tangible and attainable. Implementation is the lifeline to the vision; when the plan stops working, or the team stops working the plan, the vision dies.

### **The Team**

Impactful and meaningful change cannot take place without the leader and employees having the same sense of urgency and burden. When the leader shares his burden with a sense of urgency, this will alert the organization that change is needed.

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<sup>42</sup>Bossidy, Charan, and Burck. *Execution*, xxvi.

Change begins when everyone is on board and they are willing to prepare for change to take place. The leader carries the responsibility of effectively communicating the burden and a sense of urgency; this must be done well in order for the organization to be successful.<sup>43</sup>

The right team members with the right understanding of the mission and the role they each play are key components in moving forward. Making sure that the right employees are taking on the right projects is not something that can be delegated to other executives or human resources; the leader of the organization must take on this crucial task. The team will determine the success and failure of the plan, and ultimately the organization; the leader must be heavily involved with the hiring and firing processes.

While most leaders understand the importance of personnel, many make the mistake of not giving much thought to who is being hired into the company.<sup>44</sup> They make the mistake of choosing people who make them feel comfortable instead of choosing the person who is best for the job. This understandable mistake explains why so many companies and churches have people in the wrong positions; eventually, the entire organization suffers.

Likewise, some leaders are not willing or able to let the wrong people go in order to put the right person in place to accomplish the task. Before hiring and firing, the leader must know what is needed to make the company succeed. The leadership void that is found in many companies is the lack of courage to fire, and the lack of knowledge to hire. Leaders simply do not know what they need.

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<sup>43</sup>Robert Tanner, "Leading Changes (Step 1): Creating a Sense of Urgency," February 7, 2018, accessed November 3, 2017, <https://managementisajourney.com/leading-change-step-1-creating-a-sense-of-urgency/>.

<sup>44</sup>Bossidy, Charan, and Burck. *Execution*, 109.



## **Step 8: Follow through and Implementation**

NPHX has experienced years of catchy mission and vision statements that hang on the wall and fail to keep it in front of the church and execute.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately, many fail to follow through and develop or implement the plan in its entirety. They will call meetings where great ideas are shared but no one is held accountable for developing the ideas into a workable plan. Without accountability or practical steps forward, nothing happens.<sup>46</sup> Implementation, which requires hard work and strong accountability, is the key to the success of a plan, and in turn, the future success of the organization.

For example, NPHX has had the same mission statement for over forty years: “Living God’s Love in the Heart of Our City.” This mission statement is good and honorable. However, an evaluation of the mission statement, and how it was being accomplished in the church, revealed that no clear objectives or plans existed to make the statement true or attainable. The church’s failure to achieve this mission statement points to deeper issues with leadership, accountability, and strategic planning.

## **The Leader Holds Everyone Accountable**

The leader, in order to keep the change moving forward at a healthy pace, must continually hold everyone accountable.<sup>47</sup> The tendency can be for the organization to slowly fade back into old habits that caused the decline. To combat that slide, the leader must establish clear roles, clear direction, and clear accountability. Unfortunately a commitment to holding everyone accountable is easier in theory than in practice. Leaders

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<sup>45</sup>According to a conversation I had with John Shillington, an executive pastor who has been at NPHX for 35 years.

<sup>46</sup>Bossidy, Charan, and Burck. *Execution*, 71.

<sup>47</sup>Herrington, Bonem, Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 67.

must be ready to back up this statement with real world initiatives that will strengthen engagement.<sup>48</sup>

John Hess, CEO of Hess Corporation, modeled accountability in his launch. He challenged his entire leadership team to come up with solutions that would make the company more agile, cost conscience, and faster at decision making. In order to manage change weariness, he created a champion team responsible for coordinating the variety of efforts underway.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, the organization must see that the leader has a plan, has initiatives and objectives, and will hold others accountable to insure that the success of the plan.

### **The Leader Celebrates Short-Term Wins**

If employees do not see signs of success along the way then they will have a compelling reason to abandon the vision. Retreating from the vision because of a real or perceived lack of success is a natural form of self-defense; employees do not have to feel like they have failed because they retreat.<sup>50</sup> Pausing to celebrate in the midst of change takes intentionality but is crucial for the morale of the team and long-term success. Acknowledging and celebrating short-term wins will give the leader credibility he needs to sustain the efforts in the long haul.<sup>51</sup>

These short-term wins must be strategically scheduled in the life of the organization. If the organization celebrates too often then they are in danger of becoming complacent; if the organization waits too long, low morale may creep in. The wins must

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<sup>48</sup>Douglas A. Ready, “4 Things Successful Change Leaders Do Well,” *Harvard Business Review*, January 28, 2016, accessed December 3, 2017, <https://hbr.org/2016/01/4-things-successful-change-leaders-do-well>.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Stanley, *Visioneering*, 48.

<sup>51</sup>Kotter, *Leading Change*, 119.

be visible and tangible for the people in the organization as well as outside of the organization. Celebrating short-term and long-term wins will help to develop enthusiasm and excitement in the organization—crucial elements of rebuilding morale in a once failing organization.<sup>52</sup>

### **Conclusion**

With so many churches failing or in decline, the need for leaders who are willing to enter the hard process of revitalization is more pressing than ever before. Effective revitalization requires that a leader have a clear burden and vision, and also have a realistic view of the current condition of the organization. He must have the courage to make the necessary and difficult changes that lead towards revitalization. An honest and complete assessment of the current organizational culture as well as analysis of the reasons for decline will allow the leader to accurately determine what needs immediate attention and change. The leader must be willing to evaluate and confront the elements and/or the people in the organization who are causing dysfunction. He will need to have hard conversations and possibly move or remove employees in order to create the team who will fulfill the mission of the organization.

The right team, paired with a clear vision and a plan of how to accomplish the vision, is essential for success, because implementation of the plan will be difficult. The leader must be committed to working hard, making sure that everyone is moving forward in sync to fulfill the mission and that decisions are being made that will make the vision a reality.

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<sup>52</sup>Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 139.

## CHAPTER 4

### DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

I became the senior pastor of North Phoenix Baptist Church in June, 2016. I accepted the position knowing that the church was in the midst of a major decline; in fact, that is the very reason that I took the job. Even before I preached my first sermon, I had a burden to see the revitalization of the church.

#### **The Pastor and a Burden**

Churches are dying. According to the NAMB, between 900 and 1,000 churches a year hold their final services, close their doors, and leave the communities in which they once served as an outpost for the gospel. Church statistics are astonishing: “10-15 percent of all churches are healthy and multiplying; 70-75 percent are plateaued or declining; and 10-15 percent are in the process or near risk of closing.”<sup>1</sup>

Revitalization is desperately needed in North American churches. In Arizona alone, eighty-three churches have closed their doors since 2013.<sup>2</sup> The average church size is seventy and many seem to be on the verge of closure. These numbers are heartbreaking, and are what God used to grab my heart.

As churches close their doors, their communities fail to hear the gospel. Not only are church members impacted by this, but lost souls in the community are as well. A pastor must have a burden for the call that is greater than the desire for ministry success. Before accepting the call to revitalization, I needed to have a burning in the soul type of

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<sup>1</sup>NAMB, “Church Replanting,” accessed December 20, 2017, <https://www.namb.net/church-replanting>.

<sup>2</sup>These were statistics given by the Executive Director, David Johnson.

burden from God. He gave that to me, and even so, the work of revitalization might be one of the hardest things I've ever done in my life.

### **The Pastor and a Calling**

Having the burden is not enough; a specific calling is required. Many people with burdens are not called to pick up their lives and move their families into a spiritual warzone. Some are called to write checks, pray prayers, and be encouragers; few are called to surrender to the work, the battle, of revitalization. God provided a clear call that led me, and my family, into the unknown.

Scripture provides multiple examples of men and women being called to specific tasks: Joseph (Gen 37-50); Moses (Exod 3-4; Isaiah (Isa 1), and Jeremiah (Jer 1). No one should attempt to take on a God-sized task without a clear calling. The security is in the clarity of the calling when the task at hand becomes difficult. Without a God-given calling, I would have depended on my own skills, gifts, and resources to try to accomplish the will of God. And I would most certainly have failed. The work of revitalization is tough, very tough, and at times, I did question my calling. The responsibility and grit of the work affected me emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually. I also had to prepare for how this calling and this work would affect my family.

### **The Pastor and His Family**

The health of a pastor's family will affect the health of his ministry and the health of a pastor's ministry will affect the health of his family. The pastor might be the one called to revitalization but his entire family will feel the effects as he works to achieve it. The pastor must do all that he can to set up boundaries early, speak to other revitalizers, and prepare the best he can to protect his family.

If the pastor's spouse is wrestling with what God has called him to do, he should trust God, and wait. If the pastor is truly called by God to take on the task of revitalization but his spouse is not in agreement, the result will be ministry suicide. It will only be a

matter of time before the bottom falls out. The pastor must wait until God has both spouses' hearts on the same page.

My wife and I were on the same page with the call and in a happy and healthy place in our relationship when we received the call. Even so, the work of revitalizing a church has put a toll on our marriage and we feel pressure from every direction. We are often tired spiritually, emotionally, and physically because every day feels like we've been through a battle. Eventually, we had to create some boundaries for the sake of the health of our relationship. We began to deliberately insert areas of our life where we could refuel. Being deliberate and intentional allowed us to continue thriving as a couple and as a family. We began saying "no" to some things to make room for the right things. Unfortunately some people in the church were angry and even offended when we put these boundaries in place and consistently followed them. However, I see it as part of my responsibility as a leader and as a pastor to honor and protect my family time. In return, the church receives a healthier, more focused pastor, and my family receives a better father and husband.

### **The Pastor and Spiritual Warfare**

As I began and continue the work of revitalization at NPHX, spiritual warfare was, and continues to be present. Taking on the task of revitalization is taking on the gates of hell. I am facing darkness and taking my family into a valley of dry bones and depending on God's power to revitalize them. The enemy hates this. At times in this process, both my wife and I dealt with depression, feeling beat up and lonely. Many who hated me for the decisions and changes I was making also chose to hate her. As new members of the community, we did not have any friends and did not know whom to trust. Life was incredibly difficult, and more than once we were tempted to quit, but we remembered our calling. Many days my wife would hear negative comments about me that hurt her to the core, and many days I would come home wounded and hurt. But we were united in God's calling, and bore the load together.

Unfortunately, revitalization is sure to create some family wounds and scars. We had to remember that the enemy is on the prowl and he was trying to devour us (1 Pet 5:8). We had to remember that God has called us into this valley and it is Him who will see us through. I often felt as though my family and marriage were in a constant whirlwind—there was always sickness, car accidents, and a general feeling of darkness and oppression. At one point I received a death threat along with racist anonymous letters reminding me “this isn’t Mexico.” I had to remember that my fight was not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities of this world.

### **The Pastor and a Vision**

Andy Stanley defines vision as “being born in the soul of a man or woman who is consumed with the tension between what is and what could be.”<sup>3</sup> When I arrived in Phoenix for my second interview, I remember asking God to give me a vision of what the future of the church could look like. I will never forget seeing the worn out campus in the middle of a busy and diverse city. I remember reading the records of the church and seeing the drastic membership and financial declines they have had over the years. And although the facts were disheartening and concerning, I felt an overwhelming sense of, “God is not done yet.” Not a cheesy Christian cliché or self-motivating phrase, but a burning in my soul telling me that GOD IS NOT DONE. This sense and impression from the Spirit allowed me to see past the deterioration of the buildings and declining of the numbers, past the depressing reality to a future that only God could create. My burden for NPHX, combined with this clear calling and vision would be the very things I would depend on during my times of despair.

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<sup>3</sup>Andy Stanley, *Visioneering* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1999), 17.

## **The Pastor and the Power of God**

I cannot overstate the importance and necessity of the power of God. I am looking at darkness and dysfunction in the face and working to remove it. In no way will I succeed without the power of God. One of the primary enemies of revitalization is self-sufficiency. I could be the most gifted and talented leader and preacher and yet would fail miserably without the power of God. It is only the power of God that will raise dry bones to life; that will take a dying or dead church and make it new. God can accomplish amazing things when the person He calls is entirely dependent on Him. I found that when every part of me desperately needed and wanted to see God move, for the sake of His own glory, that was when He usually chose to move. I had to approach the task of revitalization wholly depending on the power of God.

### **Assessing Culture**

Susan Heathfield writes, “Culture is made up of the values, beliefs, underlying assumptions, attitudes, and behaviors shared by a group of people. Culture is the behavior that results when a group arrives at a set of generally unspoken and unwritten rules for working together.”<sup>4</sup> As the new senior pastor at NPHX, I immediately entered the process of assessing the church culture. As soon as my feet hit the office floor I began meeting with everyone I could. I knew that in order to make any progress towards revitalizing the church, I had to understand the current culture and how it became that way. I met with elders, deacons, staff, lay leaders, long and short-term members, and first-time visitors. By the time I had met with everyone, I was exhausted, both physically and mentally. But the meetings were incredibly rewarding.

As a follow-up to those initial meetings I hosted four consecutive meetings for four consecutive weeks before each worship service. I met several hundred people in the

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<sup>4</sup>Susan M. Heathfield, “What Makes Up Your Company Culture?” November 13, 2016, accessed November 3, 2017, <https://www.thebalance.com/what-makes-up-your-company-culture-1918816>.



chapel for an hour to have a time of questions and answers, and also passed out surveys.<sup>5</sup> My purpose for these hours was to provide an opportunity for the congregation to meet their new pastor, and at the same time I could learn what was on their hearts as another way to assess the church culture.

Unfortunately, how I idealistically imagined these meetings was essentially the opposite of what actually happened, although I did find out quite a bit about the culture. Those four weeks became *hell weeks* for me. Congregants spent the hour telling me everything that is wrong with the church and exactly what is needed to fix the problem. I heard about everything: topics that need to be preached; music that needs to be played; the style of preaching; the role of the deacons; the Monday night outreach programs that need to be brought back, and even what I should be wearing. One person was bold enough to say, in front of the hundreds who attended the meeting, how weak my preaching was.

The words were painful, and the meetings were generally horrible, but they gave me the insight I was looking for. The church was hurt, angry, and tired. They had deferred hope, and it made their heart sick (Prov 13:12). Many had experienced the ‘golden days’ of the church, and now they all seemed to be behind them. The congregants did not trust the leadership and everyone had an opinion about how to make the church more effective.

During the month that I held these meetings, I was also surveying the staff and having one on one meetings with them.<sup>6</sup> By observing their demeanor in my office, and then by reading their surveys, I was able to detect a clear common theme. The staff was tired and discouraged; morale was low. This same theme carried through to the entire church. No one seemed optimistic or excited about the future of NPHX.

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<sup>5</sup>See appendix 4.

<sup>6</sup>See appendix 5.

Throughout this time, the same question came to my mind over and over again: “What happened?” How did a church that once had over twenty thousand members shrink to an average attendance of just over one thousand? A recent article offers some insight into how such a decline is possible:

In many cases, the decline and struggle of local churches can be traced to decades of unfaithful shepherds who cared more about numbers, programs, politics, and personal gain than the biblical call for pastors to shepherd the souls of God’s people (1 Pet 5:1-4; Heb 13:17). Many churches needing revitalization have hurting, broken, discouraged sheep that need a shepherd to care for them and nurture them back to health. This is where a pastor’s time needs to be spent as he seeks to be faithful. If God is going to breathe life into his church, it must come through the revival of his people who are there.<sup>7</sup>

I cannot with a pure heart blame past leadership for the decline of the church. But questions remained, and I was often curious about what went wrong and how I could avoid the same mistakes. I will never have a complete answer to that question, but after meeting with the elders, deacons, lay leaders, and staff, I recognized very quickly that while these brothers and sisters dearly love the Lord, they are discouraged and weary.

### **Assess Staff Culture**

In order to ensure a more specific and complete assessment of the staff culture, I examined every area of ministry—their programs, their leadership, their spending, and their future direction. All of these elements, in every ministry, pointed to the fact that outreach was not a priority. Despite having a mission statement that proclaims that NPHX is “Living God’s Love in the Heart of Our City,” the programs say “We just take care of those who are here.”

The city was obviously not being reached. Instead of the one thousand baptisms a year that were the norm for over a decade, today NPHX only sees around 20 salvations and 25 baptisms a year. I knew where God was calling me to take the church;

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<sup>7</sup>Brian Croft and Tim Beougher, “A Roadmap to Revitalization: Pursuing Faithfulness and Survival,” in *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, ed. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., accessed November 2, 2017, <http://www.sbts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/CO-151-2015-Church-Revitalization-Web-Final-2.pdf>, 48.

my challenge was to determine if the current staff could have the same calling, vision, and DNA.

I continued to search for the reasons why the church was declining, and as part of that search I had to know how the staff was spending their time. I had to be a micromanager for a while, which is not my leadership style, but was needed during this time of discovery. I had all staff members send me their agendas for the week so that I could see what they were doing and how they were doing it. To be blunt, the staff hated it, but I loved it. They were forced to be accountable, which was a new occurrence for many of them. For me, the results were invaluable. Seeing the agendas showed so much about what they were doing with their time, where it was focused, and how much overlap was happening with some of them performing the same tasks.

### **Assess Church and Member History**

We are all shaped by our experiences, which mold us to behave in a certain manner. I believe that church congregations hold to that same pattern. I knew that something along the way had made them feel discouraged as a congregation, but I could not exactly put my finger on it. I decided to dig deep into history of the church and look at church trends, city trends, pastor trends, and major successes and failures.

I put myself in the shoes of the congregation and tried to figure out what had moved them to this place of emotional, physical, and spiritual discouragement. Researching, meeting, and listening very carefully allowed me to slowly uncover the church idols and land mines. Taking the time to look at historical church documents, setting up meetings with church members who left out of frustration before I arrived, and talking to the previous pastors brought clarity and perspective. Knowing the church's history was essential in moving forward with the work of revitalization. By learning so much about the church culture I was able to proceed with a better understanding of how the church would respond to change.

## **Assess the City Culture**

My next task was to assess the culture of the city that surrounds the church property. I looked at the demographics of Phoenix and looked at the city trends and how they correlated with the church trends. This information provided some interesting insight. When the church had over twenty thousand members, the demographics of the congregation matched the city's. About ninety-five percent of the congregation was white, and most were middle to upper class. In Phoenix, the church was known as the high profile, rich Anglo church. As the church effectively reached the city, the congregation reflected the city at that time.

However, as the demographics of the city of Phoenix began to change, and the population became more diverse, the church did not. When I walked into the church for the first time, it was almost as if I had stepped back into the 70's. The sanctuary was filled with elderly white people, and in no way did the congregation reflect the city around them. For me, this was my first 'aha' moment; proof that the church was not reaching the city. I had just driven through an incredibly diverse city, ethnically and socially, and yet, the church looked nothing like it. Did they want to? Absolutely. But at some point they no longer knew how and could not keep up with the changing culture.

## **Assess Culture of Spending**

The way a church spends its budget and uses its resources often reveals its true focus. This next step was an eye opener for me. While I am a visionary who loves to take a step of faith and see God come through, I am also a realist. I know that God can provide in huge ways but sometimes we need to start where we are and with what we have. In order to do that, I made an assessment of the church's assets. I looked at everything from facilities to personnel to finances. If we were going to reach the city, we had to know how to use what we had and who we had. This assessment was simply a time of analyzing the organizational waves of resources.

## **Moving Forward**

With the initial assessment complete, I needed to determine what steps to take moving forward. I was not overly concerned with the resources, I just wanted to know where and how God wanted me to lead this church.

### **Prepare a Vision**

I desperately sought the Lord for his guidance and wisdom. I studied Nehemiah and took the same approach that he did, praying and fasting. I took time to pray and fast to seek the face of God. I knew that any attempt to create change in the church would cause me pain so I needed to enter into the process being sure of God's will. After this time of praying and fasting, I had a clear vision of where I wanted to take the church; the challenge was that I did not know how to get there.

### **Strategic Direction**

My next step was to set three goals and begin to put them into action. The first goal would be conducting an internal and external SWOT analysis of NPHX. This objective analysis would provide insight into how people perceived NPHX and would force me to recognize my own 'blind spots' as I tried to understand the church culture. I must admit that I did not like reading some of the responses but overall, the results were both sobering and helpful.<sup>8</sup>

With the first goal accomplished, prayerfully put together a strategic direction team made up of lay leaders and staff. I decided to gather a team made up of some of the brightest minds in our congregation, a group that was diverse in skills, age, ethnicity, social class, and spiritual maturity. I brought them together and shared my heart with them; I shared the burden and vision that God had placed on my heart. I very clearly communicated that I needed their brainpower and help to make this vision a reality.

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<sup>8</sup>See appendix 6 and 7.

For the next nine months we met twice a month after church for 2-3 hours and we brainstormed for much of that time. It often felt like we were not making any progress, but after months of meeting and brainstorming we were able to take the results of the brainstorming and begin to narrow our focus. By the end of the nine months we had developed a 5-10 year strategic plan that outlined the steps for moving the church forward. Our strategic plan, centered around a clear mission statement, focused on five bold steps.<sup>9</sup> No longer did I have a vision but no plan. God had provided both the vision and the plan for accomplishing it.

My third and final goal was to prepare and present a sermon series, as a way to begin preparing the hearts of the congregation to receive change. I decided to do a 10-week sermon series on the book of Nehemiah. That first week, I used Nehemiah's story to give the congregation a sense of urgency and burden for the city of Phoenix.<sup>10</sup> My hope was that the church would begin to see the "why" behind the changes that were coming. As I shared with them Nehemiah's burden for Jerusalem and the honor of God's name, I also presented them with some very sobering realities about our church and city.

## **Implementation**

With these three goals accomplished, my next step was to begin implementing the five bold steps we developed in the strategic plan. In order to do this, I created five teams led by staff members, with each team focused on one of the steps. The goal of each team was to come up with a very clear plan and road map of how their assigned step would be accomplished. At this point, having a staff fully on board with the strategic plan was essential. The time spent creating a strategic plan would have been wasted if I did not follow through with a deliberate plan for implementation. In retrospect, developing

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<sup>9</sup>See appendix 8 and 9.

<sup>10</sup>See appendix 2.

the plan was the easy part; the hard work was just about to begin. Implementation is incredibly difficult; it requires consistency and intentionality, and a willingness to change.

### **Create the Team**

After confronting the culture, it was time to start thinking about the kind of culture I wanted to build for our staff and church. I am a firm believer that the staff sets the culture of the church. After we put together the strategic plan and determined the bold steps that would move the church forward, I had to reassess the entire staff to determine whether or not they were the team that would move us into the future. I had to take on the incredibly difficult task of determining whether or not I would keep or fire the current staff, the majority of who had worked at NPHX for at least 20 years. After I assessed the staff, I knew who would and would not move forward.

It became very clear that my vision and DNA for evangelism was an anomaly among the staff. In order to get to the place God was calling me to take us, I knew I needed a staff with the same DNA. I could not move forward with a team who did not hold the same convictions and vision as I did. Some staffers who did not bleed the same DNA gave me the response of, “sure I could do this and be fine with it.” Unfortunately, those were the type of staffers that would not move the church in the right direction. I needed people who burned with the same passion for the church and a sense of urgency for the lost. I knew that in order to accomplish the task before us, hard decisions had to be made. In order to enter the battlefield of revitalization, I needed to have the right team in place. This meant hiring new staff, but it also meant letting some staff go.

**Firing.** For the sake of revitalization and the future of the church, I did the hard thing and began letting staff go. Each separation came with a multitude of pain: the spouses made it clear they hated me; their friends from the congregation made it clear they hated me; people I would meet in the community made it clear they hated me; and many on social media let it be known that they hated me. Despite these personal attacks,

each person I fired received a generous final paycheck as well as severance pay. I needed to make sure that I did the right thing, even in the midst of pain and grief.

**Hiring.** After firing people I needed make sure to hire people who would bring an energy and enthusiasm for fulfilling the future calling and vision of the church. The first hires were going to be crucial for the standard I was going to set and the new culture I was trying to create. The congregation needed to see and feel that we were moving forward. I began hiring people and not positions. If I had hired based on skills and not character, I could have lead the church to a deeper decline. I certainly hired people with skill sets in certain areas of ministry, but character and calling was my first requirement.

**Share the vision.** Once the team was in place I needed to clearly share the vision with the entire church. The church had to know where we were going and how we were going to get there. The staff team decided that we would create a compelling and passion-filled vision video that we could share on a Sunday morning and then share on social media.

Over-communicating this vision was going to be a large part of its success, and we looked into several ways to communicate the vision. I first met with the lay leaders of the church, including the elders, deacons, and Bible Study teachers. I knew that if I could get the leaders on board then they would be my mediators in the congregation. I helped them to understand why the changes were coming and what God had placed on my heart. I expressed to them how much I needed them on board in order for this revitalization to be successful.

**Leading with the “why.”** One of the questions that came up time and time again during all of these changes was, “Why?”: “Why did you fire the staff?”; “Why did you change the website?”; and even “Why do you wear casual pants on stage?” The “Why’s” kept coming and I soon realized they were not stopping any time soon. I decided that before I made any change, I would always lead with the “why.” I knew that



even if people did not like the change, they would at least understand why it was happening. I was sure that if my staff understood the “why” they would lead the same way in their meetings. I knew that if every ministry was on the same page and giving the same message then it would unify the church and bring clarity to the changes.

**Anticipate the consequences.** In the midst of all of these changes, I did my best to be proactive and anticipate the consequences of my decisions. I found that when I did not do this, the level of confusion and chaos rose, and I regretted not spending the time to anticipate these issues. Decisions always have consequences; as the leader, one of my responsibilities is to anticipate as many of them as possible.

**Meeting with church influencers.** As I actively anticipated these consequences, I began to meet with church influencers. By meeting with a select fifty, I figured that I could impact hundreds of members. I took people out to breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I became a learner and a listener, hearing their concerns, asking them questions, and eventually requesting their help. My goal was to build trust and personally assure them that I loved the church and was not here to harm it. In amazement, I watched walls of fear and distrust being to break down throughout these meetings. They felt heard and needed, and left believing that they were an important part of the mission and vision. Instead of thinking that I was throwing away or dismissing their hard work, they came to realize that I was building on it. These meeting proved to be very effective to help move the church forward. Once the influencers were on board, the rest of the church began to dismantle their own walls of fear.

**Change culture.** A new vision meant a new culture. Trying to change a culture is much like going up to a beehive and shaking it. Many bees will fly away into the distance, other bees will come right at you and sting you, and some bees do not even move, holding firmly to the hive they know as home. When I began making changes at NPHX, some congregants left quickly, others attacked me, and some simply did not

budge. I firmly believe that the church culture is a reflection of the leadership and this reflection was not flattering. Changes clearly needed to be made.

After gathering the right team, I began focusing on building staff morale and culture. We did various team-building activities. We celebrated wins at every staff meeting. We set the bar high with clear standards and expectations, setting specific goals and objectives. We communicated the vision and mission at every single staff meeting. If the church culture was going to change, I knew it was going to start with the staff.

**Manage culture.** Big changes in an established church will always cause a cultural shake up. People within the congregation became afraid, frustrated, and angry. The question, “Where do I fit?” will be raised by long-term members. In addition to meeting personally with the fifty influencers, I also gave my team the task of meeting with the influencers of their ministries.

I recognized that when I failed to lead with the “why”, people would usually insert their own ideas. I had to be incredibly proactive in stopping the wildfires in the church before they began, or stopping them from spreading any further. My responsibility, which I eventually shared with staff, was to create and protect culture. We had to work very hard to maintain forward movement and manage the questions and chaos we were creating.

**Celebrate wins.** As the very rhythm of the church changed, we had to make sure to create a culture of celebration. We began celebrating wins in our staff meetings. We celebrated church wins on social media, in the worship service, and in mass church emails. We put the wins in front of the congregation as much and as often as we could, making sure that we controlled the new narrative.

People may not agree with the change but they cannot argue with the results and wins. NPHX grew by about eight hundred people in sixteen months. The church went from seeing fifteen salvations and twenty baptisms a year to seeing over four hundred

salvations and nearly three hundred baptisms in that same period. The church may not have enjoyed the changes while they were happening, but they could not argue with the effects.

When we continuously shared our success with the church and celebrated wins they have not experienced in over twenty years, it made the difficult changes feel worthwhile. This culture of celebration infused life into the church and also gave me leadership credibility for future decisions and calls for change.

### **Project Results**

This project proved to be incredibly beneficial to NPHX; God has moved in an overwhelming way in a very short sixteen months. The first major change I have seen is in the staff morale. When I first arrived I assessed the staff and began switching roles, firing and hiring. Once I had the right team in place I began intentionally working on raising moral. I met with every staff member individually to encourage them and let them know how much I appreciate them and to remind them God has called them to this place. Another way I raised the staff morale and changed the staff culture was by having fun in our staff meetings. We normally come together to celebrate wins which is followed by a challenge in the areas that need improvement. I have seen the staff culture change dramatically.

### **Revitalizing and Cultural Change**

A second major change is the revitalization and cultural change I have seen as the result of implementing our strategic plan. The church is showing clear signs of revitalization and a restoration of the culture of evangelism. We have seen hundreds of people saved and baptized, tithing and giving has skyrocketed, we have almost doubled in membership, people are being disciplined and equipped, and the church culture is changing into an outward gospel-centered culture.

NPHX has since developed a reputation of being a church that is focusing on revitalization. In fact, we have now partnered with a second church to begin the process of revitalization there. We recently made the merge official and we now have a second campus that we will attempt to revitalize.

Watching God provide the resources to make all of this possible has been an incredible experience. Nearly \$500,000 has been given in support of the strategic plan, and funds continue to come in. God has been responsible for these results and I firmly believe that the best is yet to come.

### **Conclusion**

Church revitalization is a difficult, messy task, one the leader must understand before he takes it on. The work will take a toll on the leader's family life and his own personal life. A sense of calling and clear God-given burden must be present in order to enter the process of revitalization. Remembering the weight of the burden and the clarity of the calling will be the very thing that gets the revitalizer through the tough and trying times that always accompany revitalizing and changing culture.

Putting a strategic direction and plan together is essential for moving the church towards becoming a healthy and effective community for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Confronting cultural issues and sin in the church is necessary and God-honoring when revitalizing the church.

The three specific goals I set for this project became a template for moving NPHX forward towards revitalization and cultural change.<sup>11</sup> As I assessed, planned, and celebrated, I have witnessed a tremendous change in the culture and growth of the church.

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<sup>11</sup>The goals were to (1) create a strategic direction and plan; (2) conduct a SWOT analysis; and (3) present a ten-week sermon series on Nehemiah.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

In this final chapter I evaluate this project, taking an in-depth look at the strengths and weaknesses of the project, its purpose and goals, and what I would have done differently. I have seen tremendous success while experiencing a great deal of pain through this project. God has been so good and faithful in seeing me through every step of the way. The church has seen tremendous growth both numerically and financially, and has experienced true cultural change and revitalization. I firmly believe that the project not only fulfilled its purpose, but exceeded it.

#### **Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The purpose of the project was to see revitalization and cultural change at North Phoenix Baptist Church. By examining the purpose and goal of revitalization, I believe that NPHX is on the right path. Over the past sixteen months, the church has experienced tremendous growth. In 2015, average attendance was 1,060; today that average is 1,600 and growing. The number of salvations and baptisms continue grow. My goal in revitalization was not only numerical but also financial. For the first time in twenty years, the church has not only met its budget but exceeded it.

Another important aspect of revitalization is the spiritual and emotional health of the staff and congregation. I have been very intentional in building staff morale by implementing a culture of celebration and positivity. I send letters of encouragement, reward hard workers, and in public I share the credit of our success with the staff. When I publicly praise my staff, it confirms that I believe in them, I am here for them, and I have

their backs. All of these ‘small’ actions have infused life into the staff and has helped to build a healthy culture of support and trust.

Another purpose of the project was to create cultural change. This task caused me a lot of pain. I knew it would be a lot of hard work and would require making many hard and uncomfortable decisions. But the culture has changed and is still changing. Watching the transition happen in such a short time has been unbelievable. At NPHX there is now a culture of confession, repentance, and evangelism. What has disappeared is a sense of entitlement.

The demographics of the church have also changed. The church is no longer 90 percent Caucasian but now looks more like the city around it. We have become incredibly diverse and taken on a new cultural identity. This change happened so quickly that I have been asked to speak about it in public settings such as *Preaching Source*.<sup>1</sup> Changing the culture meant confronting the culture and dealing with the sin in the organization. Despite the painful process and hard decisions that this required, the results have been very rewarding.

### **Evaluation of the Project’s Goals**

The three stated project goals were to create and implement a strategic plan, assess the current cultural perception of NPHX, and preach a sermon series on the book of Nehemiah. Achieving the first goal went exceptionally well. After ten months of planning the strategic direction, the bold steps that will push us to execute the plan are currently in place. The implementation of these steps is one of the most difficult parts of the plan, but it is going very well. The staff team has a clear understanding of their goals and objectives; every ministry is now focused on the same vision; and the Lord is working through these efforts.

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<sup>1</sup>Barry McCarty and Noe Garcia, “Preaching Interview: Noe Garcia,” January 12, 2018, accessed January 12, 2018, <http://preachingsource.com/preaching-interview/preaching-interview-noe-garcia/>.

As a result of implementing the strategic plan, we have seen many successes: opening a second campus; changing the look of our facilities; reaching young families; growing towards financial stability; and most importantly, multiple stories of life change. These wins are all part of the five bold steps that came out of the strategic direction and plan.

The second goal was to assess the current perception of NPHX through a SWOT analysis. This process was also successful, and we received all of the information we were hoping to receive and more.

### **Strengths of the Project**

Taking on this project of revitalization forced me to make hard decisions in the church that I may not have made otherwise. As a result, this project produced three positive outcomes, or major strengths. The first is staff change. I have successfully rearranged, added, and removed members of the team to create a group of people who are on board with the vision and excited about where the church is going. I was able look at my vision for the church and then strategically develop the team who would accomplish that goal. I did not keep the same structure and job titles; instead I hired people not positions and I often created a new position around the person. This strategy allowed new hires to come in and work from a place of their own calling and strengths. Staff change has exceeded my expectations and is a strength of this project.

The second strength of the project is the strategic plan. Having a direction and plan with very clear goals and objectives has being life-giving to our membership and staff. People in the congregation know that we have an actual attainable plan and they are seeing the fruit of that plan. The development of the plan and its subsequent success has created a sense of morale and unity in the entire church. Previously, no one in the church had a clear direction of where the church was headed, causing frustration and agitation and creating a culture of negativity and doubt. A new clear and attainable vision has given the church peace of mind and hope for the future, and is one of the strengths of this project.

Finally, the third strength of this project is the sermon series on Nehemiah. I decided to preach a 10-week sermon series on the book of Nehemiah to begin to lay the groundwork for revitalization. The opening sermon was built around Nehemiah 1:3-4. My goal was to have the congregation understand that Nehemiah had a burden that broke him and moved him to act. The entire sermon was focused on knowing the “why” and having a burden. I then transitioned into giving some statistics that NAMB released about the city of Phoenix. I reminded our congregation that Phoenix is considered a lost city and is ranked 89<sup>th</sup> out of 96 least Bible minded cities. I focused on these numbers to help create a real burden for the city within the congregation, because this burden would be the “why” for future decisions and changes. I needed our goal and burden to be clear: to reach a lost city for Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

When looking back at what I could have done differently in the project, three issues come to mind. First, I should have interviewed pastors who have been through the revitalization process or something similar *before* I began the project and not after. I must have been so busy and bogged down when the project began that I did not realize the importance of seeking information and advice beforehand. As the project comes to a close, I see now how this could have saved me from pain and from some of the problems that came about because of decisions I made.

The second weakness would be the timing of the decisions. I struggle with impatience, and often moved forward with a decision without spending enough time thinking through how the decision and its timing would affect church culture. At times, I would make a decision and let people either get on board with it or get off the train. Needless to say, this is not a good or helpful approach. We lost about one hundred fifty

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<sup>2</sup>NAMB, “NAMB Annual Ministry Report,” accessed October 15, 2017, <https://www.namb.net/about/annualreport>.



church members through the process of this project and the majority of those were due to my lack of patience and tact in my decision-making. I was so eager for results that I felt the need to make the hard decisions as soon as possible. This weakness negatively affected the project.

The third and last weakness of the project is preparing the congregation for change. Although this was not a specific goal of the project, I attempted to adequately prepare the church for future changes. However, had I made this a stated goal, I feel that I would have focused more on this preparation which would have created a smoother transition. I tried in several small ways to prepare the congregation for the changes to come but I did not make it a priority. This was a weakness of the project.

### **What I Would Do Differently**

What I would do differently is directly tied the weaknesses of the project. I would have begun (instead of ended) the project by interviewing pastors that have been through this process before. I would have gained valuable insights into problems to look out for, how to approach the congregation when revitalizing, and even how to prepare the congregation for change, as these were the areas that caused me the most pain and problems. Beginning with pastoral interviews would have better helped me to know how to prepare the congregation for change and not force them into change. I would first be a learner, and then a doer, instead of the opposite.

Second, I would focus more on the timing of decisions and project implementation. I did not understand how the timing and sheer multitude of my decisions would impact the culture of the church. I made change after change. I hired and fired staff. I made changes to Bible studies that had been occurring for thirty years and took them in a new direction in thirty days. I changed the website and began transforming the appearance of the campus by adding signs and changing color schemes. I came up with a new mission statement, vision, and direction, and at the same time I changed the style of worship. After decades of routine in the church, all of these decisions and changes were

made within sixteen months. In reality, this probably should have been a 5-year process of change for the sake of the congregation. I failed to take into consideration all that the church had been through before my arrival. I did not once think about this during my decision-making. I was called to lead the sheep and shepherd them and I have to say that I did a horrible job in my first sixteen months. I should have dedicated an entire section of this project to explaining the importance of shepherding the sheep through cultural change and revitalization.

Finally, I would change how I prepared (or failed to prepare) the congregation for change. When I first arrived as the pastor, I noticed so many things that were wrong and I immediately jumped into action. I wanted to fix it all overnight, and to the congregation, I imagine that is what it looked like I did. My actions caused major congregational anxiety and fear, and kept many people from trusting me for quite a long time. If I could go back to that first day, I would slow down and do a better job of loving and caring for the congregation instead of dragging and pushing them where I wanted them to go.

### **Theological Reflections**

Through this process of revitalization I have grown tremendously as a leader, but most importantly, I have had the opportunity to experience God in a whole new way. When reading the book of Nehemiah, I remember feeling like I had a similar burden for my city and people as Nehemiah did for his. Nehemiah was truly broken over the sins of the people and for their dishonor of God's name and glory. He took them through the process of revitalization and united them for one common purpose.

Like Nehemiah, I knew that my God-given burden was what I would need to take NPHX through the process of revitalization. I knew that the lost-ness of the city, with people dying and going to hell every day, combined with the fact that our church is located in the heart of the city was probably not displaying the honor and glory of God. This was my burden, the lost and the glory of God, and it would move me to act.

In Nehemiah 2, he moves in faith, with no available resources, and gives his request to the king. What unfolds is the proof of what happens when the faith of Nehemiah combined with the glory of God: a miracle. God, through the king, provides all the resources that Nehemiah needs to accomplish his God-given burden. Theologically, this story of God's faithfulness too root deep in my soul and I followed Nehemiah's example. I knew I had a burden, but I did not have the resources needed to fulfill the vision that was in my heart. So I prayed, fasted, and put a plan together. After I had this plan, I moved in faith and what happened next was unexplainable outside of God's power. I saw God come through in ways unimaginable. Resource after resource came flooding in. It was amazing to apply biblical concepts and principles and move in faith and see God come through. This revolutionized my faith and strengthened me as a man of God and as a leader for God.

After an in-depth study of 1 Corinthians 5, I knew that dealing with sin for the sake of the entire body of Christ was necessary if the church was to move forward with revitalization. In Corinthians as well as Nehemiah, scripture is clear that God wants sin to be dealt with and confessed before He is willing to move in a mighty way amongst the people. Without confrontation and confession, the effects of sin would continue to impact the community of God leading to brokenness of the people and the dishonoring of God's name. God cares deeply about sin being confessed and dealt with.

I took this theological conviction very seriously. I knew the process would be ugly and messy but that God would not be honored as long as sin ran rampant in the body of believers. I began addressing and confessing sin in the congregation. I believe that applying this theological truth is what set a lot of people free and lead to the salvation of hundreds of souls in such a short time. We created a safe place to confess sin and challenged people to confess and sin no more.

## **Personal Reflections**

I faced so many emotions as I went through the process of revitalizing and leading change. Revitalization has not only taught me about the power and presence of God but through this process, God has exposed many of the sinful tendencies that are deeply rooted in my soul. Entitlement, a low pain tolerance, and self-sufficiency are just a few.

### **Entitlement**

When I took the call to be the senior pastor at NPHX, I envisioned it to be something so different than what it actually was. I had previously worked for Dr. Ed Young, at Second Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, and Dr. Ronnie Floyd, at Cross Church in Springdale, Arkansas, and I remember seeing these men receive automatic respect when they walked in the room. They called the shots; they seemed to be very loved by their congregations; and they exuded the calling and power of God. I did not realize how much I expected to be treated the same way when I walked onto the campus as the new pastor.

When I was not treated the way I thought I should be treated, with respect and even awe, I became angry, bitter, and frustrated. I ended up preaching out of anger and not love, I was guarded and short with members, and to be completely honest, I only loved those who loved me and mentally would write off those who hurt me. I was entitled, and I thought I deserved more than I was getting. The next flaw God exposed was my low pain threshold.

### **Low Pain Tolerance**

When I was a pastoral intern in 2005, my supervisor told me that I must have skin like a rhinoceros and a heart of a dove. I did not understand what he meant until I became a senior pastor. Before being a senior pastor, I had been the “golden boy” who could do no wrong. First I was a loved youth pastor, and then I was a loved college pastor

who grew a large ministry. All I had ever known was success and love. I was not required to make significant church decisions that affected large groups of people.

I did not have a high pain tolerance because I never had the need to develop one. Until now. As I made decisions, people began attacking me from every direction, calling me every name under the sun, and I did not know how to handle being hated. When some of the meanest people would leave the church, a decision that was truly the best for both of us, I would fall apart. The constant attacks and critiques eventually took a physical toll. I ended up having a nervous breakdown, found myself in the emergency room with a ruptured ulcer, and dealing with depression. At the age of 32 I hated to admit that I was too weak to handle the pressures and challenges of being a senior pastor.

### **Self-Sufficient**

After ending up in the emergency room with a ruptured ulcer, I knew that something had to change. After a time of prayer and reflection, God made it very clear that I had been doing way too much on my own power and not relying enough on Him and His strength. I was shocked—I really thought that I had been depending on God. I was running fast for the glory of God; I wanted to see people saved for the glory of God, but I recognized that I often did not stop long enough to listen to God and the direction (and the pace) He wanted me to go. I was depending on my team and my own skills more than I was on God and it led to a place of frustration, agitation, and depression. This experience took me on a deeper journey with God and has ultimately made me evaluate and continually re-evaluate why I am doing what I am doing. I often have to ask the honest question, “Is this for my glory, or God’s?”

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, God has shown me so much through this project. I now look at the bride of Christ differently. When I first arrived as the senior pastor at North Phoenix Baptist Church, I looked at the bride of Christ as an object to be used to accomplish my

goal of revitalization. I used them and unintentionally manipulated them to function the way I wanted them to function in order to accomplish the goals and vision I had in place. Facing this truth was a harsh reality for me, and not one that I am proud of, but one that I had to acknowledge in order to fix.

No longer do I see the bride of Christ as the means by which my goals and vision are accomplished; rather, now my goal is to love them unconditionally. I am focusing on health of the church instead of the growth of the church. I have recognized that health is necessary for growth, so that is my focus, to love and to be healthy. Through this process I have also become more patient. I now understand that ministry is a marathon and not a sprint. The timing of the vision and the way I lead to accomplish the vision is crucial. I now realize that the vision God gave me does not need to happen overnight. Achieving the vision over a long period of time and trusting God with the timing and being patient will help me in the long run. Experiencing the process may very well be God's ultimate purpose for me. If I were to wake up tomorrow and everything I had envisioned for the church was in place, I would miss so much of what God is trying to teach me.

Something special happens to both the pastor and the church during the process of revitalization. There is a deepened relationship with God. You learn to depend and rely on God for all the provision, and most importantly, the sanctification that takes place. When I came to NPHX as the new pastor with revitalization and change in mind, I only thought about God changing the church, not changing me. I know it sounds absurd, but I did not stop long enough to think about how changing the church would change me.

This project has been beneficial in so many ways. I am thankful that God has allowed us experience major fruit from this project not only in congregational growth but most importantly, congregational health. During this project, God has been gracious enough to grow the church in numbers and in health but has also been gracious enough to

grow me as a leader and man of God in spite of all of my mistakes and failures. Praise God for his goodness to us at NPHX.

APPENDIX 1

STRATEGIC PLAN EVALUATION RUBRIC

Strategic Plan Church Health Evaluation Rubric					
1=Insufficient 2=Needs Improvement 3=Satisfactory 4=Exemplary					
Standard	1	2	3	4	Comments
Develop a strategic direction for the next 5-10 years					
Create a compelling Vision and Mission Statement					
Create a plan that is Biblically sound and not theologically conflicting					
Create a plan that is focused on Reaching the city of Phoenix (The Great Commission).					
Create a plan that is focused on Equipping its members for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4).					
Create a clear and understanding vision					
Create Bold Steps that will focus on the implementation of the Strategic Plan					



## APPENDIX 2

### NEHEMIAH 1 SERMON

Open: Illustration of the Olympian runner who's country sent him to finish the race, not only to start it. His burden was what kept him going.

Body: Nehemiah's Burden

1: Started with a burden V1-3

2: What was Nehemiah's response?

- He wept

- He mourned

- He fasted

- He confessed

3: We must have this same burden for our city

- Shared NAMB stats

- Phoenix ranked 89<sup>th</sup> out of 96 least bible minded cities

Close: Are we burdened for the city around us?

APPENDIX 3

SERMON EVALUATION RUBRIC

Sermon Evaluation Rubric					
1=Insufficient 2=Needs Improvement 3=Satisfactory 4=Exemplary					
Standard	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Faithfulness					
Biblical Clarity					
Relevance					
Application					
Christ Centered					

APPENDIX 4  
INTERNAL MEMBER SURVEY

1. Gender
2. Age
3. Member of NPHX?
4. Residence is how many miles from the church?
5. Children? How many? Ages?
6. Do you volunteer at NPHX? Where?
7. Do you volunteer outside the church? Where?
8. Giving. Online? Monthly? In Service?
9. Average attendance per month?

APPENDIX 5  
CURRENT STAFF SURVEY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Please take a few minutes to share with me about your position.

1. How long have you been at NPHX?
2. Favorite thing about your position?
3. Most challenging thing about your position?
4. I feel encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things.  
Strongly Disagree      Somewhat Disagree      Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Somewhat Agree      Strong Agree
5. How satisfied are you with your involvement in decisions that affect your ministry.  
Strongly Disagree      Somewhat Disagree      Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Somewhat Agree      Strong Agree
6. My work gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment.  
Strongly Disagree      Somewhat Disagree      Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Somewhat Agree      Strong Agree
7. My job makes a difference in the lives of others.  
Strongly Disagree      Somewhat Disagree      Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Somewhat Agree      Strong Agree
8. Do you feel valued and appreciated?  
Strongly Disagree      Somewhat Disagree      Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Somewhat Agree      Strong Agree
9. What makes you feel appreciated?
10. What are your ministry goals? Where would you like to see your ministry in 5 years?
11. I have the tools and resources to do my job well.  
Strongly Disagree      Somewhat Disagree      Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Somewhat Agree      Strong Agree

12. How satisfied are you with Leadership sharing the overall church goals that affect your ministry?  
Strongly Disagree      Somewhat Disagree      Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Somewhat Agree      Strong Agree
13. Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your position.  
Strongly Disagree      Somewhat Disagree      Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Somewhat Agree      Strong Agree
14. What 2-3 things do we need to focus on at NPHX?

Thank you for your feedback.

APPENDIX 6

INTERNAL SWOT ANALYSIS

Selecting and contacting church members that will give honest feedback on how NPHX is internally viewed and thought of will complete the analysis.

STRENGTHS				
WEAKNESSES				
OPPORTUNITIES				
THREATS				
TRENDS				

APPENDIX 7

EXTERNAL SWOT ANALYSIS

Selecting and contacting city leaders that will give honest feedback on how NPHX is externally viewed and thought of will complete the analysis.

STRENGTHS				
WEAKNESSES				
OPPORTUNITIES				
THREATS				
TRENDS				

External SWOT Analysis will be taken from the follow city leaders:

Dr. Quinn Kellis: Superintendent of Madison School District

Dick Stafford: Retired Staff Community Liaison

David Johnson: Executive Director of Arizona Baptist Convention

Steve Bass: Western Region VP for NAMB

Billy Thrall: Executive Director- Arizona Movement Day

Tracey Beal: Director of School Connect

Brian Holman: Founder of Empower College Prep

Julie Supplee: Director House of Refuge/House of Hope

APPENDIX 8

STRATEGIC PLANNING AREAS OF FOCUS

Table A1. Strategic planning areas of focus

Millennials	Family Appeal	First Class Facilities
18-32	Atmosphere/community feel	Review study done by facilities subcommittee
Churched versus Unchurched	Facilities	What is “state of the art facilities” today? (What does first class mean?)
How many are in our church today? (Number attending)	1st impressions	What/which bold steps are held up by facilities?
Their current view (survey)?	Best practices from other churches, etc. (CCV, SB, OTHER)	Are there small investments we can do now?
What is relevant (reaches ..?)	Small groups - weekday. [family gathering]	
Best practices from other churches, etc. (CCV, SB, OTHER)	Interactive programming	
Small groups - weekday. [family gathering]		
Community service		
Tech savvy ministry		
Discipleship	Compassion for the Needy/Hurting	Financial Growth Sustainability
Define what this means?	Where?	Where are we now? (Trends - more granular information)
Methodology	As a church or bible study what are we doing now?	Define financial growth
Expectation set/culture	Who do we want to minister to and what are the needs request today? (Clothes, food, money). Top 5	Teach
	Emotional needs?	Share the responsibility
	Multi-stage assistance	Share the vision
	Possible partners	Multiple channels/sources to give
	Define your target	Share the efficient model - what is best in class? Benchmark against best in class with system in place to continue to analyze performance.



*Table A1 continued*

	What can we do now?	
	Would like to know what faith based organizations are doing well?	
	Would like to see/speak with Pastor Noe's former church that had similar programs to have clear vision of his hearts desire	
Evangelism		
Define what this means?		
POF's in last year		
Equipping/discipleship.....who is doing it now?		

APPENDIX 9

BOLD STEPS 1-5

**Bold Step 1: Create a Compassion Center Ministry**

Mission: North Phoenix Baptist Church is a church that will “Be Jesus and Share Jesus” with people in the valley. Our initial focus will be in the central corridor of Phoenix with further expansion of our mission throughout the valley.
Vision: Be a caring and thriving church that invites all people to experience the love and grace of Jesus Christ. Growing in their faith walk and participating in a compassionate kingdom ministry.
Action Plan: Establish a Compassion Center

Responsible Parties	Outcomes
Elders	% of growth services provided
Elders	% of growth individuals served
Executive Staff	Quality and consistency of services provided
Designated Leaders	Lorri Paetz and TBD
Designated Leader Compassion Center	Physical Building/Facility

Steps to Achieve Outcomes	Timeline for Goals (Outcomes)
Establish a “pilot program”	2 years
Establish partnerships to accomplish mission	1-2 years
Determine physical location(s)	1-2 years
Assess and provide transportation needs	1-2 years
Full-time staff (initially student led)	1-2 years
Determine ministry scope	1-2 years
Donations (food, clothing, basic appliances, professionals)	1-2 years

Factors that are Critical to Success	Communication Method/Plan
Community Awareness	
Church members and community members served/month	
Partnerships and community alliances	

Challenges/Obstacles	Responsible Party

Challenging the status quo of “what’s been working”	
Setting priorities and developing the structure of physical space and program structure	
Financial aspect	
Personnel aspect	

**Bold Step 2: Develop and Implement a Strategy for Campus Facilities**

Mission: North Phoenix Baptist Church is a church that will “Be Jesus and Share Jesus” with people in the valley. Our initial focus will be in the central corridor of Phoenix with further expansion of our mission throughout the valley.
Vision: Be a caring and thriving church that invites all people to experience the love and grace of Jesus Christ. Growing in their faith walk and participating in a compassionate kingdom ministry.
Action Plan: Develop and implement a strategy for campus facilities (Existing and future possibilities)

Responsible Parties	Outcomes
Elders	Authorization and approval
Executive Staff	Provide a clear scope for what is expected
Adult Leaders	Complete needs assessment so that we are able to plan accordingly
Designated Leader	TBD

**Bold Step 3: Develop and Create First Class  
Student and Kids Ministries**

Mission: North Phoenix Baptist Church is a church that will “Be Jesus and Share Jesus” with people in the valley. Our initial focus will be in the central corridor of Phoenix with further expansion of our mission throughout the valley.
Vision: Be a caring and thriving church that invites all people to experience the love and grace of Jesus Christ. Growing in their faith walk and participating in a compassionate kingdom ministry.
Action Plan: Develop and create a strategy for first class student and children’s ministry

Responsible Parties	Outcomes
Elders	Approve overall plan
Elders	Approve capital budget
Elders	Approve operations budget
Executive Staff	Develop an outcomes plan
Executive Staff	Set timing on priorities
Executive Staff	Staff accordingly & manage accountability
Executive Staff	Engage Media/Communications (internal and external)
Daniel Crittendon and Youth Leadership	Organize, Prioritize, & Execute to Specific Plan
Daniel Crittendon and Youth Leadership	Develop Leadership
Warnesia Travasso and Kids Leadership	Organize, Prioritize, & Execute to Specific Plan
Warnesia Travasso and Kids Leadership	Develop Leadership

Steps to Achieve Outcomes	Timeline for Goals (Outcomes)
Address present physical needs of facility	6 months to 1 year
Set goals for overall % of growth	1 year
Achieve age group growth targets	1 -2 years
Achieve timelines for major steps in Executive Plan	
Determine and Achieve differentiation	
Media Messaging (internal and external)	1-2 years
Diff Offering	

Factors that are Critical to Success	Communication Method/Plan
Effective/Strong Support	
Mentoring Support	
Financial Support	
Appropriate Staffing	
Project Management	
Media Messaging (internal and external)	
Diff Offering	

Challenges/Obstacles	Responsible Party
Existing Culture/Manage Change	
Hiring/Retention	
Financial Support (Capital and Operations Budget)	
Differentiation with other programs	

Church/Non-Church	
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**Bold Step 4: Develop and Implement a Strategy to Engage Existing Membership and New Attendees in Internal Volunteer/Serving Opportunities**

Mission: North Phoenix Baptist Church is a church that will “Be Jesus and Share Jesus” with people in the valley. Our initial focus will be in the central corridor of Phoenix with further expansion of our mission throughout the valley.
Vision: Be a caring and thriving church that invites all people to experience the love and grace of Jesus Christ. Growing in their faith walk and participating in a compassionate kingdom ministry.
Action Plan: Strategy to engage existing membership to support and drive the church

Responsible Parties	Outcomes
Elders	% of leaders (or other predetermined group sets) can communicate multiple opportunities to serve
Executive Staff	% of overall in the number of volunteers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timeline to be determined</li> <li>• Baseline to be determined</li> </ul>
Adult Leaders	% achieve timelines for major steps in plan (TBD by executive staff and volunteer task force)
All Leaders	% increase in NPHX membership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage people and they will become members. Paradigm shift in thinking</li> </ul>
Designated Leader	Perry Gagliano, John Shillington and TBD

Steps to Achieve Outcomes	Timeline for Goals (Outcomes)
Create a volunteer task force	
Engage people to increase membership	
Seek other organizations “Best Practices” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facebook (social media use)</li> <li>• Collaboration methods</li> <li>• Site visits</li> <li>• Interview with other organizations</li> <li>• Analyze, document, &amp; communicate successes and areas to avoid based on other programs/facilities</li> </ul>	

Factors that are Critical to Success	Communication Method/Plan
Ensure appropriate staffing is in place	
Engage volunteers and staff to be the voice and face along with Pastor Noe	
Differentiate serving outside of NPHX and the needs within our church (outside opportunities are critical and as a church we want to always encourage/support interest and commitments that may not be directly related to NPHX)	
Recruiting and training of volunteers	

Challenges/Obstacles	Responsible Party
Existing culture/manage change/paradigm shift in approach and thinking	
Effective communication plan to member, attendees, & all volunteers at NPHX	
Overcoming the perception that if one volunteers they are lifetime volunteers for a specific opportunity.	

**Bold Step 5: Develop and Implement a Plan to Broaden  
the Community Awareness of NPHX and  
Our Central Corridor Mission**

Mission: North Phoenix Baptist Church is a church that will “Be Jesus and Share Jesus” with people in the valley. Our initial focus will be in the central corridor of Phoenix with further expansion of our mission throughout the valley.
Vision: Be a caring and thriving church that invites all people to experience the love and grace of Jesus Christ. Growing in their faith walk and participating in a compassionate kingdom ministry.
Action Plan: Broaden the awareness of NPBC

Responsible Parties	Outcomes
Elders	Authorization and approval
Executive Staff	Provide a clear scope for what is expected
Staff Leaders	Assist in tactical planning and implementation
Designated Leader	Pastoral Management Team - Perry Gagliano and John Shillington

Steps to Achieve Outcomes	Timeline for Goals (Outcomes)
Connect with a Marketing Consultant for analysis and development of a marketing plan	6 months to 1 year
Develop a plan for Southern Temple Baptist Church in regards to our revitalization of that ministry on south Central Avenue	6 months to 1 year
Develop a plan and begin a Millennial focused service/ministry in Central Phoenix	6 months to 1 year
Develop a plan to utilize our children’s and adult sports ministries to connect in a broader way with the central corridor community	6 months to 1 year
Broaden the scope of our ministry to college and university campuses especially in Central Phoenix – GCU, ASU	1-5 years
Develop a plan for multi campus ministry	1-5 years

Factors that are Critical to Success	Communication Method/Plan
Strong “base of ministry” at Central and Bethany Campus	Pastoral leadership from the platform, Elder buy in and leadership, multiple meetings with leadership,
Communication Plan – both internal and external	Same as above and also use of marketing plan from outside marketing consultant
Buy-in to overall strategic plan	
Effective/Strong leadership through change	
Financial plan to strategically begin and sustain multi-ministry opportunities	

Challenges/Obstacles	Responsible Party
Resistance to plan specifics – especially multi venue vision – possible unhealthy attachment to existing facilities/property	
Staffing and leading new ministry opportunities	
Financial aspect (economics)	
Effective Communication Plan and Execution	

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ABSTRACT

REVITALIZING AND CHANGING CULTURE  
AT NORTH BAPTIST CHURCH IN  
PHOENIX, ARIZONA

Oscar Noe Garcia, D.Min.  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Shane W. Parker

North Phoenix Baptist Church has been a powerhouse for the gospel in the past and they still have a great future ahead of them. A cultural change and a strategic plan is going to be vital to the future of the church and a determining factor in whether or not they continue to reach the city around them. This project is aimed to successfully create and implement a strategic plan that will allow NPHX to be a Gospel centered church that reaches the lost in the heart of Phoenix, Arizona.

Chapter 1 introduces the ministry context of NPHX, along with the rationale, purpose, goals, research methodologies, definitions, and delimitations of the project. Chapter 2 then provides the biblical and theological basis for creating and implementing a strategic plan. The chapter focuses on the book of Nehemiah. This book will be great insight to the importance of a strategic plan but also the reality of the opposition that comes with a strategic plan. Chapter 3 focuses on understanding the pastor, present and future of NPHX. Knowing the cultural values of the church is vital to the success of the implementation of NPHX. Chapter 4 details the week-by-week strategic plan and process. Chapter 5 concludes with an overall evaluation of the project, and will focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the project.

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