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TRANSFORMING THE PRAYER CULTURE IN CHURCH
REVITALIZATIONS: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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TRANSFORMING THE PRAYER CULTURE IN CHURCH
REVITALIZATIONS: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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To Raina,
my love, my friend, my partner in adventure

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PREFACE

This project opened my eyes to the imminent need for young men who desire to work in ministry to pursue church revitalization as a focus in their seminary training. This research shows that after graduating from seminary, there is a 75 percent chance that a new pastor will find himself in a church that needs revitalization. My hope and prayer are that God will purposely use this work to reclaim his glory through the revitalization of his church.

A journey is never walked alone, including this trip over the last two and a half years. My gratitude to each person is beyond measure. Dr. Michael Wilder advised me not only through my doctoral work but also through my master's work, providing me with guidance and helping me navigate the waters of academia. Most of all, though, I thank God because I have called Michael "friend" for close to twenty years, and for that, I am most grateful! Thank you, friend! Dr. Shane Parker encouraged me on numerous occasions and provided a great amount of advice, pointing me in the right direction for prayer and culture. Thank you! Dr. Timothy Paul Jones sharpened me as a scholar. You pushed me in unfamiliar areas—all with a pastoral heart. Thank you! Dr. John David Trentham always made himself available to answer my questions about the Ed.D. program. You continually made time for me when I dropped by. Thank you!

Cohort 2017, what can I say? You made me better! Two years ago, we came together as complete strangers, yet now, you are all dear to me as brothers and sisters. We did what we could through this process, emerging on the other side closer to our Savior, closer to each other, and perhaps smarter than when we began. Specifically, I had the pleasure and honor of being on an exemplary research team with Brian and Don. Gentlemen, you are simply the best collaborators God could have given me, and you have

become some of my closet friends!

My family encouraged me along the way and persevered with the schedule of my reading, writing, and reading (yes, again). Kirsten and Kayla, I am so thankful that God gave you to your mom and me. You both are truly a blessing. Elias, Valor, and Sam, Papa is now available to play pirates, swim in the pool, and read adventure books to you. I thank God for the immense blessing you are in my life, and I fervently pray that God uses each one of you in a mighty way to spread his gospel message to the world.

Raina, my love, my friend, my partner in adventure. Words cannot express my whole-hearted thankfulness for you nor how you are just as responsible for this work as I am. You made it possible, with our hectic lives, for me to have the time I needed to study, read, and write. You continue to provide support and encouragement concerning the things that God lays on my heart. I love how God continues to transform both of us through the learning process! I look forward to laboring alongside you for the adventure God has for us in the coming years. Thank you for loving me so well!

Lord, thank you for saving me, bearing with me, and equipping me for life. You have given me much for which I am thankful, and I look forward to how you will call Raina and me to future ministry endeavors.

Church, it is essential that we pray! Ask God to breathe new life into his church. Give God no rest in petitioning him to change the hearts of his people and revitalize his church. Seek him in prayer. God is the prime mover in initiating revitalization, and as demonstrated throughout the history of the church, it all begins with prayer.

Dean Craig Clark

Louisville, Kentucky

December 2019

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH CONCERN

Evangelical churches face a coming storm. A Pew Research Center study determined that “one-fifth of the U.S. public—and a third of adults under 30—are religiously unaffiliated today, the highest percentages ever in Pew Research Center polling.”¹ The drastic rise in those unaffiliated with any religion prompted the Pew Research Center to classify this group as “nones,” lumping together atheists, agnostics, and the religiously unaffiliated.² These alarming statistics from the study show that the rise of the “nones” increased by one third in a matter of just five years.³ In the Pew Research Center report, Michael Lipka discovered an increase in the amount of “nones” from sixteen percent of the population in 2007 to twenty-three percent of the population in 2014.⁴ As the data shows, people are unhitching themselves from religion. Very

¹ The Pew Research Center conducted several studies of the rise of the “nones,” classifying “nones” as atheists, agnostics, and people unaffiliated with religion. Pew Research Center, “‘Nones’ on the Rise: One in Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation,” October 9, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>.

² Michael Lipka, “A Closer Look at America’s Rapidly Growing Religious ‘Nones,’” *Pew Research Center*, May 13, 2015, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/13/a-closer-look-at-americas-rapidly-growing-religious-nones/>. During this same period in the same study, those claiming adherence to Christianity fell from 78 percent to 71 percent.

³ The total number of “nones” in 2012 equaled 46 million adults. Interestingly, the Pew Research Center report from October 2012 provides two perspectives for the rapid increase in those identifying as religiously unaffiliated. The first perspective surmises that people viewed religion with the politics of the right. This theory aligns with those who do not affiliate with any religion due to their political tendencies leaning left. These so-called “nones” also view biblical stances against homosexuality as bigotry and believe religion to be homophobic. The second perspective states that adults who delay marriage and procreation tend towards non-affiliation with any particular religion. This theory proves consistent with other Pew Research Center data in that couples who marry under the age of thirty tend to affiliate with religion and those who marry after the age of thirty do not. See Pew Research Center, “‘Nones’ on the Rise,” for further information.

⁴ Lipka, “A Closer Look at America’s ‘Nones.’” Lipka shows that in 2014, approximately fifty-six million adults identified in the “nones” category.

recently, the Pew Research Center reports, “65% of American adults describe themselves as Christians when asked about their religion, down 12 percentage points over the past decade. Meanwhile, the religiously unaffiliated share of the population, consisting of people who describe their religious identity as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular,” now stands at 26%, up from 17% in 2009.”⁵

Another study by the Pew Research Center determined that the number of Americans celebrating the religious aspects of Christmas seemed to be waning.⁶ The study found “that most U.S. adults believe the religious aspects of Christmas are emphasized less now than in the past—even as relatively few Americans are bothered by this trend.”⁷ The report also discovered that “there has been a noticeable decline in the percentage of U.S. adults who say they believe that biblical elements of the Christmas story—that Jesus was born to a virgin, for example—reflect historical events that actually occurred.”⁸ Essentially, the supernatural portions of Christ’s birth (i.e., the Virgin Birth) do not mean much to adults living in America. In regard to religious preferences, Americans appear to be trending towards being unaffiliated with any particular religion.

⁵ Pew Research Center, “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace: An update on America’s changing religious landscape,” October 17, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

⁶ Pew Research Center, “Americans Say Religious Aspects of Christmas Are Declining in Public Life: Shrinking Majority Believe Biblical Account of Birth of Jesus Depicts Actual Events,” December 12, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/12/12/americans-say-religious-aspects-of-christmas-are-declining-in-public-life/>.

⁷ Pew Research Center, “Religious Aspects of Christmas Are Declining.”

⁸ Pew Research Center, “Religious Aspects of Christmas Are Declining.” This report represents a study which details several different aspects concerning Christmas and points to a decline in religious aspects of the holiday. For instance, in 2014, 73 percent of Americans believed in the virgin birth of Jesus; however, in 2017, that percentage dropped to 66 percent. The Pew Research Center questioned people about three other aspects of the Christmas narrative: the laying of Jesus in a manger, wise men following a star and bringing gifts to Jesus, and an angel announcing to shepherds the birth of Jesus. Overall, in 2017, 57 percent of Americans believed in all four of these elements of the Christmas story, down from 65 percent in 2014.

Consequently, this data may point to the decline of the church in the United States and America's regression towards irreligiosity and secularization.

Further supporting the decline of religion in America, the Barna Group recently conducted a study to determine the perception of teens classified as Generation Z.⁹ The Barna Group writes, "It may come as no surprise that the influence of Christianity in the United States is waning. Rates of church attendance, religious affiliation, belief in God, prayer and Bible-reading have been dropping for decades. Americans' beliefs are becoming more post-Christian and, concurrently, religious identity is changing."¹⁰ The data supporting this statement show that the number of Generation Z individuals identifying with atheism doubled compared to all other adults.¹¹ Likely, these trends among Americans, and particularly in American youth, point to potential reasons why American congregations close their doors on a daily basis.

Looking deeper into the decline of churches, R. Albert Mohler Jr. assembled an array of experts in the field of church revitalization, with each contributing his experience and expertise. For his part, Mohler argues for the necessity of revitalizing churches, saying, "If existing congregations do not thrive, there will be no one to plant, sustain, support, and lead church planting. We cannot have one without the other."¹² Church planting and church revitalization go hand in hand, representing a symbiotic relationship—that is, the church needs both planting and revitalizing not only to survive

⁹ Barna Group, "Atheism Doubles among Generation Z," January 24, 2018, www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/. According to Barna's own report, those born between 1999 and 2015 are classified as Generation Z, even though the survey only targeted teens between the ages of thirteen and eighteen.

¹⁰ Barna Group, "Atheism Doubles among Generation Z."

¹¹ Barna reports, "For Gen Z, 'Atheist' is No Longer a Dirty Word: The Percentage of Teens Who Identify as Such Is Double That of the General Population (13% vs. 6% of All Adults)." Barna Group, "Atheism Doubles among Generation Z."

¹² R. Albert Mohler Jr., "Christ Will Build and Rebuild His Church: The Need for 'Generation Replant,'" in *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2015), 9.

but also to thrive. Church planters need healthy, vibrant churches to send and fund them, since sending and planting becomes unsustainable if existing churches continue to decline and die at the present rate.¹³ Thus, a great need exists for willing, able-bodied pastors to revitalize dying churches, proclaim the gospel, and promote healthy practices to rebuild churches. Brian Croft believes that pastors must shepherd the people who currently attend declining dying churches by caring for and protecting them.¹⁴

Unfortunately, churches of the SBC are not immune to falling attendance levels with the conventions churches showing signs of decline and plateau, ultimately, hampering the spread of the gospel. Statistics show that the SBC loses approximately nine-hundred churches every year, with seven out of ten churches either plateauing or declining.¹⁵ Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board, identifies two problems: “First, we have not started enough churches [and] second, each year an

¹³ Statistics follow (see pp. 4-5; see also appendix 1 for actual church closures and appendix 2 for average church closures for selected years).

¹⁴ Brian Croft, interview by author, Louisville, KY, October 2017; see also Matt 18:12-14. Croft offered two options for the revitalizing pastor: get new sheep or minister to the sheep who are currently in the church. Croft then affirmed the latter option as the right option. Such thinking goes hand in hand with a proper exegesis of Ezek 34.

¹⁵ Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 5-6. Definitions vary in regard to decline and growth among those authoring books on revitalization. Some look to a new believers/members baptism ratio to determine growth. Others look at the overall growth rate in attendance. Joseph Stephen Hudson writes, “Plateaued and declining churches are defined as churches that have maintained an average attendance growth rate less than or equal to 5 percent over at least [a] five-year period.” Joseph Stephen Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Convention Churches: A Mixed Methods Study” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 8. Citing Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon E. Penfold (*Re:vision: The Key to Transforming Your Church* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014], 22), Hudson goes on to say, “This metric comes from the estimated annual population growth rate of 1.1 percent annually in the United States. On average, an attendance growth of 5 percent or less over the course of five years would not be keeping pace with the growth of the surrounding community.” Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization,” 8n26. Finally, drawing from Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson (*Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can Too* [Nashville: B&H, 2007], xiii), Hudson defines “growth” as “greater than 10% annual growth and/or a baptism rate of 1 baptism annually for every 35 resident members.” Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization,” 8n27.

average of 1,000 SBC churches disappear.”¹⁶ Lifeway Research reports that “only about 15% of SBC churches are healthy, growing and multiplying.”¹⁷ Simple math reveals that eighty-five percent of SBC churches no longer evidence any growth; therefore, the majority of those churches have plateaued or are presently declining.¹⁸ This means for Southern Baptists who declare an affection to spread the gospel through well funded mission agencies, there must be a focus to revitalize dying churches.¹⁹

Clark Logan, Chief Research Officer at the Center of Missional Research at North American Mission Board, affirms similar statistics for SBC churches and states that over the last ten years, the SBC has lost, on average, approximately one thousand congregations annually.²⁰ Logan also provides the number of churches that were removed from the SBC database between the 1998 and 2016 (see appendix 1 and 2).²¹ Of

¹⁶ Kevin Ezell, “Breathing New Life into Dying Churches,” in Mohler, *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, 13. Mohler and Ezell state differing numbers (see Mohler, “Christ Will Build and Rebuild His Church,” 8. However, according to the information provided by Clark Logan below (see p. 5), the numbers provided by Mohler and Ezell are accurate (see appendices 1 and 2). Clark Logan, e-mail message to author, September 29, 2018.

¹⁷ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 3. Thom Rainer, however, shows the statistic for declining churches to be closer to 65 percent. He claims that the data has a 95 percent confidence level with a margin of error of +/- 3.1, which means that 35 percent of our churches indeed show growth. But, there seems to be an issue with Rainer’s statistics since he does not clearly define the growth factor of these churches (e.g., percent increase over a set number of years). This information has not yet come forth. Thom S. Rainer, “Dispelling the 80 Percent Myth of Declining Churches,” June 28, 2017, <https://thomrainer.com/2017/06/dispelling-80-percent-myth-declining-churches/>.

¹⁸ These numbers pertain to Southern Baptists alone and do not reflect the decline in other denominations in the United States or throughout the world.

¹⁹ The SBC set the cooperative budget for 2017-2018 at 192 million dollars and designated over 73 percent of it to missions in North America and around the world.

²⁰ Clark Logan, e-mail message to author, September 29, 2018. Such an annual loss means that congregations are frequently being removed from the SBC database. According to Logan, “The SBC ID is the only identifier for SBC congregations, so all we really know for sure is when a new SBC ID appears in the database and when an SBC ID is removed from the database. The state conventions and associations have control over the addition and removal of these SBC IDs. Interestingly, when the SBC removes an ID from the database, the person performing the removal does not provide a code as to the reason.”

²¹ Clark Logan, separate e-mail message to author, September 29, 2018. See appendix 1 for the actual numbers of churches removed from the SBC database and appendix 2 for averages for church removals from the SBC database during different periods. The information above depicts two numbers representing the number of SBC churches closing every year. When the researcher asked Clark Logan about the differing numbers specifically from Mohler and Ezell, he responded, saying, “It’s very possible both RAM [R. Albert Mohler Jr.] and Kevin [Ezell] were correct depending on what date range they were

particular interest to the present study, Logan states that from 2007 to 2016, the SBC closed approximately 1018 churches per annum.²² With this number of SBC churches closing, how do Southern Baptists respond to this dilemma? What solutions exist to reverse the closure of churches and arrest this alarming trend?

To alleviate this trend, churches must look to the Lord and assume a posture of prayer just as the infant church in the book of Acts did when facing insurmountable difficulties and troubling times.²³ The present condition of declining and dying churches requires the same answer: Christians need to assume a posture of prayer; the church has to pray; dying, plateauing, and growing churches must pray. As E. M. Bounds states,

What the church needs today is not more machinery or better methods, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use—men of prayer, men of mighty prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint men, but men—men of prayer.²⁴

Jesus prayed frequently and, thus, gave the apostles, disciples, and the church a model of prayer. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus announced his expectations for his followers, saying, “And *when* you pray” (Matt 6:5 ESV; emphasis added). Additionally, he taught two parables in the book of Luke so that believers would exhibit “importunity” in their

quoting.” As one compares the averages given by Logan in appendix 2, it is evident that Mohler and Ezell are both citing sound information.

²² The problem of church declination does not affect only SBC churches, however. Mohler writes, “Between 1969 and 2011, the Church of England knocked down 500 churches and ‘deconsecrated’ another 1,000.” Mohler, “Christ Will Build and Rebuild His Church,” 7.

²³ For specific places in Acts when the church prayed, see Acts 9:11 (fear), 40 (death); 12:12 (imprisonment); 16:25 (imprisonment); 20:36 (unknown outcomes); 21:5 (unknown outcomes); 27:29 (avoid catastrophe); 28:8 (sickness).

²⁴ E. M. Bounds, *Power through Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 12. Of course, it is worth clarifying that the church needs men and women—people—of prayer.

prayer life.²⁵ The Lord Jesus Christ expects his followers to pray; however, prayer remains a seemingly elusive spiritual discipline for many Christ-followers today.²⁶

In light of the statistical decline in Christian churches, the following questions need answers: How do prayer and the development of a prayer culture factor into church revitalization? How can a pastor who is facing church revitalization implement positive prayer practices in order to rely upon the infinite power of God? How did the revitalizing pastor of a church depend on the power of God by developing and sustaining a culture of prayer?²⁷ The present research aims to answer these questions.

Research Problem

Regrettably, little to no research exists concerning the role of prayer in the process of revitalizing a church, nor do methods exist to help a revitalizing church develop a culture of prayer. Church revitalizers, who have experienced and achieved success, penned numerous books in recent years detailing the circumstances, environments, and challenges they faced when they took on the pastorate of a church that needed revitalization. God graciously revitalized a church in Durham, North Carolina, led by Andy Davis, with Davis facing numerous challenges as he walked through the process.²⁸ Similarly, Brain Croft assumed the pastorate of a dying church in Louisville,

²⁵ See Luke 11:5-13 and Luke 18:1-8, which concern the persistence of those in need. In today's vernacular, one uses the word "persist" (or "persistent"); however, this word does not stress the urgency or the demand of the request. An alternative term that lends nicely to prayer and resonates well with the parables is "importunate," which means "insistent; refusing to be denied; annoyingly urgent or persistent." *Collins Dictionary*, "Definition of 'importunate,'" accessed October 1, 2018, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/importunate>.

²⁶ Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *What Is a Healthy Church Member?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 105.

²⁷ Prayer culture is later defined in this chapter (see p. 16). Briefly, however, as defined by Edgar Schein, there exists a form of culture in all established organizations. Schein lists the three levels of culture as artifacts, beliefs and values, and underlying assumptions. Churches are not insulated from culture. Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 5th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2017), 17-30. "Prayer culture" means how the congregants view prayer. Do they first assume a posture of prayer when facing trouble, or do they attempt to repair their dying church through new programs or processes?

²⁸ Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again*

Kentucky, inheriting a difficult situation wherein numerous factions wrestled for control of the church. Within his first several years of pastoring this dying church, Croft faced attempts to remove him as pastor, but Croft refused to leave by weathering the storm because he believed that people who attended this by church needed shepherding too just like people in healthy churches.²⁹ Croft survived because he implemented and adhered to godly leadership.³⁰

Fortunately, the Scriptures reveal the characteristics of a healthy church and the specific practices that a pastor may use in efforts to resuscitate a dying church. Many revitalizers write about differing practices that they derive from the Scriptures, allowing one to see a pathway towards revitalization.³¹ Sadly, dedicated focus remains in want of a common-sense approach to the development of a prayer culture for both the pastor and the congregation during times of revitalization.

In 2007, Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson researched the phenomena of church revitalization, and they identified three specific “faith factors” that lead to church revitalization: (1) a renewed belief in Jesus and the mission of the church, (2) a renewed attitude for servanthood, and (3) strategic prayer efforts.³² Although prayer ranked high on the Stetzer and Dodson’s research, negligible data exists on the specifics of prayer practices in churches that achieve revitalization. Within the context of revitalization,

(Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 20-22.

²⁹ Croft, interview. Croft offered two options for the revitalizing pastor: get new sheep or minister to the sheep who are currently in the church. Croft then affirmed the latter option as the right option. Such thinking goes hand in hand with a proper exegesis of Ezek 34.

³⁰ Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying and Divided Churches* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), 101-4. The attempts to fire Croft came from church members who opposed the changes that he implemented.

³¹ Clifton, *Reclaiming God’s Glory*; Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*; Davis, *Revitalize*; Bill Henard, *Can These Bones Live? A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 11, 199-205; Harry L. Reeder III, *From Embers to a Flame: How God can Revitalize Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004).

³² Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 55, 60, 68.

many authors focus their efforts on a variety subjects for revitalization, but they seldom focus on the development of a prayer culture for churches facing similar circumstances. Thus, a void exists in the literature concerning the importance of prayer in revitalization efforts.

State of the Research Problem

Revitalization continues to be discussed among writers and leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention. For instance, 9Marks Ministry dedicated an entire issue of their magazine to the subject of church revitalization by offering experiential advice from those who endured the task of revitalization.³³ Andy Davis wrote about his experience in revitalizing a church, sharing the lessons that he learned and offered many useful practices to would-be revitalizers. Though he offered several pieces of advice, one specifically stood out in light of the present topic: “Saturate the Church in Prayer.”³⁴ Unfortunately, Davis gave no structure for developing a culture of prayer. He suggested and implied prayer, but he offered neither a clear method nor strategy to inculcate a culture of prayer in the revitalization of a church.

In the summer of 2014, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary magazine published an issue devoted to church revitalization.³⁵ The magazine dedicated articles to various issues concerning revitalization, including a pastor’s experience in revitalizing his church and a businessman’s generous donation towards the development of a church revitalization division at SBTS.³⁶ Unfortunately, however, the magazine did not earmark

³³ Jonathan Leeman, ed., *9Marks Journal* (November/December 2011), <https://www.9marks.org/journal/revitalize-why-we-must-reclaim-dying-churches-and-how/>.

³⁴ Andy Davis, “The Reform of First Baptist Church of Durham,” *9Marks Journal* (November/December 2011): 15, <https://www.9marks.org/journal/revitalize-why-we-must-reclaim-dying-churches-and-how/>.

³⁵ *Southern Seminary* 82, no. 3 (Summer 2014).

³⁶ For information about these two articles, see James A. Smith, “Harold Mathena: Faithful Steward of God’s Blessings,” *Southern Seminary* 82, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 30-31; Aaron Cline Hanbury,

any space for the development of a prayer culture in churches needing revitalization. Writers in this particular issue sincerely mentioned prayer but only in passing; the periodical dedicated zero space to the development of a culture of prayer in declining or plateauing churches.³⁷

The North American Mission Board of the SBC printed a journal which contained seven articles that delineated different qualities of church replanters.³⁸ One article identified the core essentials that one should possess for success in the revitalization of a church; unfortunately, the lead article failed to mention any need for a replanter to rely on God through the medium of prayer.³⁹ Once again, in the extant literature, mere anecdotal references to prayer with no imperatives exist concerning a reliance on the spiritual discipline of prayer or the devotion to change the culture of prayer in a church. This resulted in little to no information on the practice of prayer and the development of prayer culture in church revitalization.⁴⁰

For example, Bill Henard dedicated approximately six pages of his book to the practice of prayer.⁴¹ The suggestions he offered reflect practices that churches in general should employ, without any specificity towards the intentional process of building a

“The Revitalization of Rehoboth Baptist Church: Southern Seminary Alumnus Troy Bush Leads Towards Renewal,” *Southern Seminary* 82, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 34-36.

³⁷ Oddly, the entire magazine lacked any direct focus on the spiritual discipline of prayer in a revitalization process. Many mentioned prayer and the need for prayer; however, no specific tactics and or practices employed by church revitalization pastors made it into the magazine.

³⁸ *Replant Journal* 1 (July 2016).

³⁹ Sam Parkinson and Mark Clifton, “Eight Essential Characteristics of a Church Planter,” *Replant Journal* 1 (July 2016): 3-32. The authors use the words “replant” and “revitalize” synonymously.

⁴⁰ Little doubt exists that the revitalizing pastors prayed with much fervor as they shepherded and nursed their ailing congregations back to health. Unfortunately, the author chronicle general information on prayer but not specifics on how the prayer culture changed from the beginning of the church revitalization to its end. The present research focuses on this particular aspect of developing a culture of prayer. For an example of “general” prayer practices, see Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*

⁴¹ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 11, 199-205.

prayer culture. Mike DeVine and Darrin Patrick chronicled another successful transformation of a dying church.⁴² DeVine and Patrick met because the church that DeVine pastored persisted in a declining trajectory. Their book sketched a compelling story, outlining a successful church merger that, by God’s grace, breathed new life into a dying church through the efforts of these two determined pastors. Regrettably, however, the authors dedicated zero space to the development of a culture of prayer for the recovering church.⁴³

Harry L. Reeder dedicated an entire chapter of his book to prayer.⁴⁴ In that chapter, Reeder offered practical advice on prayer for all churches, whether they were growing, plateauing, or declining. Unfortunately, he gave little to no practical guidance in regard to developing a prayer culture for churches in need of revitalization. Though the author devoted the majority of the prayer chapter to the positives and negatives of a book entitled *The Prayer of Jabez*, he never went into detail on how that book or prayer benefitted a pastor or a congregation in the revitalization of their church. He did not share how pastors develop a culture of prayer in their dying churches.⁴⁵

These few examples demonstrated that no concrete processes exist concerning the development of a culture of prayer for the revitalizing pastor, nor is there a template that teaches a hurting, dying congregation how to pray to and seek God. Furthermore, scant literature exists that promotes the cultivation of a culture of prayer in churches that need revitalization.

⁴² See Mark Devine and Darrin Patrick, *Replant: How a Dying Church can Grow Again* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2014).

⁴³ Once again, several places in the book state that the pastors prayed and that the people of the church prayed; however, there are no dedicated chapters that focus on how the pastors or congregation organized prayer in the church.

⁴⁴ Harry L. Reeder III, “The Role of Prayer,” in *From Embers to a Flame* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 75-96.

⁴⁵ Reeder, “The Role of Prayer,” 78-89. Reeder offers a checklist for churches in need of revitalization. In strategy no. 4, he suggests, “Prioritize prayer and the ministry of the word.”

Significance of the Study

The extant literature offers little concerning the development of a prayer culture in churches in need of revitalization; however, numerous pastors whom God used to revitalize churches acknowledge the importance of the practice of prayer in their efforts. Sadly, the literature lacks documentation of the prayer practices of these pastors. Consequently, there is an imminent need for dedicated research on how church revitalizers developed a culture of prayer in their resuscitated church. In other words, the research must answer the question: “How do pastors or congregations initiate, inculcate, and sustain a culture of prayer in churches suffering from decline or plateau?” This research may, in turn, contribute to the acquisition of significant knowledge and experiential practices that can be compiled in a central location and made available to those who wish to follow in similar footsteps.

Research Purpose

From a macro standpoint, this study occupied a portion of a much larger study concerning church revitalization conducted by seven Doctor of Education students at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. This particular study focused on the prayer practices of churches that experienced revitalization in the SBC. In doing so, this study employed a multiphase explanatory sequential mixed methods design, wherein it first collected quantitative data and then explains the quantitative results with qualitative interviews.⁴⁶ The purpose of this research was to determine how a pastor developed a culture of prayer during the process of the revitalization.

⁴⁶ John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011), 99. Creswell and Clark define multiphase designs as “an individual researcher or team of investigators examines a problem or topic through an iteration of connected quantitative and qualitative studies that are sequentially aligned, with each new approach building on what was learned previously to address a central program objective.”

The first strand of this study collected quantitative data, “analyzes the results, and then uses the results to plan (or build on to) the second qualitative phase. . . . The overall intent of this design is to have the qualitative data help explain in more detail the initial quantitative results.”⁴⁷ Phases 1 and 2 comprised the quantitative strand of the study. Phase 1 consisted of churches meeting certain criteria to be defined as “revitalized.” Lifeway Research provided the data through the Annual Church Profile. Phase 2 consisted of a survey of those churches categorized as revitalized to determine which pastors identified prayer as a prime factor in their revitalization efforts. Finally, phase 3, or the qualitative strand, of the study sought to better understand the quantitative results through a series of interviews conducted with revitalizing pastors. Overall, the main purpose of this study resided in a desire to understand the role that prayer plays in revitalized churches.

Research Questions

The overall study on church revitalization consisted of seven individual projects. All seven individual projects employed the same research questions for the quantitative strand of the project (i.e., phases 1 and 2), whereas each individual researcher focused on a specific subject matter with qualitative questions for phase 3 of the research. The five research questions are as follows:

1. What percentage of SBC churches have plateaued or are declining?
2. Of those churches that have experienced decline, what percentages have experienced revitalization?
3. Of those SBC churches experiencing revitalization, what percentage emphasized the development of a culture of prayer in the process of revitalization?
4. How did revitalization pastors develop a culture of prayer in their church?

⁴⁷ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014), 224.

5. How did the prayer culture change as the church experienced revitalization?

Research Population

The population for this research study consists of Southern Baptist churches who experienced revitalization in their church and identified their church's prayer culture as playing a significant role in the revitalization.

Delimitations of the Research

The population for this study is limited to churches meeting the methodology criteria. As such, the following delimitations apply:

1. The research will be delimited to SBC churches that complete the ACP for the defined years, 2006-2016, and meet the criteria for revitalization.⁴⁸
2. The research is delimited to churches that agree to participate in the study and indicate that prayer played a role in the revitalization.

Limitations of Generalization of Research Findings

The research draws from a specific population of churches within the Southern Baptist Convention: (1) those churches identified as meeting the criterion of revitalization, and (2) those churches that identify prayer as a major contributor to their revitalization. From churches within the population experiencing revitalization, quantitative results can be generalized across the spectrum of churches. However, the data collected through the qualitative strand (phase 3) of the research, may be transferable

⁴⁸ Revitalization criteria: (1) In 2011, the congregation had declined 10 percent or more as compared to 2006 (five years prior), and in 2016, the congregation had grown 10 percent or more as compared to 2011 (five years prior). (2) From this group, churches are excluded that had less than two of the last five years with a one-year worship attendance growth of 10 percent or more, or that had less than two of the last five years with higher than a 20:1 attendance-to-baptism ratio. (3) Finally, a church must have both two years of 10 percent worship attendance growth per year and a 20:1 attendance-to-baptism ratio or better. Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson use similar selection criteria in their book, *Comeback Churches*, which analyzes churches that grew after a period of decline. Stetzer and Dodson, preface to *Comeback Churches*. While Stetzer and Dodson use a 35:1 membership-to-baptism ratio as a revitalization factor, Thom Rainer uses a 20:1 attendance-to-baptism ratio as the basis for describing an evangelistically effective church. Thom Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches: Successful Churches Reveal What Works and What Doesn't* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 35. Furthermore, according to an SBC report, based on 47,544 participating churches in 2017, the average weekly attendance was 5,320,488, with annual baptisms of 254,122. This yields an attendance-to-baptism ratio of 20.93:1. Southern Baptist Convention, "Fast Facts about the SBC," last modified October 25, 2018, <http://www.sbc.net/BecomingSouthernBaptist/FastFacts.asp>. See appendix 6, table A3 for SBC data from 2015, 2016, and 2017.

to similar churches in revitalization situations. However, the research may serve other churches in regard to themes and practices.

Terminology and Definitions

This particular study uses the following definitions.

Annual Church Profile. The Annual Church Profile (ACP) tracks the membership, baptisms, worship, and Sunday school attendance of churches within the Southern Baptist Convention. Autonomous churches volunteer this information to their particular state conventions, and, in turn, the particular state convention sends the data to the Southern Baptist Convention.⁴⁹

Artifacts. Artifacts represent visible and tangible structures and processes, including observed behavior in which members identify as a part of their culture.⁵⁰

Basic underlying assumptions. Unconscious, taken for granted beliefs and values that determine behavior, filter perception, engage thought, and evoke feelings.⁵¹

Church plant. A church plant is the formation of a new church that has never existed before.⁵²

Church replant. For the purpose of this study, a church replant occurs when a previously existing church ceases to exist as a church for a period and then reforms as a church. This may occur if (1) there are no longer any authentic believers present in the church community, (2) the community does not meet together regularly for a period of time, or (3) the church community is no longer able to self-govern, self-support, or self-

⁴⁹ Roger S. Oldham, "The Annual Church Profile: Vital and Reliable," *SBC Life*, June 1, 2014, <http://www.sbclife.net/article/2298/the-annual-church-profile-vital-and-reliable>.

⁵⁰ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 18.

⁵¹ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 18.

⁵² Rodney Dale Anderson, "An Analysis of Attitudes, Values, and Beliefs of Congregants and Leaders of Small Churches toward Church Planting" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 12; Hudson, "A Competency Model for Church Revitalization," 32.

propagate. An example of this may be a church that “shuts the doors” for a period of time and then relaunches with a new name or covenant.⁵³

Church revitalization (CR). This definition follows Hudson’s definition, who breaks the term down into two distinct parts: non-numerical and numerical. Hudson defines the non-numerical portion, saying, “Church revitalization is defined as an intentional change of culture and praxis by members of a church community, after a period of church plateau or decline, that leads to greater church health and numerical growth.”⁵⁴ Hudson defines the numerical portion, saying, “For the purpose of this study, *revitalized churches* will meet the criteria of a period of numeric decline or plateau or decline, followed by two to five years of both 10 percent increase in annual attendance growth and an annual baptism ratio of at least 35 to 1.”⁵⁵

Church merger. A church merger occurs when two churches come together, form a covenant between the two churches, and now act as one church. The two churches might retain the name, policies, and procedures of one of the churches or potentially replace the name of both churches with a new name for the now merged churches.⁵⁶

Espoused beliefs and values. Ideals, goals, values, aspirations, ideologies of a group that “may or may not be congruent with behavior and other artifacts.”⁵⁷

Organizational culture. Following Schein, this study describes organizational culture as

⁵³ Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization,” 33.

⁵⁴ Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization,” 30.

⁵⁵ Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization,” 30n44 (emphasis original). The 10 percent increase means the increase in worship attendance; “35 to 1” means one baptism for every thirty-five members in a church per annum. For example, a church with 105 members would expect three baptisms during the year. A church with 350 members would expect ten baptisms during the year.

⁵⁶ Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization,” 33.

⁵⁷ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 18.

the accumulated shared learning of that group as it solves its problems of external adaption and internal integration; which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, feel, and behave in relation to those problems. The accumulated learning is a pattern of beliefs, values, and behavioral norms that come to be taken for granted as basic assumptions and eventually drop out of awareness.⁵⁸

Prayer culture. Prayer culture refers to the attitude of a congregation to engage in the practice of prayer both corporately and privately in order to affect change in the church.

Revival. Revival means a “new quality of spiritual life that comes through knowing the greatness and nearness of our holy, gracious Creator—something that in the former days would have been called enlargement of the heart . . . with a deep sense of the power and authority of God in the preaching of the Biblical message.”⁵⁹

Conclusion

As shown above, churches within the USA continue to decline. Church planting alone cannot replace the churches that close their doors year after year. Revitalization and planting must go hand in hand in order to reverse the trend of closing churches. God wants his people to seek him through prayer and rely on him by calling out to him at all times, but specifically in times of need. The present research undertaking seeks to determine the specific ways in which pastors changed the prayer culture in a revitalized church. Chapter 2 explores three items: revitalization, organizational culture and change, and the role of prayer in the history of revival.

⁵⁸ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 6.

⁵⁹ J. I. Packer, foreword to *Revival*, by Martyn Lloyd-Jones (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1987), vi.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

To rightly understand the role of prayer in church revitalization as well as the means by which the prayer culture in a church can be transformed, several aspects of a church in the process of revitalization must be examined. First, one must understand church revitalization to a certain extent to realize what such an endeavor encompasses. Another issue related to changing the culture of prayer in churches lies in the study of organizational culture and how to bring about needed change. Lastly, since the goal is to examine the prayer culture of a church in the revitalization process, it is pertinent to the present research undertaking that historical examples be surveyed concerning how prayer played a role in certain events. History demonstrates that God sent revival when a few people came together, crying out to the Father to revive the church. Therefore, the research investigates events such as the Great Awakening, the Second Great Awakening, the Layman's Prayer Revival, and Billy Graham's evangelistic crusades to determine if a link exists to prayer and revival phenomena and if a similar link exists between prayer and revitalization. Last, an examination of Martin Lloyd-Jones's *Revival* and Malcolm McDow and Alvin Reid's *Fire Fall 2.0* to discover a connection between prayer and revival and a corresponding synthesis of the two.

Revitalization

On December 11, 2017, Thom Rainer prognosticated the "Ten Critical Trends for Churches in 2018." The fifth prediction concerned church closures: "This trend shows no signs of slowing. I hope church leaders and members will be more receptive to

acquisitions and mergers before it's too late.”¹ Rainer clearly predicted that the trend of churches closing their doors will continue in 2018.

Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson show similar numbers for church closures, stating that 340,000 churches in America need revitalization and another 3,500-4,000 churches each year would close their doors.² Churches today face stewardship issues with the closing of so many churches. As Stetzer and Dodson write, “Billions of dollars of church property sit idle and unused. Revitalization is not just about evangelism; it's also a stewardship issue. God has provided many stagnant churches with people, resources, and buildings. God has also given them a calling. He desires them to be more than museums of past glory days.”³ Is it possible that the church may be playing the part of the slothful servant in Matthew 25:14-29? A master gives his servant one talent. Instead of investing the money to make his master more, like the previous servants, he buries the talent in the ground. Likewise, God gives the church numerous assets to spread the gospel, and, in turn, the church sometimes buries these assets by remaining inwardly focused—not outwardly focused on the surrounding community—which consequently contributes to churches declining or dying.⁴

¹ Thom S. Rainer, “Ten Critical Trends for Churches in 2018,” December 11, 2017, <https://thomrainer.com/2017/12/ten-critical-trends-churches-2018/>.

² Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 17-18.

³ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 19; Kevin Ezell, “Breathing New Life into Dying Churches,” in *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2015), 16. Ezell gives a similar warning concerning the loss of assets to Southern Baptist, writing, “If we don't step in to help these dying churches, over the next few decades we will see thousands of properties worth millions of dollars slip through the hands of Southern Baptists.”

⁴ William David Henard, *Can These Bones Live? A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 59. Henard outlines three points illustrated by Jesus in Luke 15: lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son. Henard does not want to press the limits of the “Lost Coin” parable; however, he does believe a connection can be made, writing that the lost coin represents churches that “are lost, don't know they are lost, and therefore do not know what to do about it.” He continues, “They [the dying churches] are spiritually out of touch with God.” He concludes that these waning churches do not know that they are spiritually dead and continue to live in the past instead of looking to the future. See Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 59, for the full discussion about the lost sheep, coin, and son. Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, New

As if these numbers did not tell a harrowing tale of church decline, Kevin Ezell presents even more signs of decline specific to churches within the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). From research done at the North American Mission Board, Ezell states that in 1990, one SBC church existed for every 3,800 people; however, in 2014, Southern Baptists lost substantial ground as the population grew and outpaced SBC churches to the tune of only one church for every 6,200 people.⁵ Ezell does not stop at the disproportionate SBC church-to-population ratio either. He presents two problems facing Southern Baptists: (1) the lack of new church plants, and (2) the amount of SBC churches closing their doors to never reopen.⁶ From the same data, Ezell states that the SBC closes an average of one thousand churches every year (see table 1 and table A2 in appendix 2).⁷

Church decline does not stop at the church-to-population ratio nor the yearly closure rate of SBC churches; instead, it relates to the health of existing SBC churches. Mark Clifton indicates that 70-80 percent of SBC churches are currently in decline or plateauing.⁸ The numbers stated by Rainer, Stetzer and Dodson, Ezell, and Clifton show that the church in America is declining which in turn, hampers churches to fulfill the Great Commission.

To understand the state of declining churches, a few questions must be answered. First, what is revitalization? Second, what causes churches in America to

American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 399-410.

⁵ Kevin Ezell, "Breathing New Life into Dying Churches," *Southern Seminary* 82, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 32. The numbers stated represent North America.

⁶ Ezell, "Breathing New Life into Dying Churches," in Mohler, *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, 13. Additionally, Ezell reports that between 2007 to 2012, only 27 percent of SBC churches experienced growth; unfortunately, the same data showed that 30 percent of SBC churches declined in the same time frame. This data comes from an analysis of Annual Church Profile data.

⁷ Ezell, "Breathing New Life into Dying Churches," in Mohler, *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, 32.

⁸ Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 3.

plateau and decline? Finally, why must churches pursue revitalization through a robust practice of changing their prayer culture?

Table 1. SBC churches removed from NAMB database⁹

Year	Number of Churches Removed	Year	Number of Churches Removed
1999	1135	2008	987
2000	609	2009	1114
2001	475	2010	901
2002	801	2011	1362
2003	1424	2012	903
2004	1145	2013	1462
2005	881	2014	853
2006	634	2015	1210
2007	591	2016	793

What Is Revitalization?

Some authors see revitalization in Ezekiel 37 as the model that displays God’s power to bring a dead church back to life.¹⁰ In this passage, God shows Ezekiel a valley of dry bones and commands him to prophesy over those bones. The power of the Lord forms the dry, dead bones into an army of men; but they still need to have life breathed

⁹ Clark Logan, Chief Research Officer for the North American Mission Board, affirms similar statistics for SBC churches. Logan states that over the last ten years, on average, the SBC loses approximately one thousand congregations annually. Interestingly, when the SBC removes an ID from the database, no code is given by the person doing the removal as to the reason. From a NAMB perspective, this means removing congregations from the SBC database. According to Logan, “The SBC ID is the only identifier for SBC congregations so all we really know for sure is when a new SBC ID appears in the database and when an SBC ID is removed from the database. The state conventions and associations have control over the addition and removal of these SBC IDs.” Clark Logan, email message to author, September 29, 2018.

¹⁰ See, for example, Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2016). Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying and Divided Churches* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016); Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017); Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*.

into their bodies. Once again, God commands Ezekiel to prophesy to the formerly dry bones, now complete bodies, that they be filled with the breath of life. This army comes to life and stand to their feet. Related to this passage, the revitalization authors see plateauing and declining churches as valleys of dry, dead bones; however, they believe that just like the valley of dry bones came alive again, so too can dead churches live again through revitalization efforts.¹¹

Brian Croft sees revitalization as a shepherd proclaiming God's Word to a church through the power of God and the work of the Spirit, breathing new life into the dead, dry bones of the church.¹² Furthermore, Andy Davis writes, "Revitalization occurs when God restores a once healthy church, helping it to change course from its recent decline toward spiritual disease and death."¹³

Michael Ross defines revitalization comprehensively and also admits difficulty in expressing the term; however, he comes to an idea of the nature of

¹¹ Lamar Eugene Cooper Sr., *Ezekiel*, New American Commentary, vol. 17 (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 321. Steven Tuell relates this chapter of Ezekiel as a message of hope to African slaves, speaking of "hope for the hopeless, freedom for the captives, and life for those who had thought themselves as good as dead." Steven Tuell, *Ezekiel*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 251. In this passage, God takes Ezekiel to a visionary valley of dry bones representing the exiled nation of Israel. Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 251. These bones had been lying there a long time due to the description of the bones as "very dry" (Ezek 37:2). God asks Ezekiel whether the bones can again live, eliciting the answer "you alone know" (Ezek 37:3). Next, Yahweh commands Ezekiel to prophesy to the dry, lifeless bones, resulting in God's restoring them back to life and the ultimate purpose to know that God is God (Ezek 37:4-6). Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 324. Block, commenting of the dry bones writes, "The bones' extreme dryness . . . [that] they represent have been dead for a long time. The image concretizes the hopelessness expressed in v. 11; no life remains in them at all." Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 374. Concerning the message put forth by God, Leslie C. Allen says that this demonstrates the proof of God's being. Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 185. God reveals his purpose behind this vision as the restoration of his people Israel back to their land and to place his Spirit in them, knowing that only God could do such things (Ezek 37:12-14). Likewise, churches who find themselves in need of revitalization may see the situation as hopeless, as did the Israelites in their exile or as Tuell relates the condition of African slaves in America. Subsequently, God displays who he is through the church, "Take away the church and you take away the visible manifestation of the gospel in the world," writes Mark Dever. Mark Dever, "The Church," in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H, 2014), chap. 13, Kindle. Dead churches do not do this. To remedy the hopelessness, God brings dead bones back to life to restore hope where there only hopelessness reigned. Can these churches live? Lord GOD, only you know (see Ezek 37:3).

¹² Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 25.

¹³ Davis, *Revitalize*, 30.

revitalization.¹⁴ He believes that revitalization “carries with it the hope of renewed vigor; redirected purpose; restoration of healthy growth, qualitatively and quantitatively; reformed beliefs and practices; and the refreshment of the Holy Spirit over the life of the church.”¹⁵

Bill Henard draws from Ezekiel 37 to cite two requisites for church revitalization. First, he references the fact that God commanded Ezekiel to prophesy to the dry bones. Henard says that the first thing that will breathe new life into a dying church resides in preaching the Word of God: “Church revitalization begins with laying the foundation of God’s word.”¹⁶ Henard’s second requisite (drawing from Ezek 37:5) is that the Spirit of God be involved in the work of revitalization. For churches to grow and thrive, he writes, “It requires the Spirit of God.”¹⁷ Henard’s words parallel those of William Sprague: “The plain and faithful preaching of God’s truth in all its length and breadth, and by use of those simple and honest means which God’s word either directly prescribes or fairly sanctions, we cannot reasonably doubt that here is a genuine work of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁸

In his Ph.D. dissertation, Stephen Hudson looks at revitalization from four perspectives: culture, health, statistics, and characteristics. He gives significant background from each perspective and clearly demonstrates the perceived strengths and

¹⁴ Michael F. Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization: How to Revitalize Your Church through Your Pulpit* (Glasgow: Mentor, 2006), 17.

¹⁵ Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization*, 18.

¹⁶ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 2. Errol Hulse agrees with Henard: “To Ezekiel belonged the work of preaching and praying.” Errol Hulse, *Give Him No Rest: A Call to Prayer for Revival* (Durham, UK: Evangelical Press, 1991), 49.

¹⁷ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 2. Hulse would agree with Henard here too when he writes, “To the Spirit, the work of raising the dead.” Hulse, *Give Him No Rest*, 49.

¹⁸ William B. Sprague, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1832), 14. Sprague writes specifically about revival in his work; however, a connection can be made between revival and revitalization as demonstrated below.

weaknesses of each.¹⁹ Finally, Hudson merges these perspectives into one useful definition—which is useable within this field of study—by describing church revitalization as “an intentional change of culture and praxis by members of a church community, after a period of church plateau or decline, that leads to greater church health and numerical growth.”²⁰ For purposes of this study, Hudson’s definition will be used for “revitalization.”

Revitalization should not be confused with other terms such as “church plants,” “church replants,” or “church mergers.” A church plant consists of a newly formed church that did not exist before a group of people began it.²¹ Church replants consist of churches that close their doors for a time and then reopen under new leadership—and possibly even a new name.²² Church mergers occur when one church adopts another church, with the adopted church coming under the authority of the adopting church.²³

Causes for the Decline of Churches

In relation to revitalization, several issues lend themselves to fuel the decline of the church. The Pew Research Center and the Barna Group independently studied different statistical trends leading to the decline of church attendance in America, whereas revitalization pastors and experts pointed towards practical trends for the decline of

¹⁹ Joseph Stephen Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Convention Churches: A Mixed Methods Study” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 25-29.

²⁰ Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization,” 30.

²¹ Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization,” 32.

²² Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization,” 31.

²³ For complete definitions of “church plant” and “church merger,” see chap. 1 of this thesis, “Terminology and Definitions,” 14-17.

church attendance. Seeing and understanding the trends of declining church attendance may provide insight for church leaders concerning how to reverse the decline.

Statistical approach. A Barna Group study indicates a large increase of unchurched adults. The research focuses on information from 1991 to 2009 and shows that during this time period, “the number of adults who do not attend church nearly doubled; while, the population increased 15%.”²⁴ Each week, Americans decide to skip church and spend their time engaged in other tasks and activities.

A recent study by the Pew Research Center indicates that Americans decide to practice their “faith” in a variety of ways besides attending religious services.²⁵ The Pew Research Center reports that “the single most common answer cited for not attending religious services is ‘I practice my faith in other ways,’ which is offered as a very important reason by 37% of people who rarely or never attend religious services.”²⁶ Other respondents in this study claim that they do not enjoy religious services, while still others state that they have not found a church they like to attend. A recent survey performed by Lifeway Research supports these findings, stating that “58 percent of Americans say

²⁴ Barna Group, “Number of Unchurched Adults Has Nearly Doubled Since 1991,” May 4, 2004, <https://www.barna.com/research/number-of-unchurched-adults-has-nearly-doubled-since-1991/>. According to a 2008 census report, the population of the United States in 1991 was approximately 253 million people, with a projected population of 307 million people in 2009. This represents an actual population increase of 21 percent, not 15 percent as reported by Barna. United States Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2009*, 128th ed., 8, last modified September 26, 2015. Pew Research Center, “Why Americans Go (and Don’t Go) to Religious Services,” August 1, 2018, <http://www.pewforum.org/2018/08/01/why-americans-go-to-religious-services/>. People mentioned environmental causes, social justice causes, and political causes as reasons for not attending religious services.

²⁵ Pew Research Center, “Why Americans Go (and Don’t Go) to Religious Services.” The Pew Research Center asked 4,729 adults who attended religious services a few times a year or less often and included those who never attended religious services at all. A disturbing statistic from this report comes from those who claim to be Christians but mimic non-Christian behavior: upwards of four in ten Christians claim that they do not attend church services, citing that they practice their faith in different ways.

²⁶ Pew Research Center, “Why Americans Go (and Don’t Go) to Religious Services.”

worshipping alone or with one's family is a valid replacement for regularly attending a church."²⁷

According to a Barna study of church behavior, two groups make up a rapidly growing demographic in America, the de-churched and the unchurched.²⁸ The de-churched represent "those who were formerly regulars but have since dropped out" and the fastest growing segment in America.²⁹ The rapidly expanding unchurched population comprises those "who have never attended a Christian church service."³⁰ Indicators demonstrate that those attending church on a regular basis are fast becoming a minority because of these two groups representing the unchurched in America. Combined, the de-churched and the unchurched make up 46 percent of the population.³¹

Another interesting trend in the religious landscape of America and potentially a reason for the numerical decrease in churches comes from a group of people labeled as "nones." This group consists of atheists, agnostics, or those unaffiliated with any specific religion.³² Over a period from 2007 to 2012, this group increased from 15 percent of the population to 20 percent of the population, representing nearly forty-six million people in

²⁷ Lifeway Research, "What Do Americans Believe about God?" October 26, 2018, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2018/10/26/what-do-americans-believe-about-god/>.

²⁸ George Barna, *America at the Crossroads: Explosive Trends Shaping America's Future and What You Can Do about It* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 39. Barna combines two specific categories to represent "the unchurched." The first group Barna names the de-churched, meaning those who formerly attended church but dropped out. The second group he actually calls the unchurched; individuals in this group never attended "a Christian church service." Combined, these two groups (46 percent of the adult population in America) represent a slightly larger group than those who claim regular attendance to church (45 percent of the adult population in America). Barna points out that this is "the first time since public opinion surveys have been available that regular attenders represent a minority of adults." Barna, *America at the Crossroads*, 39.

²⁹ Barna, *America at the Crossroads*, 39.

³⁰ Barna, *America at the Crossroads*, 39.

³¹ Barna, *America at the Crossroads*, 39.

³² Pew Research Center, "'Nones' on the Rise: One in Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation," October 9, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>.

2012. Many “nones” cite various reasons for their lack of affiliation with traditional religion, such as same-sex marriage and abortion on demand.³³ Among those under age thirty, the unaffiliated represent nearly one third of the group compared with only 10 percent of those older than sixty-five.³⁴ These statistics show trends towards America’s disinterest in being affiliated with church; but there are practical reasons as to the decline of the church too.

Practical approach. Outside of statistical data and more to a practical side, Brian Croft provides two primary reasons for the decline of churches. First, he believes that churches in need of revitalization, although open for Sunday services, possess no spiritual life whatsoever. Second, he maintains that the members of declining churches see brothers and sisters in the Lord as their enemies.³⁵ Croft echoes the words of Sprague: “But if there be a spirit of alienation and discord among them [church members], either they will never come together at all, or else their counsels will be divided and they will do little else than defeat each other’s purposes.”³⁶ According to Croft, “Either of these

³³ Two theories from the Pew Research Center report provided an interesting perspective for the rapid increase in those identifying as religiously unaffiliated, “nones.” The first theory surmises that people viewed religion with the politics of the right. This theory aligns with those who do not affiliate with any religion due to their political tendencies leaning left. These so called “nones” also view biblical stances against homosexuality as bigotry and believe religion to be homophobic. The second theory states that adults who delay marriage and procreation tend towards non-affiliation to any particular religion. This theory proves consistent with other Pew Research Center data in that couples who marry under the age of thirty tend to affiliate with religion and those who marry after the age of thirty do not. Pew Research Center, “‘Nones’ on the Rise.”

³⁴ Pew Research Center, “‘Nones’ on the Rise.”

³⁵ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 30.

³⁶ Sprague, *Lectures*, 61. Sprague continues his thoughts about separation within the church when he writes, “Let the professed followers of the Savior manifest towards each other a jealous or contentious spirit; let them appear more intent on the advancement of their own personal, or selfish, or petty ends, than upon the promotion of each other’s edification and benefit, and those who see them instead of taking knowledge from them that they have been with Jesus, will take knowledge of them that they have imbibed with very spirit of the world.” He continues, “The same spirit [one of selfishness and petty ends] will prevent a union of prayer. This is the grand means by which men prevail with God; and the prospect of their success is always much in proportion to the strength of their mutual Christian grace, and it is in lively exercise, other Christian graces which are more immediately brought into exercise in prayer, such as faith, repentance, and humility will not be asleep. . . . Let the united prayers of many hearts go up to heaven for the revival of God’s work and they may be expected to exert an influence which will tell gloriously on the

realities can single-handedly kill a church over time, but when both are present, death is imminent.”³⁷ Another issue brought to light by Croft comes from the treatment that congregations receive from their pastors. Croft writes, “The decline and struggle of the local churches can be traced to decades of unfaithful shepherds who care 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).”³⁸ These congregants act like any wounded animals and want to protect themselves from further harm; hence, they act to protect what they know and do not adjust well to changes initiated by a new, well-intentioned pastor.

Rainer echoes Croft concerning community and culture. Churches once flourished in communities when they looked like their surroundings.³⁹ Many times, circumstances in the neighborhood began to change; however, churches failed to adapt to those changes and continued to minister in the same way they did when the church was growing and flourishing. Rainer points to church members moving out of the community where the church existed; since these members no longer live in their church’s community, they stopped reaching out to new residents in the surrounding

destinies perhaps of many sinners.” The lack of unification of the church that prevents revival exhibits itself in the same behavior expressed by Croft in revitalization. Sprague, *Lectures*, 61.

³⁷ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 30.

³⁸ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 45. In Ezek 34, God warns shepherds who do not tend and care for his sheep that God himself will replace the shepherds of Israel. Pastors inclined to forget the flock for their own gain must realize that they tend the flocks of the Owner and should likewise care for the flock as such. Daniel Block comments, “He will rescue his flock from the hands of the shepherds by removing the shepherds from office and putting an end to their parasitism. . . . Since the shepherds, who had been appointed by Yahweh to care for his sheep, have not only neglected their duty but turned into ravenous wolves themselves, Yahweh is compelled to intervene and rescue his sheep from their jaws. For the rulers this is an announcement of judgment, but for the flock it is a message of hope.” Block, *Ezekiel*, 285.

³⁹ Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 25.

neighborhood.⁴⁰ Eventually, Rainer argues, the declining church looked more like a fortress than a place where people can come to heal their souls, all because the church refused to change and adapt as the surrounding community did. Supporting his claim, Rainer writes, “Vibrant and living churches look after the interests of others. They are concerned for their communities. They open the door for others.”⁴¹ Implicit in his words is that dying and declining churches do not look out for the needs of others and that some even choose to close their doors to the surrounding community in an effort to preserve bygone years.

Ross sees the issue for the declension of churches as coming directly from a lack of effective preaching. A reason for decline is that “preaching takes a back seat to other liturgical and pastoral duties and is judged mainly by how well ministers are ‘holding attention while preaching and being in command of all aspects of the service.’”⁴² He argues that lasting church revitalization can never be maintained, nor can revitalization take place, unless the pastor provides solid biblical preaching and can only be achieved by having a high view of Scripture.⁴³

Barna sums up the reality of declining churches succinctly, blaming it on a lack leadership:

After fifteen years of diligent digging into the world around me, I have reached several conclusions about the future of the Christian church in America. The central conclusion is that the American church is dying due to lack of strong spiritual leadership. In this time of unprecedented opportunity and plentiful resources, the

⁴⁰ Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 28-29.

⁴¹ Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 28-29.

⁴² Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization*, 30. David S. Schuller, Merton P. Strommen, and Milo L. Breeke, *Ministry in America: A Report on and In-Depth Survey of 47 Denominations in the United States and Canada with Interpretation by 18 Experts* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), 26.

⁴³ Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization*, 19, 46.

church is actually losing influence. The primary reason is the lack of leadership. Nothing is more important than leadership.⁴⁴

The church needs leaders who pursue the Lord through the preaching of God's Word, exhibiting personal holiness in their own lives, and leading God's people to pursue him through prayer.⁴⁵

Lack of prayer. When faced with overwhelming odds of failure and pressure from the ruling religious class, the infant church in Acts collapsed to their knees in unified prayer, supplicating God for answers (e.g., Acts 4, 6, 20).⁴⁶ Martin Lloyd-Jones sees an urgency in the praying early church when he writes, "In Acts 4 we read of Christians asking God to act 'Now.'"⁴⁷ As seen in appendix 1 and appendix 2, churches today continue to decline, with those numbers only reflecting SBC churches. Malcolm McDow and Alvin Reid write about the conditions of churches before God brought revival, saying, "Spiritual lethargy permeates the church, skepticism toward God, biblical authority . . . the nature and the mission of Jesus Christ. . . . The church substitutes ritual

⁴⁴ George Barna, "Nothing is More Important than Leadership," in *Leaders on Leadership: Wisdom, Advice and Encouragement on the Art of Leading God's People*, ed. George Barna (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1987), 18. For further study, see Hudson, "A Competency Model for Church Revitalization."

⁴⁵ Joseph Stephen Hudson combined elements to build his competency model for church revitalization leadership. First, the biblical qualifications for the pastoral office is a requirement for anyone serving any church revitalization role (1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9). Second, Hudson used a Behavioral Event Interview (BEI). Through structured interview techniques, the BEI seeks to catalog a thorough description of how a performer does his or her job. The BEI is designed to analyze the actual behaviors of superior performers in a job role. Third, Hudson employed a Delphi phase using multiple rounds of questionnaires to reach a consensus among a panel of experts, successful church revitalizers. Hudson's competency model can be found in appendix 7. Hudson, "A Competency Model for Church Revitalization," 8, 9, 158-59.

⁴⁶ Craig Keener discusses the threats leveled against the disciples in Acts 4:17 and how this particular group came together in light of the threat to pray. He provides a robust discussion on Ps 2 provided by Luke. Craig Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 2, 3:1-14:28 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2013), 1171. When a dispute arose in Acts 6:1-6 between the distribution of bread between Hellenist and Hebraic widows, the church prayed over those who would administer the daily distribution to the widows. Keener, *Acts*, 1253, 1260-63, 1268-79. Paul, on his way to Jerusalem, admonishes the Ephesian elders to shepherd the flock of God and to be on guard because "fierce wolves will come among you" (Acts 20:29). He drops to his knees in prayer and says farewell to these faithful, yet distressed shepherds. Darrell L. Block, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 632-33; Keener, *Acts*, 3022-23.

⁴⁷ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Revival* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1987), 198.

and form for biblical worship.”⁴⁸ Along with the problems facing the church, McDow and Reid also offer a biblical solution: “Rather than calling the people to change so that God would pour out His Spirit, ministers [of revival] began calling people to seek God’s face in prayer, in order that He would lead the people into revival.”⁴⁹ New Christians in the book of Acts called out to God when problems and issues arose. Likewise, churches must not miss, neglect, or disregard the basics of prayer; but instead depend on the power of God instead of relying on their own efforts to bring about revitalization.⁵⁰

Recently, Mark Clifton and Kenneth Priest outlined the several different boundaries—or Rubicons—that churches facing revitalization must overcome. The first Rubicon they mention lies in the staleness of prayer by God’s people.⁵¹ Answering their own question (“How can prayer be a boundary to anything?”), they answer, “Prayer itself perhaps may not be a Rubicon, but how we treat prayer sets a boundary in church revitalization.”⁵² Clifton and Priest suggest five hinderances that limit revitalization

⁴⁸ Malcolm McDow and Alvin L. Reid, *Firefall 2.0: How God Has Shaped History through Revivals* (Wake Forest, NC: Gospel Advance Books, 2014), 18.

⁴⁹ McDow and Reid, *Firefall 2.0*, 191.

⁵⁰ Lloyd-Jones exegetes Exod 33:12-17, breaking down Moses’ prayer to God and showed his complete reliance on God. Moses and the people knew their inadequacies and weaknesses proceeding to the Promised Land without the presence of God. In all reality, “Moses, you see, was afraid to go on without God,” writes Lloyd-Jones. Churches whether dying, declining, plateauing, or thriving should emulate Moses’ prayer by pleading with God, asking that they proceed no further unless God goes with them. Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 180-82. P. T. O’Brien writes about the Acts 4 prayer, “After a lengthy historical preamble (verses 24-28) the three-fold request is directed to God that He may look upon their enemies (verse 29) and attend their ministry with signs and wonders (verse 30). The request is answered as the Holy Spirit fills them, equipping them for their task of speaking the word plainly.” The disciples asked and God gave them boldness to continue to preach Christ even in the face of opposition. P. T. O’Brien, “Prayer in Luke-Acts,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 24 (January 1973): 123.

⁵¹ Mark Clifton and Kenneth Priest, *Rubicons of Revitalization: Overcoming Common Barriers to Church Renewal* (Littleton, CO: Acoma Press, 2018), 18. Rubicon refers to a river in Northern Italy where Julius Caesar defied the law of the Roman Empire (which did not permit generals to leave their assigned area of responsibility) and crossed this natural boundary. Crossing the Rubicon led to a three-year war of which Caesar knew when he entered the waters of the river. Clifton and Priest refer to the Rubicon as a boundary and liken the issues faced by church revitalizers to “Rubicons” (hence the name of the book). Clifton and Priest, *Rubicons of Revitalization*, 17. For more information on Caesar’s rise to power, see Steve Bonta, “The Rise of Caesarism,” *New American* 21, no. 1 (January 2005): 34-39.

⁵² Clifton and Priest, *Rubicons of Revitalization*, 23.

efforts: (1) we pray too little, (2) we pray too late, (3) we pray too timidly, (4) we pray too few prayers of repentance, and (5) we pray too often for what we want.⁵³ The points they argue lie in the attitude of the petitioners who are trying to revitalize their church by their own efforts instead of by the power of the Holy Spirit through prayer.

Why Churches Must Pursue Revitalization

To answer the question of why churches must pursue revitalization, Clifton asks a question: “What about a dying church reflects the glory of God or the power of the cross to a hurting and confused world?”⁵⁴ Clifton rightly notes that a church languishing in mediocrity or dying a slow death robs God of the glory he deserves. Eventually, churches simply close their doors or fade off into irrelevancy. Davis agrees with Clifton, expecting Satan to fight all efforts for a church to regain vitality and to reach the community for Christ.⁵⁵ Furthermore, he proposes additional reasons for pastors to devote years to revitalizing dying churches.⁵⁶ Of those enumerated reasons, he places “the restoration of Christ’s reputation in a community” at the top of his list, followed by a desire to win lost people within the walls of the church and to serve as a beacon of hope to churches who find themselves in similar situations.⁵⁷

⁵³ Clifton and Priest, *Rubicons of Revitalization*, 24-28.

⁵⁴ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 16.

⁵⁵ Davis, *Revitalize*, 17. Numerous authors who write books on revitalization relate stories and personal encounters with hostile church members. Brian Croft faced several termination attempts within his first year as lead pastor. Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*. Andy Davis dealt with unbiblical practices when he first arrived at his church. Davis, *Revitalize*. Mark DeVine fought against a group of individuals who worried more about keeping the power in the church instead of reaching the lost with the gospel. Mark Devine and Darrin Patrick, *Replant: How a Dying Church Can Grow Again* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2014), 59-65.

⁵⁶ Davis, *Revitalize*, 34.

⁵⁷ Davis, *Revitalize*, 35.

Another reason to pursue church revitalization lies in desire. As Henard says, “God wants the church to revitalize.”⁵⁸ Davis, in agreement with Henard, references the churches mentioned by John in the book of Revelation, writing, “[Christ’s] zeal for the holiness and fruitfulness of every church is undiminished.”⁵⁹ Christ deeply desires that his church taps into his limitless resources by means of the Holy Spirit to reach the nations with the gospel.

Ultimately, the reason to revitalize churches lies in bringing Jesus the honor and glory he richly deserves.⁶⁰ Without Jesus as the continual focus of worship through revitalization, painful and difficult times arise to a difficult level; however, with Christ and his glory as the center of worship, churches strive and persevere through the pain and misery that attaches to the changes necessary to church revitalization. As Clifton states, “When we remain focused on that truth, the pain becomes a joy.”⁶¹ The issue pain for some dying churches resides in their culture—that is, churches and church members fail to understand the effect that their culture has on their neighborhood.

Organizational Culture

People live in various cultures throughout the world. Whether or not churches want to admit it or not, they both exist within the surrounding culture of their neighborhoods and have a distinct culture within their four walls. To properly understand the meaning of culture, a brief discussion and definition of culture ensues. Next, the examination considers church culture, reflects on some churches’ issues with culture, and, briefly analyzes a healthy church.

⁵⁸ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 7.

⁵⁹ Davis, *Revitalize*, 16.

⁶⁰ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 20.

⁶¹ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 20.

Culture Discussed and Defined

What is culture? In all reality, the definition depends on the context in which a person uses the word. In 1995, Pixar and Walt Disney Pictures released the classic movie *Toy Story*, centering on a young boy, Andy, and his toys. After Andy's departure from his room, and with no other human presence, the toys come to life. In one scene, Mr. Potato Head contorts his face to Ham, a toy pig, and exclaims, "Ham, look I'm Picasso!" Ham replies, "I don't get it." To which Potato Head says, "You uncultured swine!"⁶² As a society, the U.S. lacks a clear understanding of the word *culture*. In the quote, Potato Head refers to Ham's level of sophistication, not the culture of a society or a church. To help drill down to a sound contextual understanding of culture, D. A. Carson provides clarity. He discusses the use of the word "culture" in the not too distant past as meaning the status within the world—in other words, a cultured person read Shakespeare and Goethe while listening to Mozart and Bach and probably had an idea of the works of Picasso.⁶³ These two examples are not the type of "culture" this research seeks to understand; rather, the examples demonstrate a refined person of good manners and etiquette. Subsequently, what does culture mean in regard to this research?

Edgar Schein studied culture and specifically organizational culture in the early 1980s when the concept was fairly new. Although, now, the term "culture" seems to be universally accepted, what does it actually mean? Schein defines culture as

The accumulated shared learning of that group as it solves its problems of external adaption and internal integration; which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, feel, and behave in relation to those problems. The accumulated learning is a pattern of beliefs, values, and behavioral norms that come to be taken for granted as basic assumptions and eventually drop out of awareness.⁶⁴

⁶² *Toy Story*, directed by John Alan Lasseter, featuring Tom Hanks, Tim Allen, Don Rickles, and John Ratzenberger (Pixar Studios, Walt Disney Pictures, 1995), DVD.

⁶³ D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 1.

⁶⁴ Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 5th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2017), xv, 6.

Carson prefers the definition of culture as Clifford Geertz presents: “The culture concept . . . denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life.”⁶⁵ Therefore, according to both Schein and Carson, specific characteristics come to light when defining culture.

First, people share common experiences, conforming to a standard and in turn solve problems together both internally and externally. Subsequently, the group develops working solutions in order for the group to begin to integrate the acquired knowledge into the DNA of the group.⁶⁶ Artifacts (e.g., language, technology, stories, myths, rituals, climate) represent different behaviors the group demonstrates and teaches to outsiders who desire entry to the group.⁶⁷ Finally, these different aspects and behaviors become “taken for granted” by the group at large.

In order to understand the intricacies better, Schein breaks culture down into three categories: (1) artifacts, (2) espoused beliefs and values, and (3) underlying assumptions.⁶⁸ To visually represent culture, Schein uses the metaphor of a farmer creating a lily pond: plants represent an organization’s artifacts, what the farmer says he wants represents beliefs and values, and water and fertilizer represent underlying

⁶⁵ Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 2.

⁶⁶ Schein uses the term “cultural DNA.” Just as every living cell contains DNA, all organizations contain a cultural DNA, “Basic taken for granted assumptions.” Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 7.

⁶⁷ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 17. Concerning climate Schein writes, “Some culture analysts see climate as the equivalent to culture, but it is better thought of as the product of some of the underlying assumptions and is, therefore, a manifestation of the culture” (17).

⁶⁸ For the definitions of “artifacts,” “espoused beliefs,” and “underlying assumptions,” see chap. 1 of this thesis, “Terminology and Definitions,” 14-17.

assumptions.⁶⁹ Similarly, Aubrey Malphurs uses an apple as a metaphor for culture. The skin of the apple represents the artifacts of a certain culture, the flesh of the apple represents a group's values, and the apple's core represents the organization's beliefs.⁷⁰

Churches in need of revitalization are no different. Each church puts forth a culture based on what people see (artifacts), created on what they value (Schein—espoused values and beliefs), grounded on their beliefs (Schein—underlying values).⁷¹ On his website, Thom Rainer asks several questions directed towards churches who blame pastors for the decline of the church. One specific question from Rainer clarifies the general discussion of organizational culture within the present context: “Some churches shouldn't be asking ‘How can we find a new pastor?’ but ‘What might we be doing to run off the pastor we have?’ instead.”⁷² To appropriate the question for the purpose of revitalization, churches should ask, “What might our church be doing to keep people from attending?” The answer to this question resides in the church's culture to which this discussion now turns.

The Church's Culture

Some within evangelical circles consider culture to be a result of the fall or a system created by Satan to influence and control the world, but such is not the case.⁷³ Culture exists around all people and civilizations, including churches. Related to this area of discussion, Malphurs defines “church congregational culture” as “the unique

⁶⁹ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 25.

⁷⁰ Aubrey Malphurs, *Look before You Lead: How to Discern and Shape Your Church Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 20-22.

⁷¹ Malphurs, *Look before You Lead*, 21; Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 18.

⁷² Thom S. Rainer, “Why Declining Churches Often Run Off Pastors,” September 6, 2018, <https://thomrainer.com/2018/09/declining-churches-often-run-off-pastors-revitalize-replant-057/>.

⁷³ Malphurs, *Look before You Lead*, 8.

expression of the interaction of the church's shared beliefs and its values, which explains its behavior in general and display[s] its unique identity in particular In short, a church's congregational culture is its unique expression of its shared values and beliefs."⁷⁴

Concerning the topic of revitalization, Malphurs argues that a new senior pastor must become an expert of the church's culture to which he has been called, saying, "To a great degree his job is to lead and manage the congregational culture."⁷⁵ A pastor must understand that culture change takes a significant amount of time. Schein equates the quick change of any culture to the mere painting of the flowers in his lily pond example.⁷⁶ To effect true change—that is, to change the DNA of a culture—the base level of an organization must be changed; the church is not exempt from these facts or this process. Therefore, in light of the current research context, a pastor must determine the health of prayer in his church since, prayer practices (or lack thereof) represent one aspect of a church's culture. If the church exhibits healthy practices of prayer, then the pastor learns from the new members of the church. If unhealthy, then he must change the prayer culture in small ways to effect enduring change.

The Church's Problem with Culture

With the decline of numerous churches and subsequent closings, a church's culture in general may be a contributing factor. Malphurs argues that many times in declining churches, congregants see culture and Scripture as one and the same. People view the singing of hymns, such as those written by the likes of John Wesley and Martin Luther, as a defense of the Bible itself, but they do not see music styles in worship as one

⁷⁴ Malphurs, *Look before You Lead*, 20.

⁷⁵ Malphurs, *Look before You Lead*, 15.

⁷⁶ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 27.

of the church's cultural expressions.⁷⁷ Malphurs also discusses the long-term cultural influences in many churches in America that came from a European-style of tradition in which people look at the church as a building and not as a collective group of people sharing the story of Jesus with their neighbors. Churches stuck in the European model believe that “Jesus and Paul worshipped in churches like this”—that is, churches with traditional worship styles, buildings, and attire.⁷⁸ Malphurs sheds light on a church's resistance to change when he writes, “The problem is that some of these people in the European-influenced churches believe they're defending the faith when in reality they're defending their cultural heritage. So, they fight as if the entire future of orthodox Christianity depends on them.”⁷⁹ He concludes that the damage wrought by this thought process blurs the differences of culture and orthodoxy.

Several books on organizational change reveal an issue related to the concept of “status quo.” Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James Furr write, “Implicit in this is the recognition that the status quo is not acceptable.”⁸⁰ To what do these authors refer? Herrington, Bonem and Furr conclude that remaining stagnant welcomes a slow demise for an organization—in this case, the church. T. S. Eliot agrees that a “society must either proceed into a gradual decline of which we can see no end, or . . . reform itself into a positive shape.”⁸¹ Though Eliot compares Christian society to that of secular society, his words still apply—cultures, organizations, businesses, churches that remain stagnant see

⁷⁷ Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 71.

⁷⁸ Malphurs, *Look before You Lead*, 14.

⁷⁹ Malphurs, *Look before You Lead*, 14.

⁸⁰ Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 36.

⁸¹ T. S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture: The Idea of a Christian Society and Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949), 20.

decline. John Kotter, along with Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, would see the removal of the status quo as an urgent need for the long-term viability of the organization and in this situation, the church.⁸²

Status quo and death may be seen in an unlikely place. The United States military is arguably the finest fighting force in the world. U.S. soldiers train extensively with some of the best equipment; yet, during the war on terror, Al Qaeda in Iraq (AIQ) out-flanked, out-maneuvered, and began defeating the U.S. military.⁸³ The Task Force, comprised of the branches of the U.S. military commanded by General Stanley McChrystal, fought a foe with tactics developed forty-fifty years ago; it did not adapt to the change in warfare presented in modern-day Iraq. Though successful in waging war in the past, even the U.S. military must change their culture (tactics) and adapt to their surrounding community (enemy).⁸⁴ McChrystal et al. put things into perspective:

In the course of this fight, we had to unlearn a great deal of what thought we knew about war—and the world—worked. We had to tear down familiar organizational structures and rebuild them along completely different lines, swapping our sturdy architecture for organic fluidity, because it was the only way to confront a rising tide of complex threats.⁸⁵

Just as the U.S. military realized a need to adapt and change to meet today's ever-changing threat in the world; likewise, churches must adapt and change to meet the needs of their surrounding communities to reach them with the gospel.

⁸² John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 12.

⁸³ Stanley A. McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2015), 17-19. The tactics developed by the U.S. military originated from World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. AIQ did not play by traditional rules of war and remained very fluid in their resistance against the Task Force. McChrystal understood this and helped develop a more fluid fighting force to deal with the present threat.

⁸⁴ Past performance, even in war, does not indicate future victory.

⁸⁵ McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 20.

Malphurs argues that a church must begin to change before it peaks. Using a sigmoid curve to demonstrate his point, he writes, “The S-curve (sigmoid curve) depicts how virtually everything in life begins, grows, plateaus, and then ultimately dies.”⁸⁶ The S-curve applies to the life-cycle of churches. Malphurs goes on to say that before a church plateaus or declines, it must begin a new S-curve or else die: “First, gifted leaders of churches and denominations must start new S-curves. They need to launch out in new directions. Second, they need a strategic planning process that helps them start new sigmoid curves. They need to know how to think and act in the twenty-first century” (see figure 1).⁸⁷

Hard questions must be asked in regard to churches experiencing a decrease in attendance and a lack of giving to meet service and financial needs. Do congregations rest on the past successes of their church? Do they preach the gospel message unashamedly? Have they remained stagnant as the surrounding communities have changed? Churches must understand that they need to change in order to continue to be effective in reaching the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁸⁸ David Kinnamen, President of the Barna Group, sums up the idea behind cultural change and gospel adherence, saying, “Yet while the culture will continue to change, our calling as the Body of Christ has not and will not.”⁸⁹ Churches, like all other organizations, must be healthy and vibrant, adapting to the cultural changes of an ever-changing community yet

⁸⁶ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 9.

⁸⁷ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 11.

⁸⁸ By no means does this mean abandoning orthodoxy; rather, it means studying culture, remaining flexible within the culture, and compromising on style in order to remain relevant to the culture. As noted earlier in this chapter (see p. 37 above), many see the relinquishing of their traditions and culture as the releasing of the truths contained in Scripture. Church leaders can—and should—educate their congregants on the differences between orthodoxy and culture.

⁸⁹ Barna Group, “Five Trends among the Unchurched,” October 9, 2014, <https://www.barna.com/research/five-trends-among-the-unchurched/>.

maintaining fidelity to the gospel of Christ and discovering new ways to overcome obstacles in order to share Jesus with their neighbors.

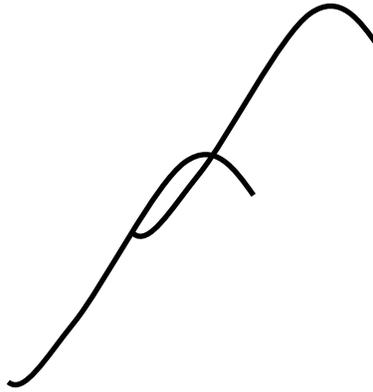


Figure 1. Malphurs’s depiction for true growth, the S-curve⁹⁰

Organizational Health of the Church

Health affects all things; organizations and churches are not exempt. As Gordon T. Smith writes, “If as a church you want to have a long-term impact on the lives of individuals, families, a community, and the lives of those in that community, then you must consider the institutional character of the congregational life.”⁹¹ Is the church fraught with bickering from within? Is the church known for reaching out to the community in general or does it put up defensive barriers to shut out the world? Thom Rainer writes, “There were several points where these churches could have reversed the

⁹⁰ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 16. A new S-curve must begin before any plateau or decline begins. As Rebecca Bagley writes, “The key to sustaining a healthy life, a healthy business or a healthy region is to make a transformation to a new curve before the current one is too far in decline. . . . We are more likely to make this transformational change when the initial curve is still on the rise, since resources, energy and confidence are high. . . . A new curve must begin while the first one can still support it.” Rebecca O. Bagley, “The Key to Growth: Transformational Change,” *Forbes*, January 2, 2013, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/rebeccabagley/2013/01/02/the-key-to-growth-transformational-change/#a51fa266b8ce>. In regard to churches and growth, leadership must determine the right time to begin a new S-curve in order to harness the momentum created by the previous change.

⁹¹ Gordon T. Smith, *Institutional Intelligence: How to Build an Effective Organization* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 5.

decline they were experiencing. But the remaining members in the church refused to see reality. They were blinded to the slow erosion that was taking place.”⁹² The reality of which Rainer speaks manifests itself in an unwillingness to change the church’s culture even though the surrounding community where the church resides changed years ago.

Patrick Lencioni convincingly argues, “Once organizational health is properly understood and placed into the right context, it will surpass all other disciplines in business as the greatest opportunity for improvement and competitive advantage.”⁹³

Lencioni defines organizational health by breaking it into four disciplines: build a cohesive leadership team, create clarity, over-communicate clarity, and reinforce clarity.⁹⁴ Though Lencioni writes for organizations in the business world, the same rules apply to churches: churches must be internally healthy, by adhering to gospel principles, in order to help those who are outside the church understand the message of hope and healing offered by God.

Churches must examine themselves by first looking at their commitment to the orthodoxy. Second, churches must ask, “Has the surrounding culture of the community changed while we remained stagnant?” If the answer to both is yes, “we continue to adhere to biblical truths,” and “we remained stagnant as the community changed,” then a change must occur. Since God’s Word does not change, then a change in the culture of the church is in order. Churches in need of revitalization must seek God through prayer and ask him to align their hearts to his.

⁹² Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 17. The churches studied by Rainer chose not to change with the change of the surrounding community. He found that “these churches were not hanging on to biblical truths. They were not clinging to clear Christian morality. They were not fighting for primary doctrines, or secondary doctrines, or even tertiary doctrines. As a matter of fact, they were not fighting for doctrines at all. They were fighting for the past. The good old days.” Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 18.

⁹³ Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 4.

⁹⁴ Lencioni, *The Advantage*, 15.

Prayer

God designated prayer as the means for a person to communicate with him. Therefore, a petitioner must use language to communicate their desires and wishes to God as opposed to wordless prayers.⁹⁵ Prayer does not begin with the creature but originates with the Creator as illustrated by Edmund P. Clowney when he writes, “Prayer, like worship, is always a response to God’s revelation of himself and his will.”⁹⁶ Dale Davis writes, “We take his promises and turn them into prayers in order that the promises may come to pass. What honor God confers on us, not as robots, but as servants who should have no higher ambition than to pray down his will.”⁹⁷ Similarly, Andy Davis and Bill Henard agree that God desires to revitalize his churches and affords his people to pray down his promises.⁹⁸

Throughout the history of the church, God uses prayer to develop the faith of his saints and to usher in revival. Why would he not do the same for church revitalization? To answer this question, a distinction must be made between revival and revitalization; therefore, a brief discussion ensues concerning the differences. Next, the

⁹⁵ David Crump, *Knocking on Heaven’s Door: A New Testament Theology of Petitionary Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 288. In this section, Crump clearly articulates his dissatisfaction with wordless prayer and argues that all prayer must use language. He does not condemn silent prayer since the petitioner uses language to voice his or her concerns to God. One such man, admired by this author who prayed without ceasing was George Müller, and exemplified the discipline of prayer. In 1836, God led Müller to open an orphanage in Bristol, England. In response, Müller vowed to ask nothing from any person in the way of monetary support, staffing issues, or specific needs to care for children. Rather, Müller relied on God to provide everything he needed through the medium of prayer. Müller petitioned God, praying for provisions for the orphans and the staff when the orphanage’s coffers and pantries lay empty and bare. Food arrived at just the right time to feed the children, or someone gave a donation to meet the orphans’ needs—all because Müller sought God first and foremost in his life. Müller’s reliance on prayer provides an individual example of a man who relied strictly on the providence of God and built his immense faith. Given the fact that God, in response to Müller’s prayers, supplied Müller with everything he needed to operate an orphanage, why would churches facing revitalization not follow such an example and similarly rely on God through prayer? George Müller, *Answers to Prayer*, ed. Lore Ferguson Wilbert (Nashville: B&H, 2017), 6.

⁹⁶ Edmund P. Clowney, “A Biblical Theology of Prayer,” in *Teach Us to Pray: Prayer in the Bible and the World*, ed. D. A. Carson (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1990), 136-37.

⁹⁷ Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Kings: The Wisdom and the Folly* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2002), 246.

⁹⁸ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 7; Davis, *Revitalize*, 16.

research leads to an examination of revivals from history, beginning with two biblical accounts and then a look at several revivals in America. Third, to build a picture of revival, the research examines the works of Martin Lloyd-Jones and Malcolm McDow and Alvin Reid. These authors discuss differing yet similar aspects of revival, providing a revival picture. Finally, a brief study of the works on prayer to provide clarity to the effects of prayer on revitalization. To begin, we look at the differences between revival and revitalization.

Revival versus Revitalization

The distinction between revival and revitalization must be made clear to promote an understanding of the origins of both. Elmer L. Towns and Douglas Porter define revival as

an extraordinary work of God in which Christians repent of their sins as they become intensely aware of his presence in their midst, and they manifest a positive response to God in renewed obedience to the known will of God, resulting in both a deepening of their individual and corporate experience with God, and an increase in concern to win others to Christ.⁹⁹

A few characteristics of revival emerge from this definition: God's extraordinary work, God's presence during the time of revival, and a concern to reach the lost.¹⁰⁰ Revival necessarily begins with God. Ross agrees that "only God can send revival" and points out that as people sense the church's need for revival, they subsequently prepare for God to bring the revival to their church.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Elmer L. Towns and Douglas Porter, *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever: From Pentecost to the Present* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 2000), 4.

¹⁰⁰ Towns and Porter, *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever*, 4.

¹⁰¹ Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization*, 22-23. Ross provides a quote from Andrew W. Blackwood that helps one understand the nature of revival. Blackwood writes, "A man who knows the ways of the waves, or of an orchard, can judge fairly well what will follow after the present stage. On the contrary, nobody but God can begin to tell when a long-awaited revival will begin, what form it will assume, or how long it will continue at the crest." Andrew W. Blackwood, preview to *Revivals: Their Laws and Leaders*, by James Burns, 7-19 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960), 10.

In regard to revitalization, Ross defines it as an effort in which God brings purpose, passion, purity, and priorities back to the proper place in the church's life. This realigning of priorities gives new life to the ministry and congregation of the church; but, as Ross stresses, "It is not an attempt to produce revival by means of revivalistic techniques."¹⁰²

To summarize the differences, revival begins when God spurs the hearts of his people to develop a deeper relationship with him and, in turn, to reach out to non-Christians and share the message of hope offered through the cross of Christ. On the other hand, revitalization realigns a church back to its proper purpose, passion, purity, and priorities in order to be effective in its surrounding community.¹⁰³ Ultimately, both of these phenomena must begin with the power of prayer to bring about change in individuals and church cultures. The intention now is to show a connection between prayer and revival and, as a corollary, revitalization.

History of Prayer and Its Connection to Revival

God uses prayer to effect change. Authors wrote numerous books chronicling the events of revivals in the world (in general) and America (in particular). Before looking at revival in America, two biblical accounts of revival will be examined. Throughout Scripture and the history of the church, people prayed before changes in situations occurred. Although not a direct link to New Testament churches, biblical narratives chronicle the effects of prayer in bleak times and when hope seems lost. One such example given in the Old Testament can be found in the book of 1 Kings where Elijah battles the prophets of Baal.

¹⁰² Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization*, 24. Earlier in this chapter, several definitions were considered. Hudson's definition is used in this research. See pp. 21-24 for the discussion.

¹⁰³ Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization*.

First Kings 18. Revival came to the people of Israel in 1 Kings 18 when the man of God Elijah confronts the wicked King Ahab. Earlier in 1 Kings, Elijah warns King Ahab of the coming drought to the land; neither rain nor dew would fall on the land except by the word of the Lord (1 Kgs 17:1).¹⁰⁴ Several years later, God sends Elijah to oppose Ahab along with the prophets of Baal and Asherah in order to stir up the people of Israel to return to the Lord with all their hearts (1 Kgs 18).¹⁰⁵ After the prophets of Baal fail in calling on their god, Elijah prays to the LORD, asking, “Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back” (1 Kgs 18:37 ESV). The fire of the LORD falls on the offering, consuming everything (v. 38), and, with this demonstration from the LORD, the people declare the LORD to be God (v. 39).¹⁰⁶

God initiated this revival to bring the people of Israel back to himself in two distinct steps. First, God called Elijah away from his place of concealment with the widow Zarephath (1 Kgs 18:1-2). And second, Elijah prays for the hearts of the people to return the Lord (vv. 36-37). In answer to Elijah’s prayer, God responds first by consuming the water-drenched offering (v. 38) and then, after Elijah prays seven times, God sends rain to the parched land (vv. 41-45).¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Dale Davis says that Elijah abruptly appears before king Ahab to announce that Yahweh plans “to inflict the covenant curses upon Israel for her covenant-breaking.” Davis, *1 Kings*, 201.

¹⁰⁵ Jesus points to the faithfulness of the widow who fed Elijah during this time with the bottomless container of flour and oil (1 Kgs 17:8-16). Jesus says the drought lasted for three and a half years (Luke 4:24-26). Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 1, *1:1–9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 417-18.

¹⁰⁶ George T. B. Davis, *When the Fire Fell* (Philadelphia: Million Testaments Campaigns, 1945), 8-9.

¹⁰⁷ As an aside, when the fire fell from the sky consuming the offering, the people fell on their faces acknowledging the supremacy of the LORD (see 1 Kgs 18:39), an answer to Elijah’s earlier prayer. Davis writes, “How differently Yahweh responds to one servant’s prayers! He sent an immediate and warm answer (v. 38) to Elijah’s previous prayer on Carmel (v 36-37), but here [18:42-45] puts him through an agonizing process before sending his delayed and wet answer.” Davis, *1 Kings*, 247.

In this case, God initiates and prompts Elijah to go confront Ahab; however, through prayer, God reveals himself to the people of Israel. Comparing the present passage with a church in need of revitalization, Wesley Duewel writes, “No church can become so compromising or backslidden that God cannot send fresh blessing.”¹⁰⁸ Dwight L. Moody sums up this account neatly, saying, “We read about another occasion where Elijah prayed, and this time brought down fire on Mount Carmel. The prophets of Baal cried long and loud to their gods, but no answer came. The God of Elijah heard and answered his prayer and God demonstrated his power (1 Kings 18). Let’s remember that the God of Elijah still lives.” Indeed, all churches have the same access to God as well as the same permission from God to “ask the fire from heaven to come down and consume our lusts and passions—to burn up our impurities and let Christ shine through us.”¹⁰⁹ God used the prayers of his prophet to return the hearts of his people and also used prayer to launch the New Testament church at Pentecost.

Pentecost. Pentecost (in Acts 2) is worth mentioning as a testimony to faithful believers uniting in prayer for God to accomplish a great work.¹¹⁰ Jesus commands the disciples to remain in Jerusalem for the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4, 8). After witnessing Jesus ascend into the heavens (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9), this group of

¹⁰⁸ Wesley L. Duewel, *Revival Fire* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 19.

¹⁰⁹ Dwight L. Moody, *Prevailing Prayer: What Hinders it?* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1913), 1-2. Dwight L. Moody sums up this account neatly, saying, “We read about another occasion where Elijah prayed, and this time brought down fire on Mount Carmel. The prophets of Baal cried long and loud to their gods, but no answer came. The God of Elijah heard and answered his prayer and God demonstrated his power (1 Kings 18). Let’s remember that the God of Elijah still lives.” Moody, *Prevailing Prayer*, 1-2.

¹¹⁰ John chronicles the words of Christ concerning the sending of the Holy Spirit in John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26-27; 16:7-11, 12-15. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 476-542. Controversies exist as to the nature of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the saints before Jesus sent the Counselor. James Hamilton offers six differing perspectives on the subject: (1) complete continuity; (2) more continuity than discontinuity; (3) some continuity, some discontinuity; (4) more discontinuity than continuity; (5) complete discontinuity; (6) vague discontinuity. James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 10-24.

one hundred and twenty disciples retire to a room “devoting themselves to prayer,” waiting for the Spirit (Acts 1:14; 2:1; cf. Luke 24:52-53).¹¹¹ R. Albert Mohler Jr. describes this event as an act of obedience on the part of this group of men and women (see Luke 18:1) and an act of trust for God to send the Holy Spirit through the act of prayer.¹¹²

During this time of prayer, the Lord fulfills his promise by sending the Holy Spirit, with each disciple receiving the gift as marked by “individual flames of visible fire which then rested on those who were filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:3).”¹¹³ Immediately, the disciples leave the room and begin speaking in tongues and preaching the good news about the resurrection of Jesus (as exemplified in Peter’s sermon; Acts 2:4-40). Thus, the fledgling church begins on Pentecost with the addition of three thousand people to the original group (v. 41). This new community of faith dedicates itself to the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer (vv. 42-47).¹¹⁴ John Polhill writes about the devotion of this group to prayer, saying, “There is no effective witness without the Spirit, and the way to spiritual empowerment is to wait in prayer.”¹¹⁵

The church begins as disciples, in obedience to Jesus, who devote themselves to pray for God to fulfill his promise.¹¹⁶ Gary Millar says that this gathering of disciples desires “God to advance his agenda and deliver on his promises.”¹¹⁷ As the church

¹¹¹ Davis, *When the Fire Fell*, 9.

¹¹² R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Acts 1–12 for You*, God’s Word for You Series (Purcellville, VA: Goodbook, 2018), 16-17.

¹¹³ Duetel, *Revival Fire*, 23.

¹¹⁴ Related to the present research context, Mohler states that if a church neglects any of these four components, then “there is a critical problem with the church’s health.” Mohler, *Acts 1–12 for You*, 40.

¹¹⁵ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: B&H, 1992), 90.

¹¹⁶ Carson discusses the beginning of the church and differing perspectives. D. A. Carson “When Did the Church Begin?” *Themelios* 41, no.1 (April 2016): 1-4.

¹¹⁷ J. Gary Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Prayer*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 38 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 192. Millar does not equate

formed on that first day, the devotion in prayer continued as the burgeoning church continually sought God’s will together (see Acts 4:23-31; 13:1-3; 20:36). Prayer ushers in the birth of the church as well as the expansion of the early church and it also marks the re-awakening of the church.

The Great Awakening. Historians denote the Great Awakening as beginning in the year 1727 and continuing through 1750. In an essay concerning prayer and revival, Rick Ostrander looks to the prayer practices of a group of people known as the Moravians.¹¹⁸ This group of Christians dedicated themselves to constant prayer, emphasizing the “unity of Christians, spiritual revival, and world evangelization.”¹¹⁹ God answered the prayers of the Moravians with converts from all levels of society; successively, the Moravians’ prayer practices fueled the furnace of revival across the sea in America.¹²⁰

As Jonathan Edwards steps on the scene, societal and religious values continued to decline in America.¹²¹ Edwards begins preaching to the people in his

this gathering of disciples to a pious act by a group of people from a newly formed religious order; rather, this devoted group of praying disciples wanted God to fulfill his stated promises. Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord*, 192.

¹¹⁸ Rick Ostrander, “Prayer and Revivals,” in *Encyclopedia of Religious Revivals in America*, ed. Michael McClymond (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 333. The Moravians lived in Herrnhut, Germany, on the lands of Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf. This group of Christians sent out more than one hundred missionaries to several countries around the world. The Moravians began a round-the-clock prayer vigil with forty-eight people—equal numbers of men and women. This practice continued for a century. Their desire to reach the world with the gospel inspired William Carey, the “Father of Modern Missions,” to go to India to proclaim the gospel. Towns and Porter, *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever*, 54.

¹¹⁹ Ostrander, “Prayer and Revivals,” 333.

¹²⁰ Towns and Porter, *Ten Greatest Revivals Ever*, 54.

¹²¹ Davis, *When the Fire Fell*, 12; Towns and Porter, *Ten Greatest Revivals Ever*, 56. Jonathan Edwards replaced his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, in the pulpit in North Hampton. Stoddard advocated keeping unconverted people in the church, so they could hear the gospel message. Known as “the Half-Way Covenant,” the unregenerate could attend services and participate in communion. Many disagreed with Stoddard over this practice because some preachers did not possess the ability to preach and minister as effectively as Stoddard. When Edwards assumed the pulpit, he saw the effects of this covenant: unconverted members of the church had become influential in the church and promoted a time of spiritual decline.

congregation a message of justification by faith alone.¹²² In 1734, Edwards begins to passionately preach messages aimed at the conversion of souls, and later that year, six people come to know the Lord through various means. What changes in Edwards' life? He begins to pray and gathers others to pray. As Ostrander writes, "In 1734 Edwards organized youth and adult prayer societies in his North Hampton, Massachusetts, congregation. . . . Edwards credited the establishment of prayer societies as an important predecessor to the awakening."¹²³ Edwards sees the fruits of prayer and the preaching of God's Word with people coming to faith during the revival in North Hampton, including the salvation of unsaved spouses and children.¹²⁴ Edwards describes the effect that Christian prayers will have on non-Christians, "This being observed, will be the means of awakening others, making them sensible of the wants of their souls, and exciting in them a great concern for their spiritual and everlasting good, and putting them upon earnestly crying to God for spiritual mercies, and disposing them to join in that extraordinary seeking and serving of God."¹²⁵ Later in 1747, he publishes a book, entitled *An Humble Attempt*, in which he states "explicitly his intention to usher in revival through the united prayers of believers."¹²⁶ Edwards writes, "This disposition to prayer, and union in it, will gradually spread more and more, and increase to greater degrees; with which at length

¹²² Davis, *When the Fire Fell*, 12.

¹²³ Ostrander, "Prayer and Revivals," 333.

¹²⁴ Towns and Porter, *Ten Greatest Revivals Ever*, 56. Davis writes that Edwards preached and prayed for eight years, and finally revival came to his town. He continues to chronicle the amazement behind this revival brought by God through Edwards's petitioning through prayer. Davis, *When Fire Fell*, 12-14.

¹²⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People, In Extraordinary Prayer, For The Revival of Religion and the Advancement and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth*, ed. Henry Rogers and Edward Hickman (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1834), sec. 2, pt. 3, Kindle.

¹²⁶ Ostrander, "Prayer and Revivals," 334.

will gradually be introduced a revival of religion, and a disposition to greater engagedness in the worship and service of God, amongst his professing people.”¹²⁷

The above only represents a minute portion of the revival that took place in the mid-eighteenth century. Others who preached during this time include David Brainerd, missionary to the native Americans, George Whitefield, and John Wesley. Each sharing and relying on the power of prayer to spread the gospel.¹²⁸ They prayed for the salvation of souls and for the out-pouring of God’s Spirit to save people. As history attests, God clearly initiates revivals through pastors and evangelists who preach the Word of God. However, through their vigilant watch in prayer, the men named above sensed that God was working to bring about revival.

These accounts from past preachers serve as an example for plateauing or dying congregations today. God desires his people to rely on him through prayer. The reliance on prayer before and during the Great Awakening helped churches see the power of God to bring revival and churches today may tap the same power to bring about revitalization.

The Second Great Awakening. In the wake of the Revolutionary War, the state of religion in America declines again due to the influence of the Enlightenment. People look to reason and tend toward deism rather than Christianity.¹²⁹ Within the

¹²⁷ Edwards, *An Humble Attempt*, sec. 2, pt. 2, Kindle.

¹²⁸ Davis, *When the Fire Fell*, 17. David Brainerd demonstrated his sincerity to prayer, writing, “When you cease from labour, fill up your time in reading, meditation, and prayer: and while your hands are laboring, let your heart be employed, as much as possible, in divine thoughts.” David Brainerd, *The Journal of David Brainerd* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1802), 276. Brainerd also wrote, “Prayer was so sweet an exercise to me, that I knew not how to cease, lest I should lose the spirit of prayer. Felt no disposition to eat or drink, for the sake of the pleasure of it, but only to support my nature, and fit me for divine service. Could not be content without a very particular mention of a great number of dear friends at the throne of grace; as also the particular circumstances of many, so far as they were known.” David Brainerd, *The Life and Diary of David Brainerd with Notes and Reflections by Jonathan Edwards* (n.p., 1749), 104-5, Kindle.

¹²⁹ Towns and Porter, *Ten Greatest Revivals Ever*, 69.

church, there seems to be a loss of focus on the real reason for the church's existence, as evidenced by low spiritual conditions. For instance, Methodists argued over polity, Episcopalians decried "ecclesiastical despotism, and the Presbyterians argued over the correct origin of hymns to sing."¹³⁰ However, during this time, there remained a "strong religious element—in large part the fruit of the Great Awakening."¹³¹ Ministers in New England encouraged their colleagues to reread Edward's *An Humble Attempt* and urged them to "organize prayer societies for revival."¹³² Methodists in the South saw a decline in the culture and formed groups to pray, fast, and seek repentance. Cane Ridge, Kentucky experienced an outbreak of revival as James McGready led his congregation to pray for revival. McGready wrote, "A remarkable spirit of prayer and supplication was given to Christians, and a sensible, heartfelt burden of the dreadful state of sinners out of Christ."¹³³

Throughout this time, the constant message to promote revival came in the form of unified prayer as churches asked God to pour out his Spirit. One such account came from the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1803:

That most of the accounts of revivals communicated to them stated that the institution of prayer societies, or seasons of special prayer to God, generally preceded the remarkable display of Divine grace with which our land has been recently favored. In most case, preparatory to signal effusions of the Holy Spirit, the

¹³⁰ Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism: 1750-1858* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 116.

¹³¹ Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, 114. Thomas Paine wrote two influential books (*Rights of Man* and *Age of Reason*) which both achieved great popularity. Paine claims that he went through the Bible and essentially dismantled it by way of reason; in essence, he declared the Bible debunked. Thomas Paine, *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Moncure Daniel Conway (n.p.: n.p., 1796), 187, Kindle. William Wilberforce, in speaking with American ambassador John Jay, believed that America lost its spirit of religion. Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce* (London: n.p., 1838), 2:57. However, Murray believes this to be an exaggeration on Wilberforce's part. Murray believes the decline of Christianity to be exaggerated in order to emphasize the scale and magnitude of the Second Great Awakening; but, he argues, "the Second Great Awakening requires no such distortion of history in order to justify its title." Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, 115-16.

¹³² Ostrander, "Prayer and Revivals," 334.

¹³³ Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, 130.

pious have been stirred up to cry fervently and importunately that God would appear and vindicate his own cause.¹³⁴

Millar agrees and believes that when people pray to God, they ask God to deliver on his promises.¹³⁵

One noteworthy phenomenon of the Second Great Awakening comes from college campuses. As Murray writes, “The revivals, far from being merely emotional events which influenced the uneducated, made a profound impression on almost all the main centres of learning.”¹³⁶ For instance, in 1787, four students at Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia decide to pray. Timothy Beougher argues that this very event begins the Second Great Awakening.¹³⁷ When discovered, the college’s president invites the students to pray with him, and the results were dramatic: more than half of the students on campus attend the prayer gathering in the president’s parlor.¹³⁸ Several other campuses experience revival like Hampden-Sydney, including Dartmouth, Princeton, and Yale.¹³⁹

One of the main preachers of the Second Great Awakening was Charles G. Finney, who was educated as a lawyer, saved in the early 1820s, and then called by God to preach. Utilizing his acquired legal skills and excellent oratory skills to argue God’s Word, Finney delivers powerful sermons.¹⁴⁰ Concerning revival and prayer, Finney wrote:

¹³⁴ Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, 130.

¹³⁵ Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord*, 23.

¹³⁶ Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, 132.

¹³⁷ Timothy K. Beougher, “Student Awakenings in Historical Perspective,” in *Accounts of Campus Revival*, ed. Lyle W. Dorsett and Timothy K. Beougher (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1995), 35.

¹³⁸ Beougher, “Student Awakenings in Historical Perspective,” 35.

¹³⁹ Beougher, “Student Awakenings in Historical Perspective,” 35-36. For further study, see McDow and Reid, *Firefall 2.0*, 210-12.

¹⁴⁰ Towns and Porter, *Ten Greatest Revivals Ever*, 99.

A revival may be expected when Christians have a spirit of prayer for a revival. That is, when they pray as if their hearts were set upon a revival. Sometimes Christians are not engaged in prayer for a revival, not even when they are warm in prayer. Their minds are upon something else; they are praying for something else—the salvation of the heathen and the like—and not for a revival among themselves. But when they feel the want of a revival, they pray for it; they feel for their own families and neighborhoods, and pray for them as if they could not be denied. What constitutes a spirit of prayer? Is it many prayers and warm words? No. Prayer is the state of the heart. The spirit of prayer is a state of continual desire and anxiety of mind for the salvation of sinners.¹⁴¹

Finney relied heavily on prayer, sometimes spending hours in prayer—oftentimes even alone in the woods.¹⁴² Indeed, he believed prayer to be the means God used to begin revival and effect change.¹⁴³

The Second Great Awakening began when people prayed, resulting in thousands of people converting to Christianity.¹⁴⁴ Ministers prayed and prompted the people under their care to pray. Through the efforts of prayer, revival came to America even in the face of the challenges of reason and deism. Churches today face similar hurdles to overcome; however, Christians still possess the gift of prayer just as Finney and the churches of the Second Great Awakening did. Dying churches must look to the results of unified prayer as depicted in Second Great Awakening and then enact the same measures to prompt revitalization today.

The Layman’s Revival: (1857-1858). The Layman’s Revival began in New York City with a prayer meeting initiated by Jeremiah Lanphier on September 23,

15. ¹⁴¹ Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (New York: Fleming H. Revel, 1868),

¹⁴² Duesel, *Revival Fire*, 94.

¹⁴³ Ostrander, “Prayer and Revivals,” 335.

¹⁴⁴ McDow and Reid, *Firefall 2.0*, 225. According to McDow and Reid, “From 1800-1830 Presbyterians grew fourfold, from about 40,000 to 173,329. Baptists experienced dramatic growth, from 872 churches and 64,975 members in 1795 to 7,299 churches and 517, 523 members in 1836. The Methodist Church . . . [experienced] phenomenal growth in the Second Great Awakening resulted in 1,323,361 members by 1850.”

1857.¹⁴⁵ A former businessman, Lanphier organized a one-hour prayer meeting for business men during their lunch breaks.¹⁴⁶ Six attended the first meeting, but within a few weeks, the number of men exceeded the capacity of the original room, thus requiring a larger venue. As the newspapers reported on this event, news spread to other cities across the country, which, in turn, began holding similar meetings for the sole purpose of prayer.¹⁴⁷ One such place used for the ever-growing noon prayer gatherings was Burton's Theater in New York.¹⁴⁸ Some estimates show the attendance of the New York meeting being close to three-thousand people.¹⁴⁹ One thing for certain happened during this time—God saved thousands of people, all precipitated by one man's inviting people to pray during the lunch hour.

Dwight L. Moody, influenced by the Layman's Revival, used his gift of planning and organization to promote revival through prayer. Moody sent teams to organize prayer meetings weeks before he came to preach in a city.¹⁵⁰ Subsequently, Moody then led the one-hour prayer meetings before he preached in the revival gathering.

¹⁴⁵ Kathryn Teresa Long, *The Revival of 1857-58: Interpreting and American Religious Awakening* (New York: Oxford Press, 1998), 13; Walter Hampel, "Prayer Revivals and the Third Great Awakening," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 31, no. 1 (January 2007): 31. Also referred to as the Third Great Awakening, the revival that began in 1857 benefitted from the Second Great Awakening. Lanphier converted to Christ under the preaching of Charles Finney and was commissioned as a lay missionary to the Dutch North Church located at Fulton and Williams Streets in New York City. Lanphier petitioned God to reveal his will to him so that he could reach lost souls. Lanphier went out for a walk and the idea appeared in his mind to begin a prayer time for businessmen at the noon hour when many sought rest, food, and drink. To advertise his prayer meeting, Lanphier handed out flyers telling the time and place for his prayer meeting. The first day of the prayer meeting, Lanphier sat alone for thirty minutes until six men arrived. From that day on, the prayer meeting swelled with men praying during the noon hour. Walter Hempel cites the bank crash of October 8, 1857, as a cause for the increase. Hampel, "Prayer Revivals and the Third Great Awakening," 30-32. However, as noted earlier, God by his Holy Spirit moves people to revival.

¹⁴⁶ Kathryn Teresa Long, "Revival of 1857-1858," in *Encyclopedia of Religious Revivals in America*, ed. Michael McClymond (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 362.

¹⁴⁷ Towns and Porter, *Ten Greatest Revivals Ever*, 125.

¹⁴⁸ Hampel, "Prayer Revivals and the Third Great Awakening," 32.

¹⁴⁹ Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, 343; cf. Towns and Porter, *Ten Greatest Revivals Ever*, 125, who report six thousand.

¹⁵⁰ Ostrander, "Prayer and Revivals," 336.

Moody believed that a key to revival lay in “a deeper work among God’s believing people” and thought best to preach only to professing Christians in order to promote “a higher standard of life in the church of God.”¹⁵¹ The mid-day prayer session served as a base for the evening evangelistic services.¹⁵²

The Layman’s Revival serves as yet another reminder that revival comes about by the will of God. In addition, however, God desires that his people pray, longing for revival and the conversion of souls. In the late 1800s, God led one man to invite people to come pray together during their lunch hour, asking God to bring revival. This may prompt laymen in churches to form groups for the sole purpose of prayer, asking that God would intervene in the situation of a dying church and send his Spirit to bring healing and move hearts.

Billy Graham. No analysis of the effects of prayer on revival would be complete without looking at the ministry of Billy Graham, the most widely known religious leader of the twentieth century.¹⁵³ Graham preached revival crusades all over the world; however, his address during the Los Angeles Crusade of 1949 provides special clarity concerning the present discussion on the role of prayer and revitalization.

In this address, Graham detailed the decline of the nation by citing statistics that demonstrated the moral decay of the country. In the Los Angeles sermon, Graham preached on 1 Chronicles 7:14, highlighting God’s specific conditions for a people to experience revival: need and desire, repentance, prayer, and faith.¹⁵⁴ Of the four, the first and third are germane to the discussion.

¹⁵¹ Moody, *Prevailing Prayer*, 31-32.

¹⁵² Ostrander, “Prayer and Revivals,” 336.

¹⁵³ Clowney, “Billy Graham on the 1949 Los Angeles Crusade,” 288.

¹⁵⁴ Billy Graham, “We Need Revival,” in *Revival in Our Time: The Story of Billy Graham*

In relation to the first condition, Graham asked his audience if they wanted revival and argued that while revival and change are possible, they come only if God's people met his conditions. Graham expressed fidelity to God's Word, believing "that God is true to his Word, and that He must rain righteousness upon us if we meet his conditions."¹⁵⁵ As to Graham's third condition—that is, "revival never comes except in answer to prayer," Graham related a story of thirteen thousand prayer meetings held in Augusta, Georgia, prior to the arrival of the crusade.¹⁵⁶ He believed that prayer means unity across the spectrum of denominations.¹⁵⁷ Finally, Graham enumerated the benefits of revival: blessings, repentant sinners, churches desiring to serve God, and packed prayer meetings to name a few.¹⁵⁸ One thing is clear in regard to Graham's address, the man deeply relied on prayer in the same manner as Moody did in the 1850s.

Conclusion. Jonathan Edwards wrote *An Humble Attempt* as an exegesis of Zechariah 8:20-23. In this passage, the prophet describes the coming together of people from different cities and nations to entreat and call upon the Lord. Edwards writes how this prophecy of Zechariah 8:20-22 "parallels many other prophecies that speak of an extraordinary spirit of prayer preceding that glorious day of revival and advancement of the Church's peace and prosperity."¹⁵⁹ Edwards truly believed that petitioning the Lord in

Evangelistic Campaigns (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen Press, 1950), 58.

¹⁵⁵ Graham, "We Need Revival," 59.

¹⁵⁶ Graham, "We Need Revival," 59.

¹⁵⁷ McClymond, "1949 Los Angeles Crusade," 290. Hampel agrees with this sentiment. Hampel, "Prayer Revivals and the Third Great Awakening," 39.

¹⁵⁸ McClymond, "1949 Los Angeles Crusade," 290. Of interest, Stuart Hamblin interviewed Graham on his radio program the morning of the first day of the crusade. Hamblin told his audience that he planned to attend that evening and he did; however, he left the crusade angry over the message preached by Graham. A few days later, both Hamblin and his wife, Suzie, gave their hearts to Christ. Graham prayed during this time about extending the crusade and saw the conversion of Hamblin as a sign to do so. Towns and Porter, *Ten Greatest Revivals Ever*, 156.

¹⁵⁹ Edwards, *An Humble Attempt*, sec. 2, pt.1, Kindle.

prayer could revive the country that Edwards saw falling into decline. But Edwards is not alone; the belief that prayer precedes all revival can be seen in all the revivals reviewed above. Time after time, people sensed a need for revival by observing the surrounding culture and the failing morality of the society in general, and upon seeing such things, they gathered together in prayer to petition God to bring revival.

As already noted, revival does not equate to revitalization; however, common threads exist. First, congregants must perceive the degeneration of their churches as attendance drops, facilities fall into disrepair, and tithing decreases to critical levels. Second, as Graham preached almost seventy years ago, dying churches must see the need for and desire revitalization, pray that God would send his Spirit, repent from sin, and faithfully trust that God will accomplish the revitalization. Lastly, just as historical revivals began with prayer, so too must dying faith communities today reach out to God, asking him to revitalize their churches. Francis Chan summarizes the imperative for churches to engage in the practice of prayer when he writes, “Would you say that prayer plays any meaningful role in the life of your church? If prayer isn’t vital for your church, then your church isn’t vital. . . . If you can accomplish your church’s mission without daily, passionate prayer, then your mission is insufficient and your church is irrelevant.”¹⁶⁰ To be vital in their communities and genuinely demonstrate reliance on God, churches must engage him in regular and fervent prayer to bring about the revitalization of their church.

A Pattern for Revival by Prayer

Lloyd-Jones on prayer for revival. In *Revival*, Martin Lloyd-Jones outlines the process in which the universal church of Christ experiences revival. He does so by exegeting particular portions of Scripture, specifically, the Israelites and their worship of

¹⁶⁰ Francis Chan, *Letters to the Church* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2001), 62.

the golden calf, punishment by God, and subsequent return to YHWH. In Exodus 32–33, Lloyd-Jones observes three stages of the Israelite revival. First, the people recognized the situation in which they found themselves.¹⁶¹ God declared to Moses that he (God) would send his angel before him (Moses) and the Israelite people to drive out the inhabitants; however, God would not accompany Israel because of their being a stiff-necked people.¹⁶² Exodus 33:4 reveals the reaction of the people after hearing from the Lord: “When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned.” In light of their present circumstances, the people realized their sin and “God’s pronouncement, God’s judgment upon it.”¹⁶³ Likewise, the church today must realize its current position. As Lloyd-Jones writes, “There is not hope for true prayer and intercession for revival unless we realise that there is a need.”¹⁶⁴ Supporting the deductions of Lloyd-Jones, William B. Sprague writes, “They [people] wake up to a sense of neglected obligations.”¹⁶⁵ Does the church realize that a need exists for revival? Churches in need of revitalization must perceive the same need as the Israelites did—the lack of God’s presence. Has God removed his blessings from declining churches due to sin or a lack of faithfulness in reaching the adjacent community? Lloyd-Jones points his readers to Psalm 106:15, which says, “And He [God] gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul” (NKJV). The

¹⁶¹ Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 153.

¹⁶² Something to consider, the Israelites declared their fidelity to God and his law in Exod 24, which included the instructions given to them in Exod 20 to refrain from making gods of silver and gold. God called Moses to the mountain, and he remained there forty days (Exod 24:18). Due to the impatience of the Israelites, although committing to God (Exod 20), pressed Aaron to make gods for them (Exod 32). The Israelites went back to the former paradigm that they experienced in Egypt even though God performed several miracles in their midst (Exod 5-12 for miracles performed by God in Egypt), including parting of the Red Sea, stopping the Egyptian army (Exod 14), and providing manna from heaven and water from a rock (Exod 16).

¹⁶³ Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 153.

¹⁶⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 155.

¹⁶⁵ Sprague, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 6.

question, then, that churches must ask is “Is God in [our] midst?”¹⁶⁶ Even when churches prosper outwardly through prosperity and affluences, they must ask the same question.¹⁶⁷ The Israelites desired God’s presence to go into the promised land (Exod 33:4), the Psalmist pants and thirsts after God (Ps 42:1-2), and the Apostle Paul desired to know Christ and his power (Phil 3:10).¹⁶⁸ Do churches today desire God’s presence as evidenced by these three examples? Lloyd-Jones writes,

Christian people, I am not asking whether you are living a good life. I am not asking whether you are happy. I am not asking whether you read your Bible, or pray. I am not asking whether you are active in church work, or some form of Christian activity. What I am asking you is this—Do you know God? Is he with you? Is he in your life? Is he in the camp? Or are you travelling on, with God, as it were, somewhere in the distance, giving strength and power by his angel and by his leader?¹⁶⁹

To any church, is God in its midst?¹⁷⁰ Those that do have God in their midst experience fullness of their soul, not leanness. Churches in need of revitalization must recognize these deficiencies—is God in the church’s midst, or do Christians have lean souls?

According to Lloyd-Jones, the second stage of revival comes in the later part of Exodus 33:4 (“no one put on his ornaments” ESV), which demonstrates the Israelites’ repentance from the sin of using their ornaments to make the golden calf. Lloyd-Jones writes, “Yes, it was these ornaments that had led to their downfall. These were like the things out of which the golden calf had been made. And they hated the very thought of the whole thing. And God says, ‘Strip yourselves of them.’ And they stripped

¹⁶⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 158.

¹⁶⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 158.

¹⁶⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 158-59.

¹⁶⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 159.

¹⁷⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 158.

themselves.”¹⁷¹ Lloyd-Jones relates this “stripping off” of the ornaments to the concept of repentance within the church—that is, congregants realize the sin of unfaithfulness and repent. Do churches today truly understand this spiritual practice? Have declining churches examined themselves to see if they resemble “stiff-necked people” and to “removed their ornaments”?¹⁷²

Prayer and intercession round out the final step in revival, according to Lloyd-Jones, who writes, “The prayer for revival is, ultimately, a prayer based upon a concern for the manifestation of the glory of God, and remember that this can be individually as well as collectively.”¹⁷³ Lloyd-Jones points his readers to Exodus 33:18: in his intercession for the people of Israel, Moses speaks boldly, reasons well, and petitions God specifically; subsequently, God grants his request to go with them to the promised land.¹⁷⁴ However, Moses desires not only the presence of the Lord; “He wants the living God himself,” exclaiming, “Show me your glory!”¹⁷⁵ Likewise, the missing element in the church today lies with these faith communities desiring activities and results yet lacking a desire to know God in an intimate way. Members of declining churches must pray, asking God to make himself known in the church. As Lloyd-Jones writes in regard to the definition of revival, “Do you want know what is revival? . . . It is just this glimpse of God, of the glory of God, passing by.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 160.

¹⁷² McDow and Reid see repentance in the drinking of the gold-laced water. The Israelites just departed Egypt, and to the Egyptians, drinking the ground-up gold rose to an abominable level because “it was the consumption of their god.” McDow and Reid, *Firefall 2.0*, 28. Therefore, the Israelites demonstrated genuine repentance by drinking the gold tainted water (Exod 32:20). McDow and Reid further point to the leadership skills of Moses and, more importantly, to the power that Moses had through God: “Not even Moses, as a mere human being, could have forced a population of that magnitude to do that which was so abhorrent” (28). These events further testified to the repentance of the Israelites.

¹⁷³ Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 216.

¹⁷⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 195-97.

¹⁷⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 215.

¹⁷⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 220.

Lloyd-Jones points the church of Christ to the prayer uttered by Moses in the golden calf incident found in Exodus 32–33. Moses begs God to be amongst the people. Likewise, churches in need of revitalization must pursue the same course of action through prayer—they need to realize the need for revival, repent from their sin and unfaithfulness, and seek God through prayer and intercession. Martin Lloyd-Jones is not the only one who see steps to revival, however. Other authors do as well.

McDow and Reid on revival. McDow and Reid also point to steps that precede revival, overlapping portions of Lloyd-Jones’s proposal. Additionally, these authors ask the question about the commencement of revival and point to men who led during times of revival. For instance, McDow and Reid point to Jonathan Edwards, who “believed Christians are passive beneficiaries in God’s movement,”¹⁷⁷ whereas “Charles G. Finney taught the opposite: revival is ‘a purely philosophical result of the right use of constituted means.’”¹⁷⁸ Either way, McDow and Reid believe that God uses both divine sovereignty and human responsibility to ignite the fire of revival by the Holy Spirit. They write, “He is waiting for Christians. Believers have not because we ask not.”¹⁷⁹ Could this be true within the walls of declining churches? If so, how can churches initiate revival?

According to McDow and Reid “no set formula exists to create revival”; however, the authors do point to steps that preceded the revivals of the past.¹⁸⁰ First, revival begins with a recognition of need by believers who desire a renewal and have a

¹⁷⁷ McDow and Reid, *Firefall 2.0*, 15; see also Jonathan Edwards, “Thoughts on the Revival of Religion in New England,” in *The Complete Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Sereno E. Dwight (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1834), passim.

¹⁷⁸ McDow and Reid, *Firefall 2.0*, 15; Charles Finney, *Lectures on Revival of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1993), 5.

¹⁷⁹ McDow and Reid, *Firefall 2.0*, 15.

¹⁸⁰ McDow and Reid, *Firefall 2.0*.

sense of desperation.¹⁸¹ Second, revival progresses when believers repent from sin. McDow and Reid argue that Christians often repent from the sins that cause them misery, but they do not, however, come completely clean before God, thus allowing presumptuous sins to remain in their lives.¹⁸² Third and going hand-in-hand with the previous step, revival continues to progress due to believers' obedience to God. While repentance in step two refers to an actual change of mind, agreeing with God and his Word, obedience to God in step three refers to the actual change in behavior. The final step that preceded past revivals is the exercising of one's of faith in God. McDow and Reid argue that these steps to revival coincide with steps to salvations, stating, "The gospel that saves also revives."¹⁸³

Both Lloyd-Jones and McDow and Reid overlap in some areas of their steps and stages to revival; however, there remains a few differences between the two (see table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of Lloyd-Jones and McDow and Reid concerning their steps to revival

<i>Lloyd-Jones</i>	<i>McDow and Reid</i>
Realization of Position	Recognition of Need
Repentance	Repentance from Sin
Prayer and Intercession	Obedience to God
	Exercise of Faith
Revival	Revival

¹⁸¹ McDow and Reid, *Firefall 2.0*. McDow and Reid's first and second stages align with Lloyd-Jones's first and second stages.

¹⁸² McDow and Reid, *Firefall 2.0*, 15. Martin Lloyd-Jones gives a robust description of repentance and would agree with the words of McDow and Reid. He provides the example of a fellow who claims to be a fool, agrees that he acted foolishly, suffered for his actions, yet moves on from the action. Lloyd-Jones calls this remorse and claims that repentance "is a much deeper thing." He then asks the question, "Do we ever think of what our sin is like in the sight of God?" Lloyd-Jones concludes his discussion on repentance, stating, "Nothing matters except my relationship to God." For a more comprehensive picture of Martin Lloyd-Jones thinking on this subject, see Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 155-59.

¹⁸³ McDow and Reid, *Firefall 2.0*, 15.

Synthesizing the models from Lloyd-Jones and McDow and Reid brings clarity to the process of revival.

A Synthesized View of the Cycle of Revival

Figure 2 presents a synthesized view for church revival based on Exodus 32–33. Just as the Israelites pressed Aaron to “make us gods who shall go before us” (Exod 32:1), likewise, churches today get their eyes off of God and onto activities that do not allow people to see the glory of the Lord passing by; therefore, just like the sin of the Israelites, God removes his presence from these people (Exod 33:3).¹⁸⁴ The people realize the predicament that sin placed them into (33:4), which prompts them to repent from sin and seek holiness once again (demonstrated by the drinking of the gold-laced water [32:20] and the removal of their ornaments [33:4-6]).¹⁸⁵ Moses initiates repentance, separation, and consecration by moving the tent of meeting outside of the camp, thus allowing the Israelites to seek the Lord as they wished (33:7-9).¹⁸⁶ This led to the Israelites obedience and worship of God (33:10).¹⁸⁷ Revival in the church begins in a similar manner.

¹⁸⁴ T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 172-74.

¹⁸⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 160; McDow and Reid, *Firefall 2.0*, 28. Alexander and Lloyd-Jones agree concerning the removing of jewelry as an act of contrition which ironically the Israelites perpetrated in their coercion of Aaron to make gods for them. Alexander, *Exodus*, 174.

¹⁸⁶ Douglas Stuart writes that due to the sin committed by the Israelites, that the relationship between God and the people changed. Instead of being in their midst, God “would no longer accompany closely. What he so far granted to them was a more distant presence, not an utter abandonment.” Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New America Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 694.

¹⁸⁷ Alexander, *Exodus*, 178.

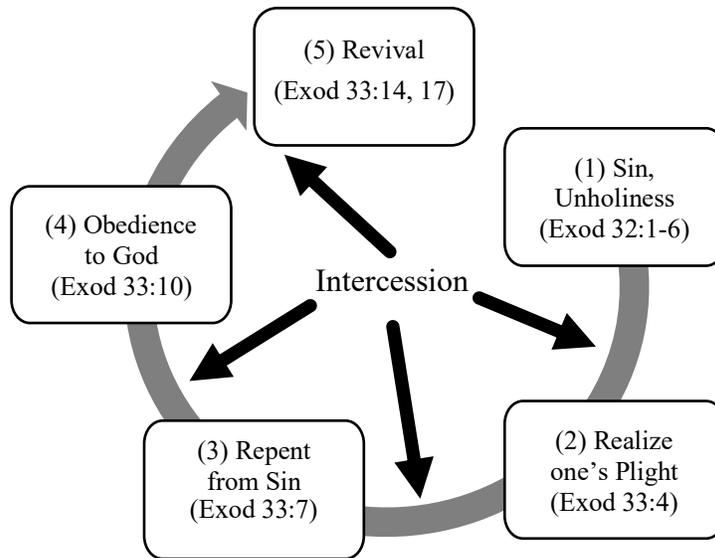


Figure 2. The cycle of revival¹⁸⁸

The flicker of revival begins with churches who do not experience God’s presence, similar to the Israelites, due to sin, unholiness, and unfaithfulness before him. (stage 1). Churches experience decline because of the accolades of past performances or the placing of their faith in something other than God (such as programs or people). These declining churches may be in unrepentant sin before the holy God. For the Israelites, this became apparent when God told Moses that he would not accompany the Israelites to the promised land and then withdrew his presence from among the people. For the church, this may become apparent by a declining membership, a lack of funds for ongoing financial needs, or a waning influence within the surrounding community. Next, people recognize the position of the church, and as people of practicality, congregants just “do something” without properly diagnosing the problem so that they can promote revival (stage 2).¹⁸⁹ Concerning the diagnosis of the church’s problem, Lloyd-Jones

¹⁸⁸ This hybrid-diagram combines Lloyd-Jones’s three stages of revival and McDow and Reid’s four steps to revival.

¹⁸⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 11. The idea of “just do something” maybe thought of as “action

writes, “It is sheer madness and waste of energy to attempt any kind of treatment until we first establish an accurate diagnosis.”¹⁹⁰

Once the people properly diagnose their plight, a journey towards repentance begins. Moses moved the tent of meeting outside the camp, demonstrating a separation from the sin committed by the Israelites. Concerning revival in the church, Lloyd-Jones states, “One man, or a group of men . . . feel the burden so much that they are led to do something about it.”¹⁹¹ He makes a simple point—the potential for revival comes from one person or a few people. As Moses led the way, others joined him (Exod 33:7).¹⁹² Just as the Israelites in the camp repented from their sins, so too must congregations repent from sin both individually and corporately, asking the Lord to return to the “camp”—so to speak (stage 3).¹⁹³

without thoughtful consideration,” coming in the form of new programs; not eliminating old, inefficient, or ineffective programs. Pastors may also be seen as the reason for the decline of the church, precipitating the elimination of a pastor for the ills the church experiences.

¹⁹⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 11. Lloyd-Jones exegetes Mark 9:28-29 in regard to properly diagnosing issues with the church. In this portion of Mark’s Gospel, the disciples fail to exorcise a demon from a young boy; therefore, the boy’s father brings him to Jesus. The disciples give excuses, but Jesus corrects them and plainly states, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer” (v. 29). Lloyd-Jones focuses his attention on the word “kind” uttered by Jesus, implying that several “kinds” of demons exist. Subsequently, Lloyd-Jones uses this passage to help the reader understand that the issues with church decline does not reside in one issue; rather, a proper diagnosis must be discerned with prayer and fasting so that a proper cure can be provided. Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 10-11. James R. Edwards further writes that Jesus called his disciples to “tasks beyond their abilities, and the fact that the tasks surpass their abilities is evidence that the ministry is Christ’s, not theirs.” James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 281.

¹⁹¹ Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 163. Evidence from past revivals show this to be true: Jeremiah Lanphier and the Layman’s Revival (1857-1858); James McQuilken and the Northern Ireland Revival. Recognizing Lloyd Jones wrote a number of years ago, the act of praying for revival is not limited by gender. Women contribute to the beginning of revival too.

¹⁹² The same may be said about Jonathan Edwards organizing societies in his church to pray prior to the Great awakening, or similarly along with Jeremiah Lanphier organizing a prayer meeting during the lunch hour to usher in the Layman’s Revival. Revivals started with one person (or a handful of people) seeing problems and submitting to the Lord in a posture of prayer. So too can congregations in need of revitalization begin small prayer services, calling out to God to heal their churches.

¹⁹³ Mark Clifton and Kenneth Priest, *Rubicons of Revitalization*, 28. Clifton and Priest call for churches to deeply repent from their sins both privately and corporately, allowing God to forgive their sins (1 John 1:9).

Repentance led the Israelites towards obedience to God: “And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door” (Exod 33:10). God’s image-bearers show obedience by the proper worship of the Lord; likewise, the church does too. Obedience also extends to adherence to the Scripture, as James reminds believers, “Be doers of the word” (Jas 1:22)—that is, “a doer who acts” (1:25).¹⁹⁴ Christ-followers obey Scripture in order to pursue conformity to Christ and receive God’s blessings (stage 4).¹⁹⁵

In turn, God’s presence returned to the Israelite camp, and God declared that his presence would accompany the Israelites to the promised land and that he would be their God (Exod 33:14).¹⁹⁶ God grants the request from the petitioning Moses, saying, “This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight” (33:17).¹⁹⁷ In the same manner, the return of God’s presence to churches means congregations returning to God (stage 5).

For churches facing revitalization, this synthesis provides a tool to analyze the current situation and provide insight to solutions. Although presented in a circular fashion, depicting sin and unholiness as the root cause for the removal of God’s presence, this does not necessarily imply overt, rampant sin in a congregation. A church may be unfaithful to God by not adapting to the surrounding culture of the community where God planted the church even though it maintains fidelity to the gospel of Christ. For example, this could look like a predominantly white congregation which finds itself in a community predominantly comprised of African-Americans but is not reaching out to the

¹⁹⁴ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 53.

¹⁹⁵ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*.

¹⁹⁶ Edwards, *Exodus*, 701-2.

¹⁹⁷ That is, God granted Moses’s request to accompany the Israelites into the promised land.

community at large. Once again, God placed the church in its current situation; therefore, the church must bloom where planted.

Prayer for Church Revitalization

As discussed at length above, prayer preceded the revivals of the past. If churches today seek to become healthy, vibrant, and relevant in their surrounding communities, then church revitalization must be preceded by prayer. Therefore, it is imperative that prayer be defined as it relates to the work of revitalization. Therefore, it is imperative that prayer be defined as it relates to the work of revitalization.

According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, “Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies.”¹⁹⁸ The simplest definition of prayer is “talking to God.”¹⁹⁹ However, to approach someone and talk to them means that a relationship exists between the two parties. As Graeme Goldsworthy states, “How we talk to people, and what we say, will to a large extent be governed by how well we know them.”²⁰⁰ J. Gary Millar simply defines prayer as calling on the name of the LORD.²⁰¹ For Clowney, creatures respond to God through prayer by knowing his name.²⁰² Richard Longenecker describes prayer as “the lifeblood of religion, the indispensable factor in every form of piety and faith.”²⁰³ From these biblical scholars, prayer means a relationship with God necessary for life.

¹⁹⁸ Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* (n.p.: SMK, 2014), Question 98, Kindle.

¹⁹⁹ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Prayer and the Knowledge of God: What the Whole Bible Teaches* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 15.

²⁰⁰ Goldsworthy, *Prayer and the Knowledge of God*, 18.

²⁰¹ Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord*, 17.

²⁰² Clowney, “A Biblical Theology of Prayer,” 136-37.

²⁰³ Richard N. Longenecker, ed., *Into God’s Presence: Prayer in the New Testament*,

Crump's Five Conclusions

In *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, David Crump presents conclusions from his extensive study on prayer, providing churches with an opportunity to understand both how prayer relates to a believer's life and the benefits of revitalization situations. These conclusions, in turn, yield a solid foundation concerning prayer.

First, Christians pray to a personal God. Crump refers to God as the supreme person—not as a supreme being—because of his personal nature and his desire for a personal relationship with his creatures. In regard to prayer, many times people break the process down to a mechanistic formula instead of a conversation between two persons.²⁰⁴

Second, a personal God is willing to be moved. Because God desires a personal relationship with his creatures, he willingly listens to their petitions. God, in time, brings his will to fruition when he restores the created order as he intended. As Christians, people look to God to fulfill their prayers, but they do not fully understand the entire picture against the back drop of eternity.²⁰⁵ The fact that God denied the petitions from his own Son in Gethsemane and from Paul concerning his “thorn in the flesh” reminds petitioners today that God reserves the right to say no for the fulfillment of his ultimate purposes.²⁰⁶

Third, prayer can change those who pray. Prayer always changes the one praying to God; it serves as a means of finding “strength, peace, solace, faith, direction,

McMaster New Testament Studies (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), xi.

²⁰⁴ Crump, *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, 284-89.

²⁰⁵ Crump, *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, 15. Crump discusses the reality of unanswered prayers and provides four possible answers to unanswered prayer: (1) questioning the sincerity of God's concern; (2) doubting the value of prayer altogether; (3) silently accusing oneself as an unfaithful failure that lacks stamina, faith, or both; or (4) weaving together some spiritually tenuous fabric made of all three. Crump exposes these as lies from the enemy. Crump, *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, 15.

²⁰⁶ Crump, *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, 289.

and contentment.”²⁰⁷ Too often, as humans, people want to engage the emotional component of necessary change. In other words, humans want to feel the change so as to make it seem real. Vincent Brümmer refers to this as the “therapeutic sanctifying value of prayer.”²⁰⁸ Crump expands on this concept, writing, “The praying person receives an overflow of spiritual benefits that surpass, or even appear totally unrelated to, the specifics of any request. Prayer becomes a resource for meeting the existential necessities of strength, peace, solace, faith, direction and contentment.”²⁰⁹ However, prayer to God means that Christians (1) understand God’s will for their lives in a more meaningful way, and (2) receive encouragement and comfort in times of need.²¹⁰ John Calvin also reminds us that prayer changes the person praying, writing that God “ordained [prayer] not so much for his sake but for ours.”²¹¹

Fourth, Christians pray between times. Christians pray about this life and in the present time; however, prayer must also be oriented in the light of eternity. Thus, prayer concerns an already/not yet reality. Indeed, Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come,” but he also taught them to ask God for their daily bread (Matt 6:10-11). And so, the church finds itself fixed in an interim period, waiting on the restoration of all things in Christ Jesus but not without responsibilities to dutifully carry out in the here in now.

Fifth and finally, power appears through suffering. There is no doubt that suffering exists in this world. Paul chronicled numerous hardships at certain points in his

²⁰⁷ Crump, *Knocking on Heaven’s Door*, 296.

²⁰⁸ Vincent Brümmer, *What Are We Doing When We Pray? A Philosophical Inquiry* (London: Trinity Press International, 1984), 16-28.

²⁰⁹ Crump, *Knocking on Heaven’s Door*, 298.

²¹⁰ Crump *Knocking on Heaven’s Door*, 298.

²¹¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. J. T. McNeill, trans. F. L. Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 1:852;

life (2 Cor 11:16-29).²¹² Jesus demonstrates power through suffering when he prays in the garden of Gethsemane asking the Father to remove “this cup from me” (Luke 22:42); however, the Father allows the suffering of Jesus on the cross and raises him in power from the grave. Many times, believers pray through hardships, desiring miraculous interventions. Ultimately, “the principal evidence of God’s power is not seen in the deliverance from discomfort, but our Spirit-inspired ability to call him Abba” and to know that the suffering Christians experience is nothing compared to the joy that will be experienced once they are united with Christ in glory (Rom 8:15-18).²¹³

To understand Crump’s conclusions concerning prayer in light of revitalization, God wants the church to thrive, grow, and reach the nations and community with his gospel. God cares about the feelings of the people who may have been hurt by former pastors at the church.²¹⁴ Since God wants to hear his children’s prayers, he invites them to ask him to heal their broken, dying churches. The church cannot receive unless the church asks (Luke 11:9-10). Oftentimes in the case of prayer, the hearts of the people praying change. With such change comes an opportunity to see the situation differently and an openness to reevaluate presently held positions, which, in turn, leads to a change of heart towards revitalization. Churches look to glorify God and ask him to bring his kingdom to fruition now and in his own way. Finally, the pain and suffering that churches experience in times of decline are meant to mold and shape the church into what God intends for it to be.

²¹² Crump, *Knocking on Heaven’s Door*, 297.

²¹³ Crump, *Knocking on Heaven’s Door*, 303.

²¹⁴ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 45.

Conclusion

This chapter examined three issues: church revitalization, organizational culture, and prayer. The historical examination showed that revival began as individuals or small groups prayed, asking God to revive their churches again. Can the same be said concerning the revitalization of a church? Churches within the Southern Baptist Convention continue to decline. Martin Lloyd-Jones predicted this decline a number of years ago when he writes, “Look at the decline in the membership of the church, attendance at Sunday Schools, [and] attendance in church services,” and he was right.²¹⁵

A review of literature reveals that, time and again, revival arrives when people realize the poor state of the church and begin to pray for God and his presence to return to the church. Now, while the precedent literature connects revival to God’s people praying for revival, it does not address the connection between God’s people praying and the revitalization of their churches. The literature review also demonstrates a gap in the literature concerning revitalization and the effect prayer has on a revitalized church. A deficiency exists in the literature as to the documentation of how present-day pastors developed a prayer culture in the churches they revitalized. Chapter 3 examines the multiphase explanatory sequential mixed methodology that studies church revitalization and the methods employed by revitalizing pastors and how they changed the prayer culture of their church.

²¹⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 181. Lloyd-Jones did not predict the decline of the SBC but, rather, the church in general.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

This chapter describes the multiphase explanatory sequential mixed methods study conducted and the methodological approach used for the study. The researcher designed this study to identify the role of prayer and the development of a culture of prayer in Southern Baptist churches that experienced revitalization. The process involved three distinct phases of study: (1) an examination of Annual Church Profile (ACP) data which identifies churches that meet the criteria of a revitalized church,¹ (2) a quantitative survey which identifies churches that meet a selection criterion, and (3) qualitative interviews of selected revitalization pastors who identified prayer and prayer culture as leading factors in the revitalization of their churches.

Research Purpose

This explanatory sequential mixed methods study seeks to identify the practices of pastors leading Southern Baptist churches who developed a prayer culture that significantly contributed to revitalization of their churches.

Synopsis of Research Questions

The overall study on church revitalization consisted of seven individual projects. All seven projects employed the same research questions for the quantitative

¹ The Annual Church Profile is an annual statistical report churches voluntarily submit to the Southern Baptist Convention. The reported numbers provide an annual snapshot of the impact Southern Baptists are making through their local churches in penetrating their communities with the Gospel. Roger S. Oldham, "The Annual Church Profile: Vital and Reliable," SBC Life, June 1, 2014, <http://www.sbclife.net/article/2298/the-annual-church-profile-vital-and-reliable>.

strand of the project (i.e., phases 1 and 2). From the phase 2 survey, each researcher garnered select information concerning their specific research focus.² The qualitative strand, phase 3, of the research consisted of identifying pastors who the researcher may potentially contact for qualitative interviews. Overall, the research considered a total of five questions, three quantitative and two qualitative. Those questions are as follows:

1. What percentage of SBC churches have plateaued or are declining?
2. Of those churches that have experienced decline, what percentages have experienced revitalization?
3. Of those SBC churches experiencing revitalization, what percentage emphasized the development of a culture of prayer in the process of revitalization?
4. How did the pastor of a revitalized church develop a culture of prayer in the church?
5. How did the prayer culture change as the church experienced revitalization?

Design Overview

This study occupies one portion of a much larger study concerning church revitalization conducted by seven Doctor of Education students at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. This particular segment focused on the prayer practices of churches that experienced revitalization. In doing so, this study employed a multiphase explanatory sequential mixed methods design, where it first collected quantitative data and then explains the quantitative results with qualitative data.³ Overall, this study was divided into two strands: quantitative and qualitative (see figure 3).

² The seven research foci consisted of discipleship, evangelism, leadership, missions, prayer, and worship. After a predetermined number of surveys are returned, the seven researchers will review and analyze the data obtained from the participating pastors. For the purposes of this study, this researcher focused on those pastors who identified prayer as an important contributing factor to the revitalization effort.

³ John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011), 99. Creswell and Clark define multiphase designs as follows: “an individual researcher or team of investigators examines a problem or topic through an iteration of connected quantitative and qualitative studies that are sequentially aligned, with each new approach building on what was learned previously to address a central program objective.”

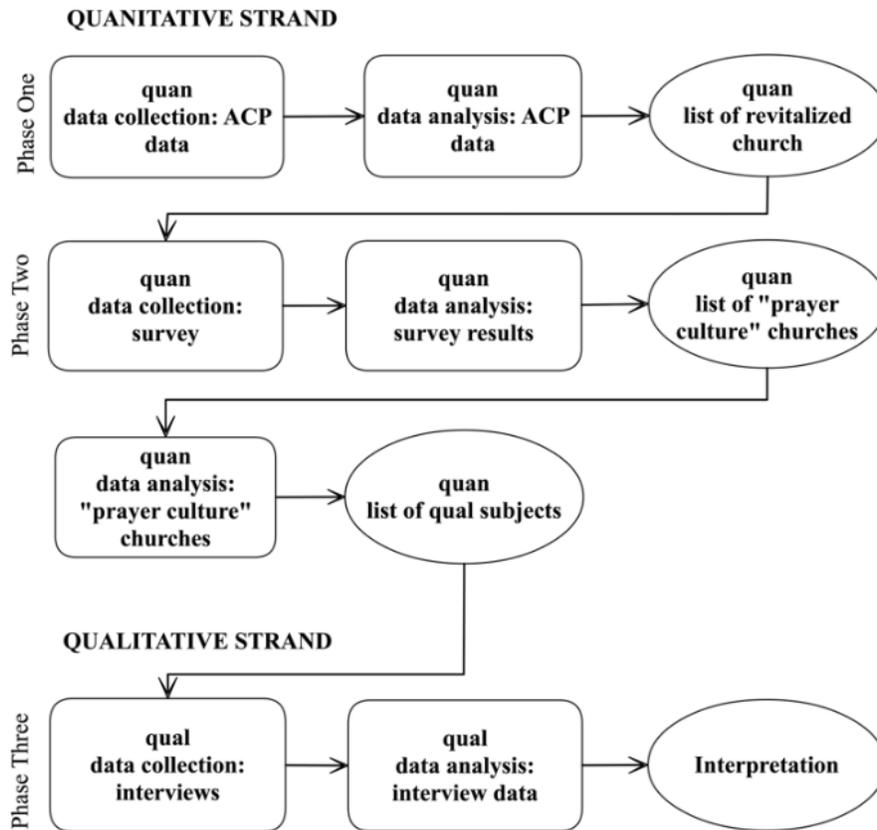


Figure 3. Explanatory sequential mixed methods design overview

Quantitative Strand

The first strand of this study collected quantitative data, “analyzes the results, and then uses the results to plan (or build on to) the second qualitative phase. . . . The overall intent of this design is to have the qualitative data help explain in more detail the initial quantitative results.”⁴ Phases 1 and 2 of the study comprised the quantitative strand. Phase 1 consisted of churches that met certain criteria, to be defined as “revitalized,” with Lifeway Research providing the data through the Annual Church Profile. Phase 2 sought to discover churches from phase 1 that identified prayer as a significant factor in the revitalization efforts. During phase 2, the research team

⁴ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014), 224.

administered a survey seeking demographic information, the role of the respondent during the revitalization, and sections related to the specific disciplines concerning church revitalization.⁵ For this study, the purpose of the survey was to determine which pastors identified prayer as an important contributing factor in the revitalization of their church.

Qualitative Strand

Finally, the qualitative strand, phase 3, sought to understand the quantitative results through a series of interviews conducted with revitalizing pastors as well as to capture how each pastor developed and changed the prayer culture in his church.⁶ The main purpose of this study resided in the desire to appreciate the role that prayer plays in revitalized churches and to determine how a culture of prayer developed under the leadership of a church's senior pastor.

The qualitative strand of the study involved the interpretation of all the data. According to Creswell and Clark, "the researcher interprets to what extent and in what ways the qualitative results explain and add insight into the quantitative results and what overall is learned in response to the study's purpose."⁷ This included analyzing the data from both the quantitative and qualitative strands and answering the research questions appropriately.

⁵ I.e., Discipleship, evangelism, leadership, missions, prayer, and worship.

⁶ As Creswell writes, The explanatory sequential mixed methods approach is a design in mixed methods that appeals to individuals with a strong quantitative background or from fields relatively new to qualitative approaches. It involves a two-phase project in which the researcher collects quantitative data in the first phase, analyzes the results, and then uses the results to plan (or build on to) the second, qualitative phase. The quantitative results typically inform the types of participants to be purposefully selected from the qualitative phase and the types of questions that will be asked of the participants. The overall intent of this design is to have the qualitative data help explain in more detail the initial quantitative results. (Creswell, *Research Design*, 224)

⁷ Creswell and Plano Clark, *Mixed Methods Research*, 84.

Interpretation

The last portion of the study involved the interpretation of the data collected and the findings. The researcher interpreted and summarized the quantitative and qualitative data, and the answered research questions. This component will “discuss to what extent and in what ways the qualitative results help to explain the quantitative results.”⁸ The next section describes the population of the research.

Research Population

The population for this study was members or affiliate churches of the Southern Baptist Convention within the United States who experienced revitalization. Three specific characteristics of this population provided the rationale for inclusion in this study. First, the Southern Baptist Convention is the largest protestant group within the United States.⁹ This allowed the study to begin with the largest potential population. Second, the Southern Baptist Convention archived extensive data on member churches. This data was collected for each church through the submission of the Annual Church Profile, which is stored and analyzed by Lifeway Research. Finally, churches within the SBC shared a common culture and confessional context, which allows for greater commonality in the sampling. The following section describes the process of delimiting the population in each phase of the study.

⁸ Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 84.

⁹ “American Religious Data: 1952-2010 | U.S. Religion Census,” accessed November 12, 2018, <http://www.usreligioncensus.org/compare.php>. Group size is counted in three categories: congregations, adherents, and attendees. For number of congregations, the SBC ranked first with 50,816 congregations, while non-denominational Christian Churches ranked second (35,496). For adherents, the SBC ranked first with 1,9896,279, while non-denominational Christian Churches ranked second (1,2241,329). For attendees, the SBC ranked second with 6,263,277, while non-denominational Christian Churches ranked first (8,621,258).

Sample and Delimitations

To be eligible for the study, a church must be a member of the Southern Baptist Convention, and it must have completed the ACP from the years 2006 to 2016.¹⁰ The delimitation began during phase 1, in which churches met the definition for revitalization. Three criteria determined the definition of revitalization:¹¹

1. In 2011, the congregation worship attendance declined 10 percent or more as compared to 2006 (five years prior), and in 2016, the congregation worship attendance grew 10 percent or more as compared to 2011 (five years prior).
2. From this group, churches were excluded that reported less than two of the last five years with a one-year worship attendance growth of 10 percent or more, or reported less than two of the last five years with a higher than 20:1 worship attendance-to-baptism ratio.
3. Finally, a church achieved both two years of 10 percent worship attendance growth per year and a 20:1 worship attendance-to-baptism ratio or better.¹²

Churches that met all criteria of the definition of revitalization served as the population for the study. This number of churches experiencing revitalization were used to calculate the percentage of SBC churches that experienced decline, plateau, growth, or revitalization.¹³

¹⁰ Churches who did not submit ACP data for the inclusive years, 2006-2016, were excluded from the population.

¹¹ This definition of revitalization was determined by the larger research group in consultation with the group's doctoral thesis supervisor.

¹² Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson use similar selection criteria in their book, *Comeback Churches*, which analyzes churches that grew after a period of decline. Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, preface to *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), Kindle. While Stetzer and Dodson use a 35:1 membership-to-baptism ratio as a revitalization factor, Thom Rainer uses a 20:1 attendance-to-baptism ratio as the basis for describing an evangelistically effective church. Thom Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches: Successful Churches Reveal What Works and What Doesn't* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 35. Furthermore, according to an SBC report, based on 47,544 participating churches in 2017, the average weekly attendance was 5,320,488, with annual baptisms of 254,122. This yields an attendance-to-baptism ratio of 20.93:1. Southern Baptist Convention, "Fast Facts About the SBC," last modified October 25, 2018, <http://www.sbc.net/BecomingSouthernBaptist/FastFacts.asp>. See appendix 6, table A3 for SBC data from 2015, 2016, and 2017.

¹³ The answers to research questions 1 and 2 are necessarily calculated as percentages based on the total number of SBC churches (47,544 in 2017) versus the number of churches that completed the ACP. Southern Baptist Convention, "Fast Facts About the SBC."

Furthermore, only pastors who completed the phase 2 quantitative survey instrument, answered affirmative to a follow-up interview, and identified prayer as being a contributing factor to their church revitalization were included in phase 3 interviews.¹⁴

Limitations of Generalization of Research Findings

The population and sample were derived from Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) churches in North America. The quantitative attributes were generalized to SBC churches experiencing revitalization.¹⁵ The qualitative attributes were only generalized to the participants in phase 3 of the research. While there may be limitations in direct application of these findings, depending on the cultural context of a given church, the combined quantitative and qualitative findings may be transferable to other church contexts due to the commonality of discipleship themes and practices. These themes and practices were generally mirrored in other evangelical congregations beyond SBC churches.

Research Instrumentation

In this multiphase explanatory sequential mixed methods study, phase 2 involved a quantitative study based upon six disciplines: discipleship, evangelism, leadership, missions, prayer, and worship. Each of the seven researchers contributed questions to the survey based on his particular field of study. The researchers selected a Likert-type scale (1-6) survey.¹⁶ Prior to the submission of the survey instrument to identified participants, a number of steps were completed. First, the phase 2 instrument

¹⁴ Question 6 of the phase 2 survey asks participants, “Are you willing to participate in a follow up interview regarding the revitalization process at your church?” Only those answering “Yes” will be included in phase 3.

¹⁵ Creswell and Plano Clark, *Mixed Methods Research*, 9.

¹⁶ Creswell and Plano Clark, *Mixed Methods Research*, 236.

went through several iterations between the seven researchers. Second, an expert panel reviewed the instrument.¹⁷ Third and finally, the researchers submitted the survey instrument to the Ethics Committee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for its review and approval.

Once the researchers received a minimum of 250 completed surveys from the identified participants, phase 3 commenced.¹⁸ For this portion of the study, the researcher identified those pastors who indicated prayer as a major contributing factor to their church's revitalization. This was determined by phase 2 participants answering item 8 of the survey instrument as "Highly important" or "Important."¹⁹ Phase 3 of the research consisted of qualitative interviews with selected pastors. The researcher provided an interview protocol to help clarify and explain the data and information obtained during the quantitative strand of the research (phase 2).²⁰

Research Procedures

First, the researchers sought permission from the Ethics Committee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and detailed the phases of the research. For phase 1, the research team, along with the researcher's supervisor, contacted Lifeway and

¹⁷ The expert panel consists of Mark Clifton, Senior Director of Replanting/Revitalization for the North American Mission Board (NAMB) of the SBC and author of *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2016); Brian Croft, Senior Fellow at the Mathena Center for Church Revitalization and author of *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying and Divided Churches* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016); Andrew M. Davis, author of *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017); Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, revitalization pastors and co-authors of *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville: B&H, 2012); and Joseph Stephen Hudson, author of "A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Convention Churches: A Mixed Methods Study" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017).

¹⁸ Having 250 participants in the phase 2 quantitative survey results in a confidence interval of .05 at a 95 percent confidence level with the population of 716 revitalized churches.

¹⁹ Item 8 states, "Rate each ministry (discipleship, evangelism, leadership, missions, prayer, worship, or other) emphasis as to the importance it played in the revitalization process. (Highly Unimportant, Unimportant, Slightly Unimportant, Slightly Important, Important, Highly Important.)"

²⁰ Creswell and Plano Clark, *Mixed Methods Research*, 71.

obtained ACP data. This data not only allowed the researchers to determine which churches met the criteria to qualify for phase 2 but also provided contact information for the churches and senior pastors.

Second, researchers identified churches meeting the selection criteria to proceed to phase 2, which consists of a quantitative survey instrument using a website called SurveyMonkey. Researchers introduced themselves through an email (see appendix 5) with a link to the senior pastors identified from phase 1 and asked them to complete the survey within a two-week period. After seven days, researchers sent an additional email, as a follow up, asking senior pastors to complete the survey. Once the pastors completed the surveys, researchers scored, sorted, and ranked the data. For the purposes of this research and the determination of the effects of prayer on church revitalization, this researcher identified those pastors who indicated, in phase 2, that prayer was a contributing factor in the revitalization of their church. The eighth section of the phase 2 survey concerned the role of prayer in a church's revitalization (see appendix 3).

Third, once participants were identified by the prayer selection criteria, phase 3 began with qualitative interviews.²¹ I developed interview questions for phase 3 of the research.²² Next, I chose a minimum of twelve pastors to participate in the qualitative interviews. The interviews consisted of obtaining demographic information and answers to open-ended questions about prayer and the development of a prayer culture in the church. Then, I called or emailed the identified pastors to discuss their willingness to participate in further study and then determined a time and medium in which to conduct the interviews.²³ Next, I preferred a Zoom meeting but other methods, such as telephone,

²¹ See "Interview Selection Criteria" on the following page.

²² See appendix 4 for phase 3 interview questions.

²³ Footnote 14 of this chapter references question 6 of the phase 2 survey. However,

Skype, FaceTime, or an in-person meeting were also acceptable.²⁴ The primary purpose of phase 3 interviews was to answer Research questions 4 and 5 (see table 3).

Table 3. Research questions and corresponding interview questions

Research Question	Interview Questions
4. How did the pastor of a revitalized church develop a culture of prayer in his church?	9, 10, 11, 12, and 15
5. How did the prayer culture change as the church experienced revitalization?	8, 13, and 14

Interview Selection Criteria

Questions 6, 8, 9, 10, and 25-28 of the phase 2 survey were used to determine interviews for phase 3.²⁵ Question 6 of phase 2 asked if the pastor is willing to participate in a follow up interview.²⁶ Only those pastors answering “Yes” to question 6 were considered for phase 3. Item 8 of the phase 2 survey asked the participating pastor to rate the importance that each discipline played in his revitalization efforts (appendix 2).²⁷ Pastors indicating the role of prayer as “Highly Important” or “Important” were considered for phase 3 interviews. If there were not enough pastors to provide an adequate sample, then pastors who also selected “Slightly Important” were added to the

circumstances with people change; therefore, the researcher confirmed willingness to participate in the interview through the described methods.

²⁴ Zoom provides face-to-face interaction with the interviewee and the ability to record the meeting for future transcription.

²⁵ Questions follow as each one is explained.

²⁶ Question 6: “Are you willing to participate in a follow up interview regarding the revitalization process at your church?”

²⁷ Item 8: “Rate each ministry emphasis (Discipleship, Evangelism, Leadership, Missions, Prayer, Primary Worship Gather, Other) as to the importance it played in the revitalization process. (Highly Unimportant, Unimportant, Slightly Unimportant, Slightly Important, Important, Highly Important.)”

phase 3 interview list. Item 9 asked about the resistance of the members towards the revitalization, and question 10 asked about the acceptance of the members to changes within the six disciplines.²⁸ A pastor who indicated “Great Acceptance” of prayer was considered for interviews. Item 26 consisted of two statements for pastors to rate on a six-point Likert scale and those pastors who indicated “Important” or “Highly Important” were used as selection criteria for phase 3 interviews.²⁹ Items 25, 27, and question 28 provided background to help the researcher understand prayer in the pastor’s church. Once generated, interviews began based on certain interview protocols.³⁰

Interview Procedures

The first step in the interview was to ask the pastor for permission to record the session for future transcription. Second, after securing permission, the interview and recording began. Third, the researcher informed the pastor as to the nature and reason for the interview, read the “Informed Consent Agreement” to the pastor, obtained consent to the research, and then initiated the interview.³¹ Fourth, the researcher asked each pastor the questions from appendix 4 in the specific order. Fifth, during the interview, the researcher listened for key phrases and began the coding process.³² Sixth, after posing all

²⁸ Item 9: “Reflecting on the change initiatives you have pursued in your church revitalization context, identify the area in which you have faced the greatest amount of member resistance. Question 10: Reflecting on the change initiatives you have pursued in your church revitalization context, identify the area in which you have faced the greatest amount of member acceptance.”

²⁹ Item 26: “Rate the following statements: The church leadership’s dependence upon prayer as a vital means for realizing revitalization in your ministry context and the church congregation’s dependence upon prayer as a vital means for realizing revitalization in your ministry context. (Highly Unimportant, Unimportant, Slightly Unimportant, Slightly Important, Important, Highly Important.)”

³⁰ Item 25: “Briefly describe the primary changes to the church’s prayer ministry which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.” Item 27: “Briefly describe your frequency and pattern of personal prayer during the revitalization process.” Question 28: “In what ways were the topic and act of prayer prioritized in corporate worship during the revitalization process?”

³¹ I informed the participant of the after-interview action, reading the transcript for accuracy, and the after-interpretation action, obtaining feedback from the interpretation of the data (detailed in the “Validation Protocols” on the following page).

³² Johnny Saldaña suggests, “Start coding as you collect and format your data, not after all

the questions to the pastor, the researcher asked the pastor if he had any questions to allow the flow of information to pass between the researcher and the pastor. Seventh, the research informed the pastor about the validation process of both the interview and the findings.³³ Finally, the researcher began coding soon after the interview was completed to ascertain any themes or codes that emerged from the interview.³⁴

After each interview, the following process was employed to process the data:

1. Each interview was transcribed using Transcription US.
2. Each interview was coded using emerging codes.
3. The qualitative data was analyzed into themes.³⁵ Themes centered on the content and ideas contained within the research questions.

Validation Protocols

This study followed specific protocols to ensure validation and reliability in phase 3. First, the interview questions were submitted to an expert panel for feedback and approval. The expert panel included experienced church revitalizers, denominational leaders, and researchers in the field.³⁶ Second, the researcher maintained a research journal of each step taken with dated entries, completed tasks, and observations. Third,

field work has been completed.” Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2009), 17.

³³ See Validation Protocol this page.

³⁴ Saldaña suggests, “If you are working with multiple participants in a study, it may help to code one participant’s data first, then progress to the second participant’s data.” Saldaña, *Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 18.

³⁵ John W. Creswell writes, “Themes in qualitative research (also called categories) are broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea.” Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013), 186.

³⁶ The expert panel consisted of Brian Croft, Senior Fellow at the Mathena Center for Church Revitalization and author of *Biblical Church Revitalization*; Bill Henard, Executive Director of the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists and author of *Can These Bones Live? A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* (Nashville: B&H, 2015); Joseph Stephen Hudson, author of “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization”; Kenneth Priest, Director of Convention Strategies for the Southern Baptists of Texas and co-author of *Rubicons of Revitalization: Overcoming Common Barriers to Church Renewal* (Littleton, CO: Acoma Press, 2018).

the interview content and process were triangulated through the utilization of peer reviews. Members of the research team audited the content and process, along with the project supervisor. Fourth, one pilot interview was conducted to ensure that the video software and transcription process worked properly prior to conducting live interviews.

The fifth protocol involved member checking.³⁷ Interview participants were given the opportunity to review their interview transcripts to ensure accuracy. After the interview was transcribed, each participant was provided a transcript to review and correct. After ten days, if no revisions were recommended by the participant, the researcher proceeded with the understanding that the transcripts reflected accuracy and validity. Second, the preliminary interpretation of the study was provided to interview participants for their reflection and feedback.³⁸ As with the interview protocol, a period of ten days was allowed for responses regarding the preliminary interpretation.

The final protocol for validation involved clarifying researcher bias.³⁹ The researcher acknowledged two areas where bias has the potential to influence the interpretation of the data. First, the researcher is a student of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Second, the researcher is a member of the SBC and attends an SBC church.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the methodological procedures followed in this multiphase explanatory sequential mixed methods study to determine the role of

³⁷ According to Creswell, “In member checking, the researcher solicits participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations. This technique is considered to be the most critical technique for establishing credibility.” Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 252.

³⁸ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 252.

³⁹ According to Creswell, “In this clarification, the researcher comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study.” Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 251.

prayer in churches revitalized within the SBC. The following chapter reports the finding of the research with the final chapter addressing the conclusions of the research.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This research consisted of a three-phase explanatory sequential mixed method design to determine the influence of prayer upon the success of the churches that experienced revitalization. This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the compilation protocol, findings, summary of research, answers to research questions, details concerning both quantitative and qualitative data, and summary of findings.

Compilation Protocol

The research examined SBC churches using a three-phase explanatory mixed methods study.¹ Data collection began by contacting Lifeway Research to obtain Annual Church Profile (ACP) data on select SBC churches. All churches designated for the second phase met the following selection criteria: (1) the church reported ACP data for 2006-2016; (2) the church experienced 10 percent or greater decline in worship attendance over the five-year period prior to the turnaround; and (3) the church experienced at least 10 percent annual growth in worship attendance for at least two out of five years following the turnaround while maintaining a 20:1 worship attendance-to-baptism ratio during those same years.² A total of 716 churches met the aforementioned

¹ Six doctoral research students, under the supervision of Michael Wilder, conducted the research protocol for phases 1 and 2. The students worked together as a team by dividing the duties to develop, compile, and analyze the data collected in phases 1 and 2.

² Thom Rainer uses a 20:1 attendance-to-baptism ratio as the basis for describing an evangelistically effective church. Thom Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches: Successful Churches Reveal What Works and What Doesn't* (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 35. Furthermore, according to an SBC report, based on 47,544 participating churches in 2017, the average weekly attendance was 5,320,488, with annual baptisms of 254,122. These numbers yield an attendance-to-baptism ratio of 20.93:1. Southern Baptist Convention, "Fast Facts About the SBC," last modified October 25, 2018, <http://www.sbc.net/BecomingSouthernBaptist/FastFacts.asp>. See appendix 6, table A3 for SBC data from 2015, 2016, and

criteria and qualified to be considered for phase 2. The researchers invited the 716 churches to participate in an electronically administered survey consisting of twenty-four questions and items specifically concerning church revitalization, with an additional eight questions related to the demographics of the church (see appendix 3).³

Due to a lower than desired rate from the 716 churches through electronic means, the researchers chose to send hard copies of the survey through the mail to churches with worship attendance greater than fifty—approximately 460 churches.⁴ For phase 3, participants were purposefully selected from the phase 2 survey and invited to participate in an interview to further investigate the role prayer played during the revitalization process.

Selection criteria for phase 3 interviews included the following: (1) prayer, as ranked by the pastor, played an “Important” or “Highly Important” role during the revitalization process; (2) the pastor showed at least some differentiation between areas of importance; (3) the pastor indicated that the church’s leadership found prayer to be “Highly Important” or “Important” as a vital means for the revitalization of the church; and (4) the pastors represented a diversity of congregational sizes and ministry contexts. Interviews with selected pastors were conducted by Zoom meeting (i.e., a video conference). The researcher recorded each interview, which were later transcribed. The

2017.

³ Two of the eight questions concerning demographics asked whether the survey participant would agree to participate in further research in phase 3 of the project.

⁴ The research team decided to send hard copies of the survey to churches for a few reasons. First, several of the original 716 churches are rural churches, having limited or no access to email; therefore, the churches did not receive the initial email invitation. The second reason came down to cost. The hard copy sent to the 466 churches cost 1,200 dollars. This cost included printing, envelopes, postage, and return postage. The researcher members Baker, Clark, Legg, Richardson, and Sanders collaborated on the design of the new cover letter with the approval of Dr. Michael Wilder. Don Sanders volunteered to print, address, and fill the envelopes. Churches that received a paper survey returned a completed copy to Harvester Christian Church, Don Sanders’s place of employment, with Sanders’s staff entering the results into the electronic instrument to tabulate the data.

researcher then analyzed the interviews to identify principles and best practices among the revitalized churches and leaders concerning how prayer helped the revitalization of the church.

Phase 1

Phase 1 began with a request to Lifeway Research to identify churches that existed in 2016, the most current year of data from Lifeway for ACP information when the researchers made the request.⁵ In that year, 28,046 churches provided sufficient data to calculate five-year worship attendance trends during the 2011-2016 period. The data was analyzed the five-year worship attendance records of the 28,046 churches and determined that 25.6 percent (7,180) evidenced growth churches, 25.71 percent (7,211) plateaued, and 48.69 percent (13,656) showed decline. Researchers eliminated growing and plateauing churches (14,391) and, instead, focused their attention on churches in the greatest need of revitalization (i.e., declining churches). This decision left a population of 13,656 (48.69 percent) for the research.

The next delimitation followed when the researchers applied specific criteria looking at the decline and growth rates of the church. For the first criterion, a church must have declined 10 percent or more in 2011 as compared to 2006 and grown 10 percent or more in 2016 as compared to 2011. The second criterion excluded churches that had less than two of the last five years with a one-year worship attendance growth of 10 percent or more or had less than two of the last five years with higher than a 20:1 attendance-to-baptism ratio, leaving 3,364 eligible churches to continue in the study.

The final delimitation for phase 1 occurred by applying a third criterion that a church had to meet to be considered a “revitalized” church. This final criterion excluded

⁵ To be eligible for participation in phase 1, churches must have had submitted ACP data for 2006-2016.

churches that did not have both two years of 10 percent worship attendance growth per year and a 20:1 baptism-to-attendance ratio or better during the 2011-2016 timeframe. This final delimitation identified 716 churches (3.45 percent of the 13,743) that met the criteria of revitalization and eligibility for participation in phase 2. These 716 churches represented 5.24 percent of the declining population (3.45 percent of the declining and plateauing population).⁶ These delimitations isolated churches still in decline, allowing the researchers an opportunity to study the most extreme cases of churches in decline.

Phase 2

The researchers divided the sample of 716 churches to verify contact information. Once the information was verified, the research team sent an email to each of the 716 revitalized churches, providing an invitation to participate in a survey on church revitalization.⁷ The email invitation provided a link to the survey instrument (see appendix 3). Those participants who completed the survey within seven days and agreed

⁶ Of the 28,046 churches with sufficient data related to 2011-2016 worship attendance trends, 48.69 percent (13,656) also demonstrated a decline in worship attendance of at least 10 percent during those same years. The research sample was identified from among these declining churches because they represented the most significant trend reversals that resulted in revitalization. The research team believed that the principles identified by studying these formerly declining churches would be helpful to all churches, including those that were plateaued or growing. The resulting sample of 716 churches represented 5.24 percent of the declining church population (13,656).

⁷ The survey instrument consisted of eight demographics-related questions and twenty questions related to aspects of revitalization, including discipleship, evangelism, leadership, missions, prayer, and the primary worship gathering. The questions on the survey varied from multiple-choice, open-ended responses, prioritization of items, and rating according to a Likert-type scale, requiring responses from the participants (see appendix 3). According to Lesley Andres, "Questions and instruments can be piloted with experts on the topic of the survey." Lesley Andres, *Designing and Doing Survey Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 27. Therefore, an expert panel of pastors and denominational leaders with expertise in church revitalization provided review, insight, and suggestions concerning the survey questions. The expert panel consisted of John Mark Clifton, Senior Director of Replanting/Revitalization for the North American Mission Board (NAMB) of the SBC and author of *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2016); Brian Croft, Senior Fellow at the Mathena Center for Church Revitalization and author of *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying and Divided Churches* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016); Andrew Davis, author of *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017); Phillip Nation, revitalization pastor and co-author of *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville: B&H, 2012); and Joseph Stephen Hudson, author of "A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Convention Churches: A Mixed Methods Study" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017).

to be interviewed for phase 3 became eligible to be placed into a drawing for an incentive. Following the initial seven-day period, members of the research team redistributed those churches that did not respond to the initial invite and contacted them to solicit their participation. Some follow-up calls indicated that churches did not use email for communication; therefore, upon request from a church, researchers provided paper copies of the survey to encourage greater participation from eligible churches. Once survey participation slowed, the researchers called non-responsive churches again to solicit participation in the survey. As of September 13, 2018, the efforts of the researchers netted 129 churches responding to the survey resulting in a confidence level of 7.82.⁸

To increase the confidence level, the research team sent out another email invitation to non-responsive churches with a link to the survey. The team decided to further limit the sample to churches with worship attendance greater than fifty people. This resulted in a sample of 466 churches with worship attendance greater than fifty people in 2016. To increase participation still further, the researchers sent paper copies of the survey to the 466 churches in April 2019. The researchers followed up this distribution with additional attempts of contact via email and phone calls to encourage eligible churches to complete the survey. The resending of the email with the survey link and the sending of paper copies of the survey resulted in 145 completed surveys, achieving a confidence level of 6.71.⁹

Using the 145 survey responses, a third delimitation produced a list of

⁸ The research team was comprised of students from different cohorts at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary who began their studies in 2016, 2017, and 2018. Since the 2016 cohort would graduate one year sooner, the 2017 cohort continued to solicit more participants for the phase 2 survey in an attempt to increase the confidence level.

⁹ The team decided to exclude churches with 50 or less due to the small numeric threshold needed to achieve the percentage increase or decrease. For example, a few people leaving or coming to the church could easily change the designation from growing to declining.

churches that emphasized the development of a prayer culture in the revitalization process. From this group, churches must have met one of the following criteria to qualify for phase 3: rated “prayer” as “Highly important” or “Important” on item 8 or rated either bulleted statement on item 26 as “Highly Important” or “Important.”¹⁰ This delimitation produced a list of fifteen churches that met the criteria as a church that developed a prayer culture and were purposefully sampled employing maximal variation to produce a diverse sample based on demographic categories of church context. Additionally, the researcher purposefully avoided selecting churches that other researchers on the team selected.¹¹ This delimitation produced a list of 12 churches and provided the sample for phase 3. Table 4 illustrates the delimitations and sampling of the study.

Phase 3

The researcher began the qualitative interviews by contacting the twelve purposefully selected participants from phase 2 who indicated a willingness to participate in further research.¹² Prior to beginning the interviews with the selected pastors, the researcher conducted a pilot interview to help “ensure that the level of language used in the [interview] questions is appropriate and understandable to the audience; to assess

¹⁰ Survey item 8: “Rate each ministry emphasis as to the importance it played in the revitalization process. (Highly Unimportant, Unimportant, Slightly Unimportant, Slightly Important, Important, Highly Important.)” The ministry choices were discipleship, evangelism, leadership, missions, prayer, primary worship gathering, other. Survey item 26: “Rate the following statements. (Highly Unimportant, Unimportant, Slightly Unimportant, Slightly Important, Important, Highly Important.) (1) The church leadership’s dependence upon prayer as a vital means for realizing revitalization in your ministry context. (2) The church congregation’s dependence upon prayer as a vital means for realizing revitalization in your ministry context.”

¹¹ Team members of the 2016 cohort provided a list of pastors they interviewed to the remaining four team members (i.e., the 2017 and 2018 cohort). The remaining four members submitted their interview choices to each other and compared them to discern any overlap. If overlap occurred, then the team members negotiated between themselves for particular pastors to interview, or they contacted particular pastors to determine if they would mind being interviewed by more than one researcher. In the end only of the churches overlapped with another researcher.

¹² Chosen participants answered “Yes” to question 6: “Are you willing to participate in a follow up interview regarding the revitalization process at your church?”

whether the questions are understood as intended.”¹³ According to Lesly Andres, “Pilot testing at this level will help to ensure that the content of the survey is accurate and that important topics and items have been included.”¹⁴ The process of conducting a pilot interview with a pastor who is currently revitalizing a church helped to refine the process and boosted the researcher’s confidence to conduct future interviews.

Table 4. Delimitations and sampling summary

Phase	Delimitation	Description	Number
		Total SBC churches in 2016	47,272
1	1	Churches with sufficient data	28,046
1	1	Plateaued churches	7,211
1	1	Declining churches	13,656
1	2	Met revitalization criteria 1 and 2	3,364
1	2	Met revitalization criterion 3	716
2	3	Worship attendance >50	466
2	3	Responded to phase 2 survey	145
2	4	Met prayer development criteria	15
2	4	Purposeful maximal variation sample	12

The interviews consisted of the following protocols: (1) an initial email inquiry inviting the church to participate in further research; (2) an email or phone call to set up the interview; (3) an email containing the interview questions and login instructions for

¹³ Andres, *Designing and Doing Survey Research*, 27.

¹⁴ Andres, *Designing and Doing Survey Research*, 27.

the video interview (i.e., Zoom meeting); (4) the interview; (5) a thank you email containing instructions for transcript verification and a copy of the transcript; and (6) an email containing the preliminary conclusions with instructions for verification.

To begin phase 3, the researcher sent an email invitation to the 12 selected pastors who met the selection criteria. Numerous pastors responded to the email, and interviews were scheduled at the pastors' requested times. Of the initial pastors selected for interviews, 33 percent did not respond at all, even though multiple attempts were made by sending additional emails, leaving voicemails on the church's voice recorder, and sending messages through Facebook. After several attempts, the researcher chose three additional pastors who met his phase 3 criteria and, thus, met his minimum count of twelve interviews.

A few days before the scheduled interview with the pastor, the researcher sent to the pastor an email containing the following items:

1. Agreement to Participate
2. Definition of prayer culture
3. Interview questions
4. Instructions on how to access the Zoom meeting with several different options.

The use of the Zoom meeting format to connect with pastors resulted in great ease for phase 3. No matter the technological prowess of the person being interviewed, the Zoom meeting provided simplicity to the interview process.¹⁵ After the conclusion of the interview, the researcher sent a copy of the interview to Transcription US,¹⁶ who returned the transcribed interview to the researcher in a Microsoft Word document. The

¹⁵ The benefits of using Zoom are not limited to the ones listed above; they also include the ability to schedule interviews with different reminders and to record the interview automatically. Furthermore, the software allows the interviewer to pause the recording if necessary and to mute his microphone in order to obtain a clear recording for future transcription.

¹⁶ For additional information about Transcription US, please see <https://transcriptionus.com>.

interviews lasted from twenty minutes to ninety minutes.¹⁷ Overall, ten interviews were conducted via Zoom meeting (i.e., video conference), one interview was conducted over the phone and recorded, and one pastor answered the questions in written form (i.e., a questionnaire).¹⁸

Findings

The findings from the research in phases 2 and 3 are reported below. Phase 2 shows the results from the quantitative survey but focuses on prayer. Phase 3 shows the results from qualitative interviews of purposefully selected pastors, focusing on their experience with how prayer helped in the revitalization of the church.

Phase 2

Phase 2 research consisted of a survey instrument sent to churches experiencing revitalization to determine what factors influenced their efforts. The researchers used items 1-3 to classify the position of the survey participants' current roles during the revitalization process with tables 5 and 6 showing the acquired information. Table 5 show the current role of the person who responded to the survey.

Respondents were asked about their roles both prior to and during the revitalization process (see table 6). The greatest number were pastors both before and during the revitalization process, with ninety percent serving as the pastor during the revitalization process and 47 percent serving as the pastor prior to revitalization; and forty-four percent of respondents reported not being at the church prior to the

¹⁷ Each interview was broken into two distinct parts, the first consisting of demographics-related questions and the second focusing on the prayer culture of the church. See appendix 4 for interview questions.

¹⁸ This final selected pastor was unavailable for an interview during July 2019, but he wanted to participate in the research. The research supervisor approved the request from the researcher to allow this pastor to complete a questionnaire in place of an interview. This decision was made because the pastor rated prayer as "Highly Important" (phase 2, item 8), and his specific responses to questions and items 25-28 of the phase 2 survey were noteworthy.

revitalization. This indicates they were part of the change made to perhaps facilitate revitalization. Only a small number of respondents were staff members, deacons, or volunteers prior to and during the revitalization.

Table 5. Phase 2 respondents' current roles

Role	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Pastor/Elder	133	94.32
Deacon	1	0.70
Staff	6	4.25
Volunteer	1	0.70

Table 6. Phase 2 respondents' roles related to revitalization

Role	Number of Respondents	Role prior to revitalization (%)	Number of Respondents	Role during revitalization (%)
Pastor/Elder	66	47.14	126	89.36
Deacon	—	0.0	1	0.70
Staff	10	7.14	9	6.38
Volunteer	2	1.42	1	0.70
Not at Church	62	44.28	3	2.12

To understand the ministry context in which the revitalization occurred, researchers asked in item 4, “Your church context is best described as: rural, suburban, or urban” (see table 7). Of people responding, 53 percent indicated that their church ministered in a rural context.

Table 7. Phase 2 respondents' ministry context (question 4)

Context	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Rural	75	53.19
Suburban	51	36.17
Urban	15	10.63

Item 8 of the instrument asked the respondents to evaluate the importance of each of the six areas of study in church revitalization (discipleship, evangelism, leadership, missions, prayer, and primary worship gathering). The analysis of these findings focuses on prayer; however, table 8 displays the information for all of the disciplines.¹⁹

Table 8. Phase 2 ministry importance (item 8)

Discipline	Highly Unimportant	Unimportant	Slightly Unimportant	Slightly Important	Important (I)	Highly Important (HI)	Total HI and I
Primary Worship Gathering	2.19	0.73	1.46	5.11	32.12	58.39	90.51
Prayer	2.92	0.00	0.73	9.49	22.63	64.23	86.86
Leadership	3.68	0.74	0.74	8.09	25.74	61.03	86.77
Evangelism	4.41	0.74	1.47	13.24	38.97	41.18	80.15
Discipleship	4.38	0.73	1.46	16.06	30.66	46.72	77.37
Missions	2.94	5.88	4.41	17.65	36.03	33.09	69.12

Nearly nine out of ten pastors rated prayer as “Highly Important” or “Important” to their revitalizing efforts. Prayer ranked second in the combined total of “Highly Important” and “Important”; though it only followed primary worship gathering

¹⁹ For additional information concerning phase 2 ministry importance, see appendix 9, table A5.

in the survey, it proved to be the highest-rated item in the “Highly Important” category. The numbers on the other side of the spectrum are unsurprising: only slightly more than 2 percent of participants regarded prayer as “Slightly Unimportant,” and none of the participants ranked prayer as “Unimportant” or “Highly Unimportant.”

Item 9 asked, “Reflecting on the change initiatives you have pursued in your church revitalization context, identify the area in which you have faced the greatest amount of member resistance.” Of the 145 people who responded to this item, slightly more than 4 percent indicated that the greatest area of member resistance came in the area of prayer; however, this discipline rated as the lowest of all the other disciplines (see table 9).

Table 9: Resistance to change initiatives (item 9)

Discipline	Indicating Greatest Resistance (%)
Evangelism	20.69
Discipleship	19.31
Leadership	19.31
Worship	17.24
Missions	8.28
Prayer	4.14

In regard to item 10 (“Reflecting on the change initiatives you have pursued in your church revitalization context, identify the area in which you have faced the greatest amount of member acceptance”), more than 11 percent of the respondents indicated “Great Acceptance” of their efforts to change the prayer culture of the church (see table 10).

When asked to rate the importance of prayer for the church’s leadership, of the 145 people who responded to the first portion of item 26, 84 percent indicated that prayer

was “Highly Important” or “Important” to the church’s revitalization.²⁰ When asked to rate the importance of prayer for the church’s congregation, of the 145 people who responded to the second portion of item 26 of the survey, slightly more than three out of four respondents indicated that prayer was “Highly Important” or “Important” to the congregation during the revitalization.

Table 10. Acceptability of change initiatives (question 10)

Discipline	Indicating Greatest Acceptance (%)
Worship	21.38
Missions	19.31
Leadership	15.17
Discipleship	13.10
Prayer	11.72
Evangelism	11.72

The survey presented two open-ended inquiries to participants. The first asked, “Briefly describe the primary changes to the church’s prayer ministry which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.” A common thread throughout many of the answers to question 25 focused on more intentionality to the prayer life of the church than before the revitalization. One phase 2 survey respondent wrote, “This is an area we are weak in, but I believe as we have tried to make more of an effort to participate corporately and individually, we have seen the things we pray for change.” Another wrote, “We brought in a ‘concert of prayer’ on a weekly basis to our

²⁰ The first portion of item 26 asked the respondent to rate on a Likert-type scale: “The church leadership’s dependence upon prayer as a vital means for realizing revitalization in your ministry context.” Of the 145 who responded, 88 rated prayer as “Highly Important,” and 37 rated prayer as “Important” to the revitalization for the leadership (83.9 percent). The second portion of item 26 asked the respondent to rate the following: “Rate the following: The church congregation’s dependence upon prayer as a vital means for realizing revitalization in your ministry context.” Of the 145 who responded, 67 rated prayer as “Highly Important,” and 44 rated prayer as “Important” to the revitalization for the congregation (74.5 percent).

morning worship service. We spend anywhere from 5 to 20 minutes in prayer on Sunday morning. We use Scripture as our guide and use the ACTS model to lead the people. We walk through a time of Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.” These pastors intentionally made prayer a primary focus for the churches, relying on God rather than their own efforts.

Another recurring theme emerging from item 25 claimed that the church did not focus only on the temporal and physical needs of the people (e.g., the sick) but, instead, focused on God’s will being done and the expansion of his kingdom. “Prayer for the lost. Praying that God would break our hearts over the things that break His heart,” wrote one person. Some of these pastors asked their people to name lost people they knew; one pastor stated that he “immediately passed out note cards for members to put names of those who were lost.” Several of these churches began being outward focused (i.e., on the lost and the community) as opposed to being inward focused (i.e., on themselves).

A final noteworthy theme concerning item 25 revolved around community, group, or corporate prayer. Twenty-four respondents indicated that they prioritized more time in their corporate worship times on Sunday to focus on prayer, even gathering all the Sunday morning attenders at the altar to pray for the service and unbelievers. Ten churches developed corporate prayer practices before Sunday worship began, during the worship service, or even the night before, asking that people would hear the word of God.

Another item in the survey inquired about personal prayer habits in the life of the pastor.²¹ The majority indicated daily quiet time with the Lord marked by prayer to start the week or the day. Some of the responders honestly answered that they struggle with having a consistent prayer time with God, and a few indicated a conviction to

²¹ Item 27 of the phase 2 survey asked, “Briefly describe your frequency and pattern of personal prayer during the revitalization process.”

increase time in prayer with the Lord. One pastor answered, “I was convicted about my lack of prayer I’ve been growing in my personal practice and dependence upon prayer since then.” However, almost ten percent of the respondents indicated that they need to pray more.

The final open-ended prayer question of the survey (question 28) asked, “In what ways were the topic of and act of prayer prioritized in corporate worship during the revitalization process?” No discernable themes emerged from this open-ended question. However, nearly twenty percent of pastors indicated that they preached series on prayer, invited people to come to the altar to “just” pray, and used Sunday and Wednesday night services to teach on prayer.

The last question of the survey (question 32) came under the heading of general comments and solicited advice from those who just began the revitalization process, who are in the process currently, or who already participated in church revitalization. The question asked, “What advice would you offer to a pastor seeking to lead a revitalization process?” Answers varied based on the experience of the person who participated in the survey (see table 11).²² From the responses, pastors relied on prayer and fasting the most during the church revitalization process.

Phase 3 Demographics

Phase 3 interviews began with seven questions to identify specific demographics: (1) ministry context, (2) overall ministry experience (including current church), (3) service at church prior to revitalization, (4) tenure in current role, (5) education, (6) age, and (7) current attendance for worship.

²² I developed table 11 subjectively. However, these themes emerged as the researcher studied the responses. The “responses” in table 11 do not mean *respondents* but, instead, *themes that emerged from the answers*. Some respondents listed numerous themes, while others listed only one. Thus, in table 11, the total amount of responses exceeds the total number of respondents.

Table 11. Phase 2 respondent's advice (question 32)

Theme	Responses	Frequency (%)
Prayer/Fasting	37	17
Strong preaching and teaching	23	11
Focus on slow organizational church	21	10
Love your people	17	8
Develop leaders	12	6
Invest in Relationships	10	5
Love/exegete/engage/serve the community	8	4
Be persistent	8	4
Look to Scripture	7	3
Be ready for resistance	7	3
Stay and do not leave	7	3
Trust God	6	3
Other	49	23
Total responses	212	

Phase 3 participants represented a large portion of the U.S., small and large churches, single and multi-campus, and diverse ministry contexts (see table 12).²³ Twenty five percent of the pastors interviewed represented those serving in rural communities; whereas, nearly sixty percent served in a suburban context. The majority of the pastors interviewed, eighty four percent, ministered to a single campus.

²³ The US census divisions were taken from United States Census Bureau, "Geography: Divisions," accessed September 19, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/geo/reference/webatlas/divisions.html>.

Table 12. Phase 3 church participation profile

ACP Reported Worship Attendance (2016)	Church Ministry Context	US Census Division	State	Single Campus (S) or Multisite (M)
58	Rural	Pacific	AK	S
61	Rural	Pacific	OR	S
70	Rural	West South Central	OK	S
99	Suburban	East South Central	MS	S
125	Suburban	Pacific	HI	S
130	Urban	Pacific	CA	S
157	Suburban	South Atlantic	SC	S
321	Rural	West North Central	MO	S
542	Suburban	East South Central	AL	S
800	Suburban	Mountain	AZ	M
778	Suburban	Pacific	CA	S
2100	Suburban	West South Central	TX	M

The selected pastors represented an average ministry experience of thirty-three years, ranging in age from 42 to 88 years old. These pastors averaged 9 years of tenure in their present church (see table 13).

Table 13. Pastor age, tenure in current church, and years of ministry experience

Demographic	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Median	Mean
Age of Pastor	42	88	46	57.5	58
Tenure in Current Church	2	26	24	6.75	9
Years of Ministry Experience	7	61	54	32.5	33

All the pastors interviewed attained an associate degree from college, with the

majority of the interviewees attaining a master’s degree (see table 14). Interestingly, two of the pastors interviewed earned non-theological doctoral degrees and were subsequently called to serve as full-time pastors.²⁴

Table 14. Phase 3 pastor education

Education Level	Count	Percentage (%)
Associate Degree	1	8
Bachelor’s Degree	3	25
Master’s Degree	5	42
Doctorate	3	25

Phase 3 Themes

The interviews resulted in several consistent themes related to pastors developing a culture of prayer as they led their churches in revitalization. To categorize certain themes, the researcher employed a coding process to “generate a description of categories or themes for analysis.”²⁵ By coding these themes based on percentages of frequency in the interviews, the research was able to derive best practices from the raw information presented in each interview. Through the qualitative interviews, ten themes emerged from among the pastors (see table 15).

Theme 1: Pastors directed specific times of prayer. All twelve pastors unanimously stated that the having specific times of prayer became one of the most important things they initiated once arriving at their churches. Specific times of prayer ranged from congregation members gathering before Sunday worship service to pray for the pastor, the worship service, and lost people hearing the gospel for the first time to

²⁴ One pastor earned a Ph.D. in audiology and neurophysiology, and a second pastor earned a Doctor of Jurisprudence degree.

²⁵ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009), 189.

home prayer meetings, partnering with a person during the week to pray, and men demonstrating their commitment to pray for the church corporately in the worship service.

Table 15. Themes noted among interviewed pastors

Theme	Description of Theme	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Pastors directed specific times of prayer	12/12	100
2	Pastors prayed and remained humble during the revitalization process	11/12	92
3	Pastors modeled prayer in their own life	10/12	83
4	Pastors discovered that congregations held tightly to the typical and traditional prayer times	9/12	75
5	Pastors should be more intentional about prayer at the beginning of the revitalization	9/12	75
6	Pastors found prayer to be foundational to the revitalization process	9/12	75
7	Pastors described their church's prayer culture as scattered when they arrived	7/12	58
8	Pastors refocused the mid-week prayer service on prayer not teaching	6/12	50
9	Pastors advised patience through praying during the revitalization process	6/12	50
10	Pastors experienced an apathy toward, indifference toward, or misunderstanding of prayer from the congregation	5/12	42

One pastor became very excited about the prospect of men praying:

I became convicted that part of the problem in the church was that men in the church, and this is not just our church, this is any church, but the men of the church had abdicated their responsibility. That they weren't leading. They weren't praying. They weren't doing things that God intended men to do; in a church that was healthy and growing and vibrant. So, I put together a group of men. And we started with four and we meet every Thursday night at 6:30. And all we do is pray for the church. We pray for the spirit. We pray for unity and harmony. We pray for the

worship. We pray for the guests. We ask God to send us people who need [our church].²⁶

This specific pastor invited the men of the church to come to the altar every Sunday morning to pray, and thus lead the church to pray through their example.²⁷

Pastor 4 stated that his church engages in prayer prior to specific outreach events that happen as a part of his church's outreach to the community. He stated, "We always have particular times of emphasis within the life of the church, whether it's some kind of an outreach event, we do a couple of things throughout the year that we enlist a team to pray for them."²⁸ Prior to a church-wide revival, pastor 4 promoted one hundred days of prayer before the revival. Due to the small size of his congregation, he enlisted former members who had moved out of state for job opportunities to pray for their church revival.

A final example of a pastor employing prayer at specific times is pastor 3. He did not limit his prayer partners to just Southern Baptists but joined in prayer across denominational lines since only four churches exist on the island where this particular pastor resides and ministers. Pastor 3 met other pastors once a week to pray for their island community. Until recently, all the churches on this island community faced the same issue of declining numbers in their churches. However, in a concerted effort to pray together, these churches all saw new life being breathed back into them as a result of the pastors praying for one another to reach the lost on their island. Pastor 3 articulated this cross-denominational situation well when he said,

²⁶ Pastor 2, interview by author, Zoom video conference, June 17, 2019. All interviews were confidential; the names of the interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

²⁷ Pastor 2 also mentioned that his wife met with four other women on the weekend to pray for the church and the families in the church. She told her husband that she and the other women prayed that the men of the church would "step up" to lead the church in the areas mentioned above. Once again, people meeting at specific times of prayer proved effective.

²⁸ Pastor 4, interview by author, Zoom video conference, June 21, 2019.

We all know, we're the only Baptist Church here. So, if you're going to have fellowship with Christian brothers and sisters, you cross denominational lines. And so, our concern was, and as we quite well knew that if you're going to have a vibrant community, all your churches need to be doing good. You understand? We're not in a competitive situation. We're in a cooperative Kingdom world. So, we were not praying just for our church. We were praying for Kingdom things.²⁹

This pastor did not care that the pastors with whom he prayed were not Southern Baptists. Rather, he committed himself to a specific time of prayer with other, like-minded brothers and petitioned the Lord to do a mighty work within their island community, thus helping each person become humbler before God.

Theme 2: Pastors prayed and remained humble during the revitalization process. Ninety two percent of the interviewed pastors indicated that remaining humble, as exhibited by prayer, was a large factor and would advise other pastors who seek to revitalize their church to demonstrate the same disposition before God. Humility came in the form of constantly seeking God's will, not their own, as the pastors desired to revitalize their churches. At least 25 percent of the pastors either directly or indirectly mentioned Henry Blackaby's words from *Experiencing God*: "Watch to see where God is working and join him."³⁰ One pastor said, "We are not that cool or hip and if something happens here we want to create an atmosphere where God gets the credit for it. . . . Prayer just keeps us grounded I think."³¹ Pastor 10 understood that God works as he sees fit;

²⁹ Pastor 3, interview by author, Zoom video conference, June 17, 2019. Pastor 8 expressed the same sentiment as pastor 3 because he too ministered in a small community and was the only Southern Baptist preacher in his area. He stated, "I am the only Southern Baptist church, then there's one Nazarene church, a couple of *Assemblies of God* churches, and a *First Christian* church. We gather together every Thursday morning and we pray together. I really believe this is not only part of the revitalization of the church but something that's impacting our community as well." Pastor 8, interview by author, Zoom video conference, July 8, 2019. He went on to cite John 17:21 ("that they may all be one") as the reason for his fellowship with pastors of other denominations.

³⁰ Henry Blackaby, Richard Blackaby, and Claude King, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville: LifeWay, 2007), 16.

³¹ Pastor 10, interview by author, Zoom video conference, July 22, 2019.

therefore, pastor 10 desired to give God the credit. But, this posture before God also works in another way: results.

Relying on God to revitalize their churches through prayer relieved pastors of undue stress. These men prayed and allowed God to produce the change. Pastor 7 expressed that “it [prayer] allows us to relax in the results. . . . We don’t have to take credit or blame for either. The Lord knows.”³² This type of attitude required a dose of humility to make sure that whatever the results of the church revitalization, God simply controls the outcomes. Concerning prayer and humility, Pastor 9 said it this way: “Prayer is recognizing we are not on the throne; and he is and that for me is what prayer boils down to is a reminder for me to get off the seat it’s not mine, it’s his.”³³ Pastors who worked with God to revitalize their church, humbly sought God through prayer and modeled the practice for their people.

Theme 3: Pastors modeled prayer in their own life. Ten out of twelve pastors believed that modeling prayer in their own lives both privately and publicly helped in the revitalization of their churches. One pastor said that intercessory prayer is a difficult task. This pastor decided that his presence for prayer during Wednesday evening services provided an opportunity for his people to see the priority he placed on prayer. He wanted his people to see their pastor praying; subsequently, during an otherwise busy evening when he could be teaching children or adults, this pastor believed that his praying was of paramount importance. As mentioned above, one particular pastor wanted his church to see men praying in the church. This same pastor modeled prayer by having all the men come forward every Sunday for a corporate time of prayer, with him praying for the worship service. In a similar vein, another pastor frequently invited the entire

³² Pastor 7, questionnaire, received by author via email correspondence July 1, 2019.

³³ Pastor 9, interview by author, Zoom video conference, July 7, 2019.

congregation to come forward to pray over the service. He wanted all the people to know that his church considered prayer an important discipline, so he models the practice corporately.

Theme 4: Pastors discovered that congregations held tightly to the typical and traditional prayer times. A difficulty faced by seventy five percent of pastors in the revitalization of their churches came in the form of tightly held traditions concerning prayer. Customs practiced by congregations and mentioned by pastors under this theme included typical Wednesday night prayer time, prayer before worship service, prayer before the offering, and a closing prayer. Church members clung to “prayer times” that they performed in a rote manner year after year, believing their rituals to be the only way to do things because they lacked leaders who would teach them otherwise. One pastor summed up the theme concisely when he said, “They pray for the offering. They pray during the service, there was no concentrated effort for corporate prayer.”³⁴ Another pastor stated, “I think that what they understood prayer to be was consisted of having a prayer sheet of primarily physical needs, and a Wednesday night prayer gathering. And certainly, there was prayer elements within worship service, but I don’t sense that there was a real priority understanding prayer as part of the ebb and flow of life.”³⁵ A final pastor noted that “there was a prayer list, but predominantly it was, you know, ‘Who’s speaking tonight’ at prayer meeting. It was a little sermonette devotion.”³⁶ In sum, from the words of these pastors, prayer became something that these churches just did because of their traditions.

³⁴ Pastor 3, interview.

³⁵ Pastor 5, interview by author, Zoom video conference, June 21, 2019.

³⁶ Pastor 6, telephone interview by author, June 20, 2019.

Theme 5: Pastors should be more intentional about prayer at the beginning of the revitalization. Next, seventy five percent of all the interviewed pastors said they would have been more intentional about making prayer a focus earlier in their tenure (theme 5). For instance, one pastor wished he would have moved to home prayer services sooner than he did. He also found out that beginning with fifteen minutes of praise and thanksgiving helped him to pray more effectively to God.³⁷ This pastor saw God as the Creator and King, worshipping, praising, and thanking him through prayer prior to petitioning him for temporal needs.

Another pastor intentionally began a men's prayer group but did not communicate his desires clearly to the church at large. Unfortunately, his men's prayer meeting looked like "the pastor and his group of merry prayers" instead of a group of men seeking God through prayer.³⁸ He said he regrets not intentionally communicating that he wanted all the men to attend this prayer meeting. When this pastor first came to his church, he prayed and asked God to give him "a couple of guys who would do this [pray]." God provided; however, pastor 2 said, "Looking back, I probably would have made it clearer from the beginning that this was not an exclusive group." Probing a bit deeper concerning the pastor's intentions for the church and prayer groups, the researcher asked whether the pastor envisioned the entire church meeting for this type of meeting. He responded in the affirmative with great excitement and explained that his men's prayer group, along with his wife's growing prayer group, cultivated a culture of prayer in the church. He said, "And I believe very deeply, that as the men start to pray, as the ladies start to pray, as we pray more often together as a corporate body, that prayer does become the rule and not the exception."³⁹

³⁷ Pastor 3, interview.

³⁸ Pastor 2, interview.

³⁹ Pastor 2, interview.

Pastors also noted that they would intentionally teach and train their people on prayer. Due to the influx of new people and believers to his church, one pastor said, “Because of our situation, we’ve got some newer people in our church that really don’t understand what prayer is all about. And so, I think something more like a prayer training or something. I’m not sure. I think there needs to be a study or a training on how to pray effectively.”⁴⁰ Another pastor stated, “I certainly would have taught more on prayer from the pulpit in the early days.”⁴¹ Pastors 9 and 10 said that they intentionally trained their greeters to pray for the people who came to church that day, with pastor 10 saying, “Pray that God would get a hold of their lives!”⁴² A final pastor intentionally preached several series on prayer from different angles and perspectives.⁴³ He wanted the church to know prayer not as an intellectual or academic matter but to see prayer as God intended—as a way to communicate with him.

Numerous pastors referred to Gregory Frizzell and Jim Cymbala as great sources for training their people to pray.⁴⁴ These pastors intentionally sought out books and resources to help their people develop the discipline of prayer in their lives and also preached specifically about prayer from the pulpit. These pastors saw the need to intentionally teach their people about prayer and to train them how to pray.

Theme 6: Pastors found prayer to be foundational to the revitalization process. Nine of twelve pastors claimed that prayer provided the foundation they needed

⁴⁰ Pastor 1, interview by author, Zoom video conference, June 17, 2019.

⁴¹ Pastor 7, questionnaire.

⁴² Pastor 10 interview.

⁴³ Pastor 2, interview.

⁴⁴ For example, see Gregory R. Frizzell, *How to Develop a Powerful Prayer Life: The Biblical Path to Holiness and Relationship with God* (Memphis: Master Design, 1999); and Jim Cymbala, and Dean Merrill. *Fresh Power: Experiencing the Vast Resources of the Spirit of God*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).

to revitalize the church (theme 6). Many of these same pastors averred that prayer became the catalyst to their churches' revitalization efforts. The idea of prayer being foundational from these pastors aligns with the thinking of Jonathan Edwards in his work *An Humble Attempt*. Essentially, congregants began to pray in these churches, and God breathed new life into these once dying churches. Concerning the foundation that prayer provides, one pastor stated, "I really kept that [prayer] before the people to understand whatever we were hoping to happen was going to have its foundation in prayer."⁴⁵ This pastor desired for his people to see the sure footing provided by the practice of prayer as they sought God in their outreach and revitalization. Building on the words of pastor 5, pastor 9 acknowledged, "If we are going to do evangelism and grow and do Sunday morning church, everything has to be bathed in prayer."⁴⁶ Likewise, pastor 10 declared, "I think it [prayer] creates a deep dependence for God."⁴⁷ When people form a deep dependence on God through prayer, they construct a firm foundation to build and rebuild a dying church for God's glory.

Another interesting subtheme regarding the foundational nature of prayer for church revitalization is what pastors said about the catalyzing nature of prayer. In other words, prayer began the process of revitalization for their churches. One pastor described the influence of prayer in his church as "the straw that stirs the drink."⁴⁸ Another pastor described the source of power through prayer: "Where the power comes from is from the Lord, and that was central to finding some new life in the church and in our ministry in

⁴⁵ Pastor 5, interview.

⁴⁶ Pastor 9, interview.

⁴⁷ Pastor 10, interview.

⁴⁸ Pastor 4, interview.

the community.”⁴⁹ Pastor 6 believed “that prayer, at least in my mind, it’s the engine that drives the whole thing. I have to believe that prayer is this catalyst. It is the engine.”

⁵⁰This pastor saw prayer not only as the catalyst for revitalization but also his church’s entire ministry. Finally, pastor 11 declared that his arrival at his current church resulted from the prayers of the people in the church. He said, “I think prayer moved God’s heart and God’s hand in my life and so he moved my heart towards being here. I think I am here as a direct result of somebody’s prayer or a lot of people’s prayer. [This was the] ignition switch I was to get going whatever God wanted to do here. I think prayer was the piece that started the ball rolling.”⁵¹

Theme 7: Pastors described their church’s prayer culture as scattered when they arrived. More than 50 percent of the pastors interviewed described the church prayer life and prayer culture as scattered, uncoordinated, and unintentional. Knowing the scattered nature of prayer helped pastors focus their efforts. In regard to the nature of the prayer culture before their arrival, one pastor stated that prayer practices were just functional with no concerted effort,⁵² while another pastor said that his church’s prayer efforts lacked coordination.⁵³ Pastor 10 acknowledged, “I don’t know if there was a great amount of intentionality about it.”⁵⁴ Not only did churches lack intentionality in their prayer culture, some churches stopped holding their mid-week prayer services. Pastor 8 spoke about how they “had a weekly prayer service and eventually people stopped

⁴⁹ Pastor 5, interview.

⁵⁰ Pastor 6, interview.

⁵¹ Pastor 11, interview by author, Zoom video conference, July 22, 2019.

⁵² Pastor 2, interview.

⁵³ Pastor 3, interview.

⁵⁴ Pastor 10, interview.

coming and we kind of disbanded that mid-week prayer service, although I felt like it was really needed.”⁵⁵ When asked what the prayer culture was like before the revitalization, one pastor stated, “I don’t think there was much of anything [prayer],”⁵⁶ and another pastor admitted that absolutely no prayer culture existed at the church before the revitalization.⁵⁷

Theme 8: Pastors refocused the mid-week prayer service on prayer not teaching. Six out of twelve pastors indicated that they refocused the mid-week service on prayer instead of a bible study. Pastor 5 stated,

We kept a Wednesday prayer gathering and really made that a prayer gathering. We usually read a verse of scripture, and kind of start off with testimonies of people have something particular on their heart to do that. And then we spend about 45 minutes just praying. Intercessory prayer. Sometimes we used the ACTS acrostic or some other kind of a similar pattern to do that, but we try to make sure that that really was a prayer gathering.⁵⁸

Pastor 6 said that his people felt like they did not receive satisfaction from just praying and that they desired some type of sermonette or devotional. Subsequently, this pastor retooled his mid-week prayer service to be one dedicated to prayer: 60-70 minutes of praying, with a short devotional at the beginning. He said,

I changed prayer meeting to almost [a] liturgical [service]. I start with a psalm of praise and we spend a few minutes praising God out loud. Once we praise God for that, and [see] what can we adore about God. Then we sing a hymn in this praise. Then we’ll do a psalm of confessions. [Then] do a silent time of confession. Then we do a time of Thanksgiving. Then we spend the majority of our time praying over our weekly prayer list . . . , and we really intercede for every single name.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Pastor 8, interview.

⁵⁶ Pastor 8, interview.

⁵⁷ Pastor 9, interview.

⁵⁸ Pastor 5, interview.

⁵⁹ Pastor 6, interview.

Admittedly, this pastor saw intercessory prayer as hard but necessary work. However, pastor 6's heartbeat came from his desire for his congregation to see their pastor doing the hard work of interceding for his people through prayer.⁶⁰ The refocusing of the mid-week service to prayer, not teaching, helped churches better understand the power of prayer.

Theme 9: Pastors advised patience through prayer during the revitalization process. Fifty percent of the pastors interviewed exhibited patience through the practice of prayer during the revitalization of their church (theme 9). Pastors chose a variety of ways to communicate this idea, one of which being the imagery of seeds. Pastor 9 advised a new pastor to go in and plant seeds among his members (such as seeds in the form of prayer), to sow ideas of change, and to read books with the people.⁶¹ In a similar agricultural example, pastor 8 suggested a book entitled *Water the Bamboo* by Greg Bell.⁶² Pastor 8 said,

There is a Bamboo that grows in China called "Giant Bamboo" and if you plant it in the ground and you water it for the first year nothing happens. Water it the second year nothing happens. Water it the third and fourth year nothing happens, but the fifth year as you water the bamboo it will grow 90' in 6 weeks. Yes, incredible and you may not see results of your prayer immediately but if you keep doing it keep doing it keep doing it you'll reap the harvest and you will see growth so; waiting and trusting the Lord and being patient.⁶³

This pastor truly believed that the power of prayer comes as a pastor waits on God to

⁶⁰ Pastor 6, interview.

⁶¹ Pastor 9, interview.

⁶² The book, *Watering the Bamboo*, is primarily a book on business. The example of the giant bamboo demonstrates the virtue of patience on the part of a businessperson. The bamboo is planted, watered, and fertilized for several years, building a root system to support the massiveness of the bamboo. Pastor 8 learned from reading this book that he prays patiently, waiting on the Lord to act greatly. See Greg Bell, *Watering the Bamboo: Unleashing the Potential of Teams and Individuals* (Portland, OR: Three Star Publishing, 2009).

⁶³ Pastor 8, interview.

provide in his time.

Likewise, pastor 2 recommended that pastors who find themselves in a church in need of revitalization should be patient as they pray for themselves, their families, and their churches. Concerning prayer, he said, “Be patient. . . . What we’re looking for is God’s timing, God’s will, God’s plan. And He will reveal that to us from our intimate times with him.”⁶⁴ Pastor 1 simply stated, “I think it’s something [revitalization] that you don’t rush into, that it’s something that takes time.” Revitalization requires patience in prayer while waiting on God to provide.⁶⁵

A final word of advice from one pastor to those who find themselves in a revitalization situation, or who are new to the ministry and do not have a robust understanding of patience, is as follows: “A lot of times we just want to come in and if the church has 40 or 50 people, we want to be at 500 next year, and be president of the pastors’ conference. You know, what we need to do is be patient.”⁶⁶

Theme 10: Pastors experienced an apathy toward, indifference toward, or misunderstanding of prayer from the congregation. Question 10 asked pastors, “How did you overcome any opposition in developing a prayer culture in your church?” All twelve pastors answered that they encountered no real opposition to prayer; however, 42 percent said that they sensed a general apathy or indifference in their congregation toward prayer. In describing this phenomenon, pastor 5 said, “For lack of a word, I would say, apathy, indifference. Not everyone, even to this day has universally, in an experiential, practical, kind of a way, embraced the notion that this is really all based on

⁶⁴ Pastor 2, interview.

⁶⁵ Pastor 1, interview.

⁶⁶ Pastor 2, interview.

prayer and the work of the Spirit through that.”⁶⁷ In describing his church’s transition on Wednesday night to a true evening of prayer from a time of teaching, pastor 6 said of his congregation, “They don’t feel like they got their money’s worth, so to speak, if there’s not like a preacher. And it’s probably because they’ve been doing it that way for countless years.”⁶⁸

In regard to a congregation’s misunderstanding of prayer, pastor 2 stated,

You have to get on God’s page first. . . . And they [the congregation] lay it all out on the table, and they want God to join them in their ministry. When I think God’s plan is for you to be still and know, and to listen and to then be prepared to obey. In that way we do things that we never anticipated doing, in ways we never anticipated doing them.⁶⁹

A final pastor termed his church’s prayer culture as one of going through the steps or motions of prayer, describing it a practice of “functionality,” not of connectedness to God.⁷⁰ Churches viewed prayer as a discipline they ought to do because churches do those sorts of things instead of because they have the privilege to communicate with the Creator.

Summary of Research Findings

The purpose of this three-phase explanatory sequential mixed methods study is to understand the role prayer played in SBC church revitalizations and how pastors in these churches promoted a culture of prayer in their congregations. Of the 28,046 SBC churches that reported sufficient data for analysis, the research showed 716 churches achieving a predetermined set of revitalization criteria. Phase 2 of the research used a survey instrument that gathered more information on the revitalization process, with 145

⁶⁷ Pastor 5, interview.

⁶⁸ Pastor 6, interview.

⁶⁹ Pastor 2, interview.

⁷⁰ Pastor 3, interview.

participants completing the survey. Phase 3 purposefully selected twelve participants for qualitative interviews to gain deeper insight into the role of prayer in the church revitalization process. The interview participants answered questions concerning topics that ranged from demographics to particular practices of prayer.

The third portion of the research (qualitative interviews) revealed eleven themes about prayer from the experiences of the interviewed pastors and how prayer aided in their churches' revitalization efforts. Pastors led their congregations in purposeful times of prayer and taught their people to pray in both corporate and private settings. Furthermore, pastors cautioned others who find themselves in a revitalization situation to remain humble and patient, to seek God, and to join him in his work within the church and the community.⁷¹ Finally, these pastors articulated practical approaches to how they developed and promoted a prayer culture in their churches during the revitalization.

Research Questions

This three-phase explanatory sequential mixed methods study sought to understand the role prayer played in church revitalizations in SBC churches and how pastors in these churches promoted a culture of prayer in their congregations. The research team asked five research questions; the following details the answers to those questions.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 asked, "What percentage of SBC churches have plateaued or are declining?"

⁷¹ Blackaby, Blackaby, and King, *Experiencing God*, 16.

In the year 2016, 47,272 SBC churches existed; however, only 28,046 churches reported sufficient data to calculate five-year worship trends from the years 2011-2016. When applying the first two criteria, 3,364 churches met the research team's criterion of a declining or plateauing church.⁷² To further delimit the sample, a third criterion was applied (see pp. 90-92), narrowing the sample to 716 churches.⁷³ The final delimitation occurred when the researchers chose churches with worship attendance greater than fifty people, resulting in a further reduced sample of 466 churches. Among the 28,046 churches with sufficiently reported data, 25.6 percent demonstrated growth, 25.71 percent plateaued, and 48.69 percent revealed decline. Therefore, 20,754 churches were plateaued or declining, just under 74 percent of the 28,046 churches that reported sufficient data to be included in the study.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 asked, "Of those churches that have experienced decline, what percentages have experienced revitalization?"

Seven hundred sixteen churches met the research criteria to be labeled as revitalized, resulting in only 5.24 percent of declining SBC churches meeting the criteria for revitalization.⁷⁴

⁷² For the first criterion, a church must have declined 10 percent or more in 2011 as compared to 2006 and grown 10 percent or more in 2016 as compared to 2011. The second criterion excluded churches that had less than two of the last five years with a one-year worship attendance growth of 10 percent or more or had less than two of the last five years with higher than a 20:1 attendance-to-baptism ratio, leaving 3,364 eligible churches to continue in the study.

⁷³ The third criterion excluded churches that did not have both two years of 10 percent worship attendance growth per year and a 20:1 baptism-to-attendance ratio or better during the 2011-2016 timeframe. This final delimitation identified 716 churches.

⁷⁴ The research team first narrowed the sample of churches by applying the following criteria: (1) worship attendance in 2011 had declined 10 percent or more compared to 2006 (5 years prior) and (2) worship attendance in 2016 had grown 10 percent or more over 2011 levels (5 years prior). Next, the research team narrowed the sample further by eliminating congregations that (1) had less than 10 percent annual growth for two of the last five years or (2) had a minimum worship attendance-to-baptism ratio of 20:1 for less than two of the last five years. Finally, the research team narrowed the sample still further by requiring that the revitalized churches achieved both two years of 10 percent worship growth per year and a worship attendance-to-baptism ratio of 20:1. The research team's analysis identified 716 churches as

Research Question 3

Research question 3 asked, “Of those SBC churches experiencing revitalization, what percentage emphasized the development of a culture of prayer in the process of revitalization?”

Table 8 summarizes all the disciplines in this study; but, specifically, 86.86 percent of surveyed churches emphasized the development of a culture of prayer as “Important” and “Highly Important” to the revitalization process.

Research Question 4

Research question 4 asked, “How did revitalization pastors develop a culture of prayer in their church?”

Interview questions 9, 10, 11, 12, and 15 were used to answer this research question. Each of these questions are answered as they apply to the development of prayer culture in the selected churches. Following will be an answer to research question 4.

Interview question 9. This question asked, “What initiatives did you implement to develop a prayer culture in your church?”

The researcher designed this question to understand what the pastors initially did to facilitate change in the prayer culture of their churches. Pastors answered this in a myriad of ways. One pastor said he returned the church to what he called “an old fashion prayer meeting” during Wednesday evening services.⁷⁵ He wanted his congregation to focus on prayer, asking God to fix the church. Pastor 6 answered similarly; he wanted to see a return to praying on Wednesdays instead of it being a time of teaching.⁷⁶

experiencing revitalization, 5.24 percent (716 divided by 13,656) of declining churches with sufficient data to qualify them as being revitalized.

⁷⁵ Pastor 1, interview.

⁷⁶ Pastor 6, interview.

Some pastors sensed that their people did not know how to pray or misunderstood the meaning behind prayer. Therefore, several pastors taught and preached on prayer. Some taught prayer as a series of messages delivered from the pulpit. Others purposefully gathered around them people whom he taught to pray by his example prior to worship services, mid-week prayer time, or assembled prayer groups.

Interview question 10. The researcher used this question not only to determine any opposition to the development of a culture of prayer in these churches but also to ascertain how pastors overcame any opposition concerning prayer.⁷⁷ Every pastor said that they did not experience any opposition to the development of a culture of prayer, but they did perceive a lack of knowledge or misunderstanding of prayer within their congregations.

Interview question 11. This question asked, “Reflecting back, what would you have done differently regarding the development of the prayer culture?” Several pastors, earlier in the tenure, wished they would have taught on prayer at the church so as to get people to see the value of prayer, while others desired that they would have been more intentional about prayer by specifically beginning dedicated times of prayer corporately, in small groups, and in homes.

Interview question 12. This question asked, “What resources, if any, did you find helpful in developing a prayer culture in your church?” The researcher asked this question to garner any resources that pastors felt helped them in their desire to cultivate a prayer culture in their churches. Although no one resource rose to the top, several respondents cited the works of Gregory Frizzell as helpful to their prayer initiatives. Two

⁷⁷ Question 10 asked, “How did you overcome any opposition in developing a prayer culture in your church?”

pastors mentioned the “Transitional Pastor Handbook,” a manual to help pastors as they navigate the waters of churches transitioning from one pastor to another.

Although not specifically mentioned as a resource used by pastors, Henry Blackaby’s *Experiencing God* seemed to weave its way into many of the conversations. Numerous pastors mentioned Blackaby’s overarching theme during the interview process.⁷⁸ Since the influence of Blackaby repeatedly manifested in several interviews, *Experiencing God* would, therefore, be a resource that definitely influenced these pastors to pray in specific ways.

Interview question 15. The final question of the interview tapped into the experience pastors gained as they strove to revitalize their churches. The researcher purposely built a context for this question to allow pastors to think as if they were mentoring a young man who is seeking to be a pastor and is subsequently called to a dying church. Specifically, the researcher asked, “A young pastor in your church is called to revitalize another church. What advice would you give to him as he seeks to revitalize their church?”⁷⁹ Pastors repeatedly said that they would advise young pastors to model prayer in their own lives and to teach people how to pray and fast. Along with this idea of prayer is that of patience on behalf of the new pastor. Prayer allows pastors to exercise patience as they petition God and wait on his timing to fix the church. Patience through prayer allows young pastors to remain humble by realizing that God is the one who drives the revitalization, not them.

⁷⁸ “Watch to see where God is working and join him.” Blackaby, Blackaby, and King, *Experiencing God*, 16.

⁷⁹ This question was purposed to generate thought as to recommendations and advice a seasoned pastor would give to a new pastor tackling the task of revitalizing a church. However, the answers given by the interviewee can be extended to any pastor finding himself in a similar situation—that is, revitalizing a church.

Conclusion for research question 4. At the beginning of the revitalization process, pastors perceived that their congregation exhibited an unintentionality toward prayer coupled with a lack of understanding concerning the nature of prayer. Pastors understood that prayer provided the spark necessary to start the engine of revitalization in their churches. Hence, pastors taught their people to pray with intentionality both in small groups and corporately during the worship hours, with many pastors wishing they began the process of prayer education sooner rather than later. Although no major consensus could be discerned through the interviews, pastors mentioned the works of Gregory Frizzell to aid in the development of prayer culture, and the influences of Blackaby's *Experiencing God* frequently appeared. Through the revitalization process, these participants advised pastors finding themselves in similar circumstances to remain patient and humble by modeling prayer to their congregations. In response to research question 4, pastors recognized a lack of intentionality in the prayer life of their church; therefore, they took steps to model prayer and to teach people how to pray, exhibiting patience and humility, allowing God to work in their churches' circumstances.

Research Question 5

Research question 5 asked, "How did the prayer culture change as the church experienced revitalization?" Interview questions 8, 13, and 14 informed the answers to research question 5. Each of these questions are answered as they apply to the development of prayer culture in the selected churches. Following will be an answer to research question 5.

Interview question 8. This question 8 asked, "Describe the church's prayer culture before the revitalization." The question allowed the researcher to gain insight into the prayer culture of the churches before the revitalizers began changing prayer practices. Seven out of twelve pastors stated that the prayer practices in their congregations seemed

to be scattered, unintentional, unorganized, or even non-existent. However, pastors positively evaluated their people as praying people but described them as uncoordinated in their efforts. This question also provided insight into the changes made by the pastors from the time they began to the present, thus allowing the researcher to compare and contrast the behavior of the churches.

Interview question 13. This question asked pastors, “How did the emphasis on the development of a prayer culture contribute to the church’s revitalization?” The researcher purposed this question to gain insight into the influences of prayer in churches. Pastors related stories concerning several instances of people being healed in their churches. The healings described were not limited to physical ailments; they also included personal situations in the lives of the congregants. One pastor shared a story about how God rescued his church’s current youth pastor and his wife from lives of incarceration and substance abuse. Moreover, the people of this church began praying specifically for unbelievers to come to the church and accept Christ as their savior. Several pastors claimed that the focus on developing a prayer culture within their churches became foundational to their revitalization efforts. In particular, a pastor related how prayer seemed to be an afterthought for church meetings, an add on to the business conducted. Now, he celebrates that prayer is first and foremost in church business meetings and that the temporal portions of the meetings happen only after the people pray about the spiritual needs.

Another description arose when pastors stated that prayer “heats things up.” They described prayer as the catalyst that sparked the revitalization, pushing the people to seek God in all they do by praying before they engage in a new ministry endeavor. Similarly, Blackaby’s idea of “see where God works and join him” became an oft-

repeated phrase.⁸⁰

Interview question 14. The researcher asked this question to further understand the role of prayer in church revitalization: “Which prayer initiatives remain in place since the revitalization?” This question helped the researcher to see the lasting effects, and to determine the efficacy of the prayer initiatives that pastors introduced at the beginning of their revitalization efforts. Numerous pastors restated the prayer initiatives they began at the beginning of their revitalization processes, such as the following:

1. Men and women’s prayer meeting
2. Prayer before worship services, including prayer with the pastor
3. Prayer partners instead of traditional mid-week services
4. The return to mid-week prayer services instead of a time of Bible study
5. Home prayer teams
6. Prayer teams for community outreach events
7. Forty days of prayer and fasting

Pastors reiterated the idea of men praying in the church in a demonstrable way by going to the altar each Sunday morning because they wanted the congregation to see men praying as an example to them. In the same way, a pastor chose to pray with his congregation during Wednesday night services, instead of any other activity, so as to model prayer to his people.

Conclusion for research question 5. As seen above, pastors began ministering at churches that exhibited little to no reliance on the power of prayer and showed a scattered or uncoordinated prayer culture at the beginning of their revitalization

⁸⁰ Blackaby, Blackaby, and King, *Experiencing God*, 16. Few pastors mentioned Blackaby, Blackaby, and King, but this theme recurred frequently among several pastors during the interview process.

efforts. Pastors identified their congregations as “praying people” but also as lacking the wherewithal to focus their attention in a concerted effort in prayer. Pastors perceived the lack of focus in their churches, and, consequently, they emphasized prayer at specific times, with specific people, and by different methods. Pastors acknowledged that the majority of their specific prayer initiatives remained in place well into their revitalization efforts. In response to research question 5, the prayer culture of these churches changed from one of scattered to one of purpose as pastors deliberately thrust prayer to the forefront, coordinating and focusing their congregations’ attention on the need to seek God through prayer.

Evaluation of the Research Design

The purpose of this sequential explanatory mixed method research is to determine the role of prayer in church revitalizations. Lifeway provided the data collected from SBC churches through the reporting of ACP data. The research constituted three distinct phases: phase 1 identified revitalized churches through quantitative analysis; phase 2 identified churches reporting that prayer played an important role in the revitalization of their churches through a quantitative survey; phase 3 consisted of in-depth qualitative interviews to further inform the quantitative data from phase 2. The research design provided an adequate analysis of the data for the intended purpose of the research. Due to the precision of the ACP data from Lifeway, the data reflects an accurate representation of the state of churches in the SBC.

Strengths

The primary strength of this study is that the data comes from pastors involved in successful in church revitalizations. Phase 1 identified specific churches that statistically demonstrated revitalization. In phase 2, the research team designed a unique survey instrument to gather practices concerning pastors’ development of prayer during

their church revitalization efforts; as a result, the survey instrument identified potential participants for purposeful interviews in phase 3. Phase 3 interviews employed open-ended questions about demographics, then asked specific questions concerning prayer in order to answer research questions 4 and 5. Qualitative interviews gathered information that provided a more comprehensive view of prayer from the experiences of pastors in revitalization situations, whether at the beginning, middle or end of the process. The researcher purposely selected phase 3 participants based on a predetermined set of criteria to obtain a diverse set of practices concerning the cultivation of a culture of prayer in dying or plateauing churches.

Challenges

The most significant challenge to this research came in the form of survey participants. Therefore, the delivery mechanism of the phase 2 instrument (i.e., email) posed a challenge because when people see an email for solicitation or participation, they often discard such emails into their electronic trash bins without reading them. Likewise, U.S. mailboxes get filled with the same type of junk mail, and residents instantly place such mail in their garbage cans. Of the 466 hard copies sent to churches with attendance greater than fifty people, the research team only received eighteen surveys through the mail, not a significant amount; however, the paper copies did help overall to improve the confidence level. The fact that many churches considered both the email and U.S. mail surveys as junk mail, and in turn, hampered the research team's desire to achieve a confidence level of 5; thus, the researchers only attained a confidence level of 6.71. Even though the researchers called and emailed churches numerous times, this aspect of the research process was very challenging overall.

The second challenge relates to the first. Many churches meeting the team's criteria of revitalization were small rural churches without email capability or means to

access the internet to participate in the survey.⁸¹ This feature, once again, limited the obtainment of survey participants to achieve a better confidence level.

Third, question 28 asked, “In what ways were the topic and act of prayer prioritized in corporate worship during the revitalization process?” Based off of research question 4, pastoral development of a prayer culture, it may have been better to expand beyond just the corporate worship service. For instance, better answers may have been obtained if question 28 was structured like this: “In what ways did you teach on prayer and the topic of prayer during the revitalization process?” Allowing the survey to capture all the ways pastors taught prayer to their people.

Conclusion

This study regarding church revitalization collected data from thousands of SBC churches reporting sufficient data through the ACP. Phase 1 identified 716 revitalized churches according to a predetermined set of criteria established by the research team. In phase 2, 145 pastors responded to the survey, affording the researcher an additional opportunity to capture experiences of the pastors concerning the role of prayer in their revitalization efforts. Phase 3 collected the experiences of twelve purposefully selected pastor through qualitative interviews to determine their experience in developing a culture of prayer during the revitalization process.

The findings represent a comprehensive look at SBC churches experiencing revitalization from 2011 to 2016. Pastors may discover the findings of this study helpful as they may find themselves in a church revitalization context. The academy may apply these findings as they seek to educate, equip, and encourage new pastors to pursue churches in need of revitalization. The following chapter discusses some insights,

⁸¹ The research team communicated to all 716 churches that a hard copy could be sent to them through the mail.

implications, and applications of the research and mentions recommendations for further and future research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This three-phase sequential mixed methods study analyzed SBC churches during the years 2006-2016 to determine how the development of a prayer culture affected church revitalization. The initial Lifeway data of phase 1 revealed that 716 churches met the researchers' criteria for revitalization. In phase 2, 145 persons participated in a survey specifically designed to capture the experiences of pastors who saw God revitalize their churches. In turn, and to further understand and catalog these experiences of revitalizing pastors, twelve interviews were conducted to identify the practices of these pastors in developing a culture of prayer and how it led to revitalization.

The last undertaking of research this large and in depth occurred in 2007 when Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson conducted their research.¹ No data exists in the recent past that catalogs the experiences of pastors who used prayer as a catalyst to start the engine of revitalization. The research sought to identify the past and current practices being employed by pastors who were engaged in the revitalization process and did so by changing the prayer culture of their church. This chapter provides insight to aid in future revitalizations. Specifically, this chapter will outline research implications, apply the research, provide limitations, and suggest areas of future research regarding prayer in church revitalization.

¹ See Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B&H, 2007).

Research Implications

Around the globe, churches continue to close their doors, with many becoming venues for different vocations, such as doctors' offices, circus schools, and Islamic mosques, just to name a few.² Observing the U.S., the same occurs with “80 and 90 percent of all evangelical churches” in a state of decline or stagnation.³ Frankly, when looking at the amount of church closures every year, the state of the church of Jesus Christ seems as though it is losing the battle. Within the researcher's own Southern Baptist Convention, close to 50 percent of SBC churches are in decline, and when adding plateaued churches to the ones in decline, close to three out of four churches are either dying or plateaued. Aubrey Malphurs warns that if a church does not follow the church growth curve and “waits until it is dying to make changes, it finds itself in a reactive not a proactive mode.”⁴ Malphurs concludes that trying to start new growth many times proves unsuccessful because churches must use the momentum from previous times of growth as a catalyst to grow further.⁵

Within this research alone, the team discovered 13,656 SBC churches in decline, with only a mere 5.24 percent actually reaching a level of revitalization. However, the ACP data from Lifeway Research also found that over one quarter of SBC churches reporting sufficient information shows signs of growth, which leads one to believe that hope exists for the future of SBC churches. The question arising from this

² R. Albert Mohler Jr., “Christ Will Build and Rebuild His Church: The Need for ‘Generation Replant,’” in *A Guide to Church Revitalization: Guide Book No. 005*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2015), 7.

³ Mohler, “Christ Will Build and Rebuild His Church,” 8; for additional information on the decline of churches, see Thom S. Rainer, “114 Things You Need to Know about Revitalizing Churches,” chap. 2, North/West Lower Michigan Synod, November 25, 2015, <http://mittensynod.server303.com/114-things-you-need-to-know-about-revitalizing-churches/>.

⁴ Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 14. See also figure 1 (p. 41).

⁵ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 14.

research, though, is how do Christians—and especially ministers—help dying churches look, think, and act like the healthy churches? Perhaps, the answer does not lie in the “doing” of yet another ministry program but rather in the prayer practices upon which several churches in this study relied. According to Stetzer and Dodson, “Comeback leaders reported that prayer permeated many aspects of ministry within their churches. In addition, the survey pointed out that revitalization was impacted by strategic prayer. Many comeback leaders described that praying in their churches was systematic and intentional.”⁶ As reported in chapter four of this work, the findings vis-à-vis prayer seem similar to those discovered by Stetzer and Dodson.

Within the quantitative portion of this study, pastors and churches indicated that they relied on the power of prayer to effect a change in their churches. Of the seven disciplines studied, survey participants ranked prayer of the highest importance during their churches’ revitalization efforts.⁷ Also emerging from the survey, pastors found changing the prayer culture to be five times easier than changing the culture of evangelism.⁸ In other words, pastors faced no real resistance when trying to convince their church members to pray more. This finding goes hand in hand with the qualitative interviews in that pastors found no resistance from their members to begin to change the prayer culture of their churches; however, they saw that people misunderstood prayer and had a general apathy toward the practice. To overcome this misunderstanding and apathy, pastors gathered their people to pray—not to learn about prayer, but to meaningfully pray to the Lord.

⁶ Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 201.

⁷ A staggering 96.35 percent of survey respondents ranked prayer as the discipline of greatest importance to their church’s revitalization. The researcher came to this conclusion by combining the scores of “Highly Important,” “Important,” and “Slightly Important” for question 8 of the survey (see appendix 9, table A5).

⁸ See Table 9, page 98.

Research Applications

The research team began this three-phase explanatory sequential mixed methods study of SBC churches with 28,046 churches reporting sufficient ACP data, then the researchers narrowed the sample to 716 churches meeting the team's criteria of revitalization. The survey gathered 145 responses to the survey, of which twelve respondents were interviewed concerning the role of prayer in their churches' revitalization. The interviewed pastors lived in different parts of the U.S., ministered in differing contexts, exhibited a diverse age range, and served in small, large, single-site, and multi-site churches. Most of all, through God's power, these pastors successfully revitalized their churches and truly lived out certain successful practices concerning prayer. The phase 2 results show that 96.35 percent of respondents found prayer to be "Important" for the revitalization of their churches.⁹ Stetzer and Dodson found the same ten years ago: "An increased emphasis on prayer was a major factor of importance to these comeback churches."¹⁰ It seems as though an emphasis on prayer continues to be a consistent theme in revitalization work.

Pastors Directed Specific Times of Prayer

One of the most compelling observations from the phase 3 interviews is that the pastors designated specific times of prayer for and with their people. These specific times come in the following forms:

1. Prayer teams before the worship service
2. Prayer times with the men
3. Pastors' wives leading other ladies of church, causing the men to step up and lead

⁹ See appendix 9, table A5.

¹⁰ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 69. Stetzer and Dodson listed three faith factors necessary to lead a comeback church as ranked by a comeback leader based on a scale of 0 to 4.5: (1) Renewed belief in Jesus Christ and the mission of the church (4.44), (2) renewed attitude for servanthood (4.23), and (3) more strategic prayer effort (4.13). Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 55-6.

4. Prayer for specific outreach efforts of the church

In short, pastors gathered people to a time of prayer.

The revitalization pastors saw the need to direct their congregations to gather and pray, pointing to a leadership component. Consider the words of George Barna: “The central conclusion is that the American church is dying due to lack of strong spiritual leadership. In this time of unprecedented opportunity and plentiful resources, the church is actually losing influence. The primary reason is the lack of leadership. Nothing is more important than leadership.”¹¹ In 1734, Jonathan Edwards organized what he called “prayer societies” where believers came together either on Saturday evening or Sunday morning to pray.¹² Edwards led his people to pray for revival and the salvation of souls. Likewise, pastors who participated in phase 3 of this research employed a similar strategy to breathe new life into their churches. Furthermore, these pastors expressed a desire to have begun the practice of specific prayer times earlier in the revitalization process.

Pastors Remained Humble through Prayer during the Revitalization Process

Another takeaway from the research findings resided in remaining humble during the process of revitalizing a church. The interviewed pastors advised other pastors in similar situations to approach the revitalization of their churches with an air of humility. Andy Davis, in *Revitalize*, listed fourteen lessons he learned when God breathed new life into his church in Durham, NC. He wrote, “Rely on God, not on

¹¹ George Barna, “Nothing is More Important than Leadership,” in *Leaders on Leadership: Wisdom, Advice and Encouragement on the Art of Leading God’s People*, ed. George Barna (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1987), 18. For further study, see Joseph Stephen Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Convention Churches: A Mixed Methods Study” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018).

¹² Jonathan Edwards, *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God’s People, In Extraordinary Prayer, For The Revival of Religion and the Advancement and the Advancement of Christ’s Kingdom on Earth*, ed. Henry Rogers and Edward Hickman (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1834), sec. 3, Kindle.

yourself.”¹³ He also urged pastors to saturate their churches in prayer as a means to fully rely on God.¹⁴ The words of Brian Croft clarify the idea of humility because too many times churches that find themselves in a revitalization situation were hurt by former pastors who wanted to promote themselves rather than shepherd souls: pastors must focus on relying on God through prayer, and they must discover where God has been working and join him there.¹⁵

Pastors Modeled Prayer in Their Own Lives

Pastors participating in this study disciplined themselves to pray and model prayer in their own lives before they expected their people to pray. Phase 2 shows this conclusion from numerous pastors. One noteworthy aspect from this portion of the study was the pastors’ authenticity and acknowledgment of their inadequacies. For example, one pastor wrote,

My personal prayer as pastor has been desperate and determined and daily. I prayed for wisdom in leader selection, planning processes, presentation/communication, vision. I’ve constantly prayed for Biblical understanding and “Lord, don’t let me mess up what You’re doing.” I believe in praying in agreement with the Scripture. I have failed in praying for each member by name.

This particular pastor knew the situation in which God placed him; in turn, he tapped into God’s infinite power through the practice of prayer. Hence, he sought direction from God from the position of his knees. This pastor’s words echo the words of E. M. Bounds: “Prayer is a solemn service due to God, an adoration, a worship, an approach to God for some request, the presenting of some desire, the expression of some need to him, who

¹³ Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 23.

¹⁴ Davis, *Revitalize*, 23.

¹⁵ Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying and Divided Churches* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), 45.

supplies all, and satisfies all desires.”¹⁶ The pastor’s specific request was one of desperation and direction, and he directed his prayer to the One who can meet all of his needs and revitalize his church.

Another interviewed pastor wanted to set an example to his congregation and see that they have a praying pastor.¹⁷ He demonstrated his commitment to prayer by attending the Wednesday evening prayer services of his church. Similar to other churches, this pastor admitted that Wednesday evening provide ample opportunities to minister and teach in various activities around the church. However, this pastor publicly participated during a time of intercessory prayer to set himself as an example to his people.

Pastors Advised Being Patient during the Revitalizing Process

Church revitalization is a slow process.¹⁸ Many times, churches entrench themselves in poor practices over many years, and these practices become engrained in the culture of the church. For some in these churches, these practices rise to the level of orthodoxy. Malphurs describes such a situation like this: “The problem is that some of these people in the European-influenced churches believe they’re defending the faith when in reality they’re defending their cultural heritage. So, they fight as if the entire future of orthodox Christianity depends on them.”¹⁹ Malphurs calls these practices

¹⁶ E. M. Bounds, *The Complete Works of E. M. Bounds on Prayer: Experiencing the Wonders of God through Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990), 231.

¹⁷ Pastor 6, telephone interview by author, June 20, 2019.

¹⁸ Davis, *Revitalize*, 25.

¹⁹ Aubrey Malphurs, *Look before You Lead: How to Discern and Shape Your Church Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 14. Malphurs argues that many things influence the culture of our churches. He states that some of the churches in the U.S. were “made in Europe” and some churches were “Made in America.” By the end of the twentieth century the European influenced churches in America were in decline with the new, younger generation wanting transition to “A more culturally current American format,” Malphurs writes. However, this desire to change the culture of the church was met with strong opposition with some fighting as if the entirety of Christian orthodoxy rested on their resistance to

“sacred cows” and amusingly writes, “Whatever is considered sacred becomes relatively immune to change. Over the years churches nurture and milk their own sacred cows.”²⁰ He admits that these ideas of “sacred cows” will not change quickly. In other words, the process to change the culture of a church requires patience in prayer because, overall, it is a slow process. Likewise, a decade ago, Stetzer and Dodson wrote, “Many of the leaders surveyed indicated that making the comeback required an attitudinal change among the people of the church.”²¹ Edgar Schein likens the cultural change process to DNA, writing, “Leaders who want to change culture . . . have to locate the cultural DNA and change some of that.”²² DNA change takes time, and, likewise, so does the culture of organizations; therefore, pastors must possess patience while they effect change in their churches through focused prayer to change the hearts and the minds of their people.

Another way to exhibit patience is to understand that people enjoy a certain amount of status quo. However, Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James Furr conclude that stagnation or status quo means a slow death spiral of any organization—in this case, the church.²³ Stetzer and Dodson write, “It is essential that we pray and hear from God when we seek to lead our churches through change.”²⁴ Therefore, pastors must study the culture of their church and patiently seek God’s help through prayer in order to

the cultural change.

²⁰ Malphurs, *Look before You Lead*, 138.

²¹ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 61.

²² Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 5th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2017), 27.

²³ Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 36. These authors also advise that the beginning stage of effecting change in a church is to prepare spiritually. They even advise to not proceed with the process to change the culture unless the leaders willingly prepare themselves and seek God before launching a campaign to affect change. The spiritual preparation consists of: prayer, Bible study, meditation, solitude, and fasting. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 29-34.

²⁴ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 193.

implement changes that promote revitalization.

Pastors Taught their Congregations about Prayer

Pastors expressed that their congregations had a general misunderstanding about prayer. This misunderstanding came in the form of a general apathy or indifference toward prayer (i.e., “Does prayer really work?”) or a confusion as to the true nature of prayer as a means of communicating with God. Unfortunately, people seldomly admitted their lack of faith publicly. Donald Whitney writes, “Often we do not pray because we doubt that anything will actually happen if we pray.”²⁵ Phase 3 interviews of pastors indicated that the people in their congregations embraced the traditions of prayer practices such as Wednesday prayer services that featured teaching instead of praying. Some pastors expressed that their congregations only focused on the temporal, not the eternal.

As a solution to this problem, pastors taught their people about prayer through various preaching series during the Sunday morning worship services. Others gathered around themselves groups of people to study and pray together, allowing people to learn to pray by example, as mentioned above. And yet, other pastors reclaimed the mid-week prayer service, focused exclusively on prayer for themselves, towards a time to adore the Creator, confess their sins, and petition God to renew their churches. Stetzer and Dodson observe the same: “Historically, revivals have taken place when God’s people prayed fervently and earnestly, and when they obeyed God’s Word profoundly.”²⁶ How do people learn to “pray fervently and earnestly” if someone does not teach them to do so? Pastors currently finding themselves in revitalizing situations must teach their people to

²⁵ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 83.

²⁶ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 69.

pray.

The Academy

In the summer of 2014, Howard and Patricia Mathena donated one million dollars to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to fund a major emphasis in the area of church revitalization.²⁷ In the same article concerning that donation, R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of SBTS, says,

We need young pastors to recognize the incredible, untapped opportunity of those churches [dying] and to recognize that even as church planting is a courageous calling, so also is going into a church and helping it to recapture its vision, re-embrace its convictions and re-address its community in the world with an opportunity for missions and evangelism,²⁸

This generous gift recognized the need to begin an education program to properly equip pastors seeking to revitalize churches. To this end, Brian Croft leads the Mathena Center for Church Revitalization at Southern Seminary. Croft specifically began an internship program in the fall of 2015 to “train men for pastoral ministry in a seminary context, particularly for the work of church revitalization.”²⁹ In the syllabus for a course on church revitalization, Croft states that one of his goals is to “cultivate and maintain their [the student’s] personal and spiritual well-being.”³⁰ From phases 2 and 3, this research compiled the personal prayer practices of revitalizing pastors. The research provides students seeking a career in the revitalization of God’s church with tools to enhance their personal and spiritual well-being with the Lord through prayer.

²⁷ James A. Smith, “Harold Mathena: Faithful Steward of God’s Blessings,” *Southern Seminary* 82, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 30-31.

²⁸ Smith, “Harold Mathena,” 30.

²⁹ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 127.

³⁰ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 129.

Recently, Adam Greenway, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, announced the launching of the Center for Church Revitalization. Greenway echoes the words of Mohler: “While church planting remains a critically important institutional emphasis, the time is right to strengthen our work on Seminary Hill in training and resourcing those who will and do serve in established churches in order that these congregations may experience a fresh movement of God in their midst.”³¹

Two major seminaries under the umbrella of the SBC recognize the need to train men to revitalize churches. With this study on church revitalization being the most recent in a decade, seminaries could easily incorporate the experiences and practices of successful pastors who have labored with God to revitalize their churches as cataloged in this and similar works.³² Seminaries have a golden opportunity to teach new pastors about the nature of church decline and recovery and how to effect change through the development of a prayer culture in declining church.

Additional Insights

The research above shows the themes, topics, and findings of those practitioners engaged in revitalization in connection to the scholarly precedent literature, the gathered quantitative data from the survey instrument, and qualitative data from the interviews. In addition to these themes from the best practices among revitalizers, other

³¹ Alex Sibley, “Southwestern Seminary Launches Center for Church Revitalization,” Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, August 5, 2019, <https://swbts.edu/news/releases/southwestern-seminary-launches-center-church-revitalization/>.

³² Co-laborers researching the phenomenon of church revitalization include the following: Christopher Michael Aiken, “Church Revitalization and the Role of Pastoral Leadership: A Mixed Methods Study” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018); Aaron Thomas Colyer, “Church Revitalization and Evangelistic Emphasis: A Mixed Methods Study” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018); Brian Carl Legg, “Transforming the Discipleship Culture in Church Revitalization: A Mixed Methods Study” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019); Donald Ray Sanders Jr., “Transforming the Leadership Development Culture in Church Revitalization: A Mixed Methods Study” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019); Mike Richardson, “Transforming Mission Culture in Church Revitalization: A Mixed Methods Study” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, forthcoming).

less likely ideas and themes emerged that are worth noting: first, the lasting effects of Henry Blackaby's *Experiencing God* and, second, a graphical depiction of church revitalization based off of the cycle of revival from chapter two.

The Ongoing Influence of Henry Blackaby

Henry Blackaby first published *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* in June of 1976. Churches used this book to teach their people to not only understand how to experience God but also to teach them another premise about the study: "Watch to see where God is working and join him" there.³³ Numerous pastors of the twelve interviewed in phase 3 used similar words although not specifically naming Blackaby. Furthermore, one pastor mentioned another book by Blackaby, *Fresh Encounter: God's Plan for Your Spiritual Awakening*,³⁴ as a tool he used to help spiritually awaken his church. Henry Blackaby has influenced many churches and, whether directly or indirectly, has helped to revitalize dying churches. Dying or plateauing churches may see value in using a Blackaby study, such as *Experiencing God* or *Fresh Encounter*, to help them unify and press on toward a healthy church. To know where God is working, a pastor must develop a consistent practice of prayer in his own life and in the culture of his church to discern the Lord's direction.

A Model for Church Revitalization

Another noteworthy insight is that once a church rises out of a declining state, they must not think the work is over, becoming complacent over past successes.

Malphurs posits that a church must begin another growth initiative "while it [the current

³³ Henry Blackaby, Richard Blackaby, and Claude King, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville: LifeWay, 2007), 16.

³⁴ Henry Blackaby, Richard Blackaby, and Claude King, *Fresh Encounter: God's Plan for Your Spiritual Awakening* (Nashville: B&H, 2009).

growth] is still virile and growing.”³⁵ Pastors who are currently in the revitalization process must push ahead in faith to build anew even though current ministry initiatives grow and flourish.³⁶ Unfortunately, leaders often wait too long, allowing their church to plateau, “before they seek renewal.”³⁷

What if pastors had a graphic model to help assess their churches’ current status and think about their next steps before they reach the peak of their current growth cycle? In chapter two of this thesis, a synthesized view of revival was presented to help understand its nature (see figure 2 on p. 65). Building off the revival model, figure 4 presents a model for church revitalization.

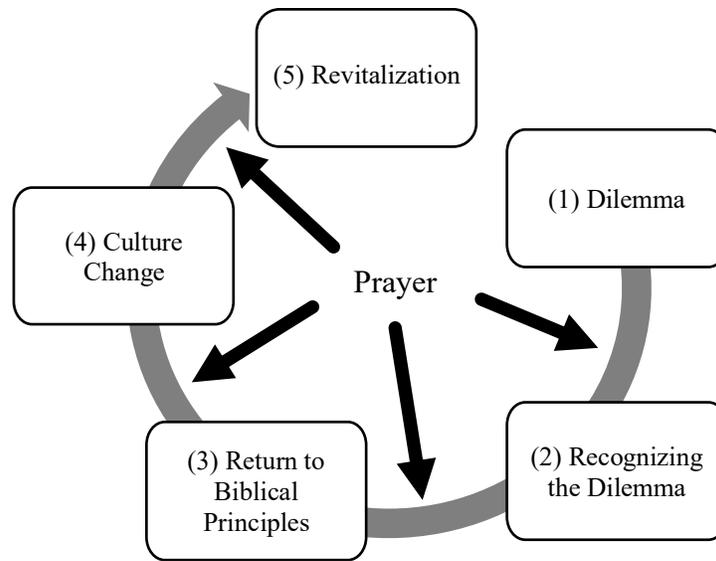


Figure 4. A model for church revitalization

According to Mark Clifton, churches become spiritually dead for one reason:

³⁵ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 12.

³⁶ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 13.

³⁷ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 13.

“They stop loving what they once loved and stop doing what they once did.”³⁸ Churches stop loving Jesus because they become focused on things other than reaching the lost, and they stop doing the things that reach the lost. Churches stop (1) reaching out (local and world missions), (2) following biblical leadership (unqualified elders or deacons assuming leadership roles), (3) executing and following church discipline, (4) praying, (5) preaching expository sermons, (6) evangelizing, and (7) discipling.

The model for church revitalization takes the form of five stages. First, a church finds itself in certain dilemmas (stage 1), for example, when attendance drops, finances dwindle, or its members become unable to meet the church’s financial obligations. As with revival, certain congregants may perceive the dilemma and begin praying for a solution to the church’s current problems. Then, there is a recognition of the dilemma (stage 2). At this stage, church members recognize that they are not focused on Jesus (i.e., love loss) and acknowledge that they are not doing what they once did to build up the church of Christ. They pray during this process asking God to reveal sin and his plans for the church. Next, through the actions of a change agent, usually a pastor, the church returns to the biblical principles that they once followed (stage 3). During this process, the pastor changes the culture of the church to reflect their rediscovered biblical principles (stage 4). Then, church members begin to (1) reach outward to their community, (2) adhere to a biblically based form of church leadership, (3) execute and follow church discipline, (4) pray more frequently and consistently, (5) preach God’s Word in an expository style, (6) carry out evangelism as a way of life, and (6) disciple their people. The church’s return to biblical principles and faithfulness in carrying out its God-given duties results in revitalization (stage 5). This entire process must be undergirded with a constantly praying congregation. Even after the church shows signs

4. ³⁸ Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 13-

of health and growth, the pastor and the congregation must seek God through prayer to direct them to where he is working, and they not get trapped into status quo.

However, as Malphurs points out, this cycle of revitalization is only the beginning; the process repeats over and over as the church continues to examine itself and address new dilemmas. Throughout the whole process (i.e., every cycle of revitalization), believers pray at each stage, asking God to provide them with discernment so they can evaluate their current practices and to provide the pastor with wisdom so he can guide and direct the church. This model allows church members to continue the constant process of evaluation, looking for ways to enhance their current processes, eliminating poorly performing ministries, and finding new, innovative ways to reach their community—and the world—with the gospel.

Research Limitations

This research studied SBC churches from 2006 to 2016 to understand the phenomenon of church revitalization. The findings of this study drew from a specific population of churches within the Southern Baptist Convention: (1) those churches identified as meeting the criteria of revitalization and (2) those churches that identified prayer as a major contributor to their revitalization efforts. From churches within the population experiencing revitalization, quantitative results can be generalized across the spectrum of churches. However, the data collected through the qualitative strand of the research (phase 3) may be transferable to churches in similar revitalization situations. However, the research may also serve other churches vis-à-vis themes and practices.

Further Research

Those interested in the revitalization phenomena can complete further research in a few different areas: (1) document the practices of successful churches; (2) discover the prayer practices of the laity; (3) ministry context-specific study.

Document the Practices of Successful Churches

Of the 28,046 churches reporting sufficient ACP data, 7,180 churches show demonstrable growth and health. Obviously, these churches must be doing something right. An interested student in revitalization may consider studying the healthy churches to determine their practices in the disciplines studied in this research. Too many times, people focus on the problem areas to come up with a solution. In this case, a researcher could focus on the successful churches and then apply the findings to declining or plateauing churches. Numerous churches employ successful practices. Determine practices that promote growth to assist declining churches in becoming healthy.³⁹

Discover the Prayer Practices of Church Members

This study focused on the methods pastors used to change the prayer culture of their church. A further study might consider looking at the prayer practices of the laity in the church. One pastor from the phase 3 interviews claimed that the people in his church prayed him to their church. Are there similar stories about prayer from the congregation in need of revitalization? How can the laity affect change within the church to promote revitalization? This type of study could encourage a pastor as he moves to a new church in need of revitalization, knowing that people may be praying specifically for him to come to their church.

Ministry Context-Specific Study

The present research looked at churches from three ministry contexts: rural, suburban, and urban. A new study could build off the current research but focus more on churches in a specific ministry context. Are there differences in the development of a

³⁹ This does not mean promote a “cookie-cutter” mentality (i.e., if it works at one church, then it must work at another church). Rather, certain general practices of churches can be documented and generalized, as done in this study, such as pastors promoting prayer and pastors teaching about prayer.

prayer culture in differing ministry contexts? Are there differing prayer issues in a suburban church that may not exist in a rural church? A challenge with the present study could come in the form of limited urban churches since only fifteen urban churches chose to participate in the phase 2 survey. This type of study might catalog differing prayer themes for specific ministry contexts, informing a new pastor moving to a specific type of church (e.g., rural, suburban, or urban). In turn, the new pastor may apply the successfully proven methods to his specific ministry context.

Conclusion

This study showed that Southern Baptist churches face an uphill battle since nearly seventy five percent of these churches show either a plateauing or a declining status. Kevin Ezell, president of NAMB, says that continuing research shows the decline and death of churches only got worse in the last decade⁴⁰ Furthermore, Mohler writes, “Between 80 and 90 percent of all evangelical churches in the United States are not growing, and a significant percentage are in outright decline.”⁴¹ The bleak picture painted by Mohler is supported by Thom Rainer’s numbers: “90 percent of churches are losing ground in their communities.”⁴² No doubt exists; churches in the U.S. continue to decline at an alarming rate, and this rate must be reversed. But what can be done? The research presented above validates the power of prayer when modeled by the pastor, taught to the congregation, and utilized by the people. Through prayer, God breathed new life into churches that seemed to be dead yet now thrive due to the obedience of these churches to seek him on their knees. Churches must pray. Pastors must pray. All of God’s people must pray.

⁴⁰ Kevin Ezell, “Breathing New Life into Dying Churches,” in *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, ed. Albert R. Mohler Jr. (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2015), 13.

⁴¹ Mohler, “Christ Will Build and Rebuild His Church,” 8.

⁴² Rainer, “114 Things You Need to Know about Revitalizing Churches,” chap. 2.

After studying and reading prayers for nearly three years, it seems fitting to close with the researcher's favorite prayer:

Here am I, O God, of little power and mean estate, yet lifting up heart and voice to Thee before whom all created things are as dust and vapour. Thou art hidden behind the curtain of sense, incomprehensible in thy greatness, mysterious in Thine almighty power; yet here I speak with the familiarly as a child to parent, as friend to friend. If I could not thus speak to Thee, then were I indeed without hope in this world. For it is little that I have power to do or ordain. Not of my own will am I here, not of my own will shall I soon pass hence. Of all that shall come to me this day, very little will be such as I have chosen for myself. It is Thou, O hidden One, who dost appoint my lot and determine the bounds of my habitation. It is Thou who hast put power in my hand to do one work and hast withheld the skill to do another. It is Thou who dost keep in Thy grasp the threads of this day's life and who alone knowest what lies before me to do or to suffer. But because Thou art my Father, I am not afraid. Because it is Thine own Spirit that stirs within my spirit's inmost room, I know that all is well. What I desire for myself I cannot attain, but what Thou desirest in me Thou canst attain for me. The good that I would do I do not, but the good that Thou willest in me, that Thou canst give me power to do.⁴³

May God richly bless you as you press on to bring glory to his name!

⁴³ John Baillie, *A Diary of Private Prayer* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), 41.

APPENDIX 1
CHURCH REMOVAL FROM THE SBC DATABASE
DURING THE YEARS 1999-2016

Table A1. Church removal from the SBC
database during the years 1999-2016

Year	Number of Churches Removed
1999	1135
2000	609
2001	475
2002	801
2003	1424
2004	1145
2005	881
2006	634
2007	591
2008	987
2009	1114
2010	901
2011	1362
2012	903
2013	1462
2014	853
2015	1210
2016	793

For averages of church removal from the SBC database, see appendix 2.

APPENDIX 2

AVERAGE CHURCH REMOVAL FROM THE SBC
DATABASE DURING THE YEARS 1999-2016

Table A2. Averages church removal from the
SBC database during the years 1999-2006

Selected Years	Averages Churches Removed from the SBC Database
1998-2016	960
2010-2016	1069
2001-2010	895
2007-2016	1018

APPENDIX 3
REVITALIZATION SURVEY

The survey was administered via surveymokey.com. Words in bold represent the emphasis in the online survey for participants.

Demographic Information

1. Your **current** role with your church:
 - Pastor/Elder
 - Deacon
 - Staff
 - Volunteer

2. Your role **prior** to the revitalization process:
 - Pastor/Elder
 - Deacon
 - Staff
 - Volunteer
 - Not at the church

3. Your role **during** to the revitalization process:
 - Pastor/Elder
 - Deacon
 - Staff
 - Volunteer
 - Not at the church

4. Your church context is best described as:
 - Rural
 - Suburban
 - Urban

5. Briefly describe what ways your community has changed over the last 10 years and ways your church sought to adapt.

6. Are you willing to participate in a follow up interview regarding the revitalization process at your church?

- Yes
- No

Interview Participation Contact Information

7. Contact information:
 - Name
 - Church Name
 - Church Address
 - Address
 - City/Town
 - State/Province
 - Zip/Postal Code
 - Church Website
 - Email Address
 - Phone Number

The Revitalization Process in General

8. Rate each ministry emphasis as to the importance it played in the revitalization process. (Highly Unimportant, Unimportant, Slightly Unimportant, Slightly Important, Important, Highly Important.)
 - Discipleship
 - Evangelism
 - Leadership
 - Missions
 - Prayer
 - Primary Worship Gathering
 - Other (please specify)
9. Reflecting on the change initiatives you have pursued in your church revitalization context, identify the area in which you have faced the **greatest** amount of **member resistance**.
10. Reflecting on the change initiatives you have pursued in your church revitalization context, identify the area in which you have faced the **greatest** amount of **member acceptance**.

Discipleship

11. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **discipleship ministry** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.

12. Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning the church's discipleship ministry **during the revitalization process**. (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree.)
- The church has a clearly defined discipleship process.
 - The majority of active members were able to explain the discipleship process.
13. Which programmatic elements existed in the church's discipleship approach **during the revitalization process**? (Select all that apply.)
- Age-graded Ministry (i.e. children, youth, college, adult)
 - Men's and/or Women's Bible Studies
 - Intergenerational Mentoring
 - Home-based Small Groups
 - Men's Ministry
 - Women's Ministry
 - One-on-one Type Discipleship Groups
 - Traditional Sunday School Model
14. Regarding the discipleship process, select the perspective which most closely represents the majority of active church members **at the beginning of the revitalization process**.
- **A More Individualistic Mindset** (Members expect to select and shape most of their own discipleship process, with an emphasis on personal needs and intentional personal growth.)
 - **A More Collective Mindset** (Members expect spiritual leadership to guide them in their discipleship process with an emphasis on common needs and intentional relational and community growth.)

Evangelism

15. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **evangelism ministry** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.
16. Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning the church's evangelism ministry **during the revitalization process**. (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree.)
- There was a demonstrable increase in personal evangelism among active members of the church.
 - The majority of active members could communicate the gospel in a personal evangelism encounter.
 - The active members of the church regularly engaged in gospel conversations for the purpose of personal evangelism.

17. Briefly describe the type and frequency of evangelism training **currently** offered in your church.

Missions (including national and international efforts)

18. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **missions ministry** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.
19. Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning the church's missions ministry **prior to the revitalization process**. (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree.)
- The church had a vibrant missions ministry focused on financially supporting short-term and/or long term missionaries.
 - The church had a vibrant missions ministry focused on sending short-term and/or long-term missionaries from its own membership.
20. Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning the church's **current missions ministry**. (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree.)
- The church had a vibrant missions ministry focused on financially supporting short-term and/or long term missionaries.
 - The church had a vibrant missions ministry focused on sending short-term and/or long-term missionaries from its own membership.

Leadership

21. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **leadership structures** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.
22. Indicate how important each of the following leadership practices have been in the revitalization process in your ministry context. (Highly Unimportant, Unimportant, Slightly Unimportant, Slightly Important, Important, Highly Important.)
- Building Momentum
 - Conceptual Thinking
 - Contextual Awareness and Planning
 - Developing Others
 - Getting Members Engaged
 - Gospel Orientation
 - Individual and Corporate Repentance

- Information Seeking
- Initiative
- Interpersonal Understanding
- Missional Focus
- Organizational Awareness
- Relationship Building
- Teamwork and Cooperation
- Transparency
- Willingness to Confront/Church Discipline

23. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **leadership development processes** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.

24. Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning the leadership development processes. (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree.)

- **Prior to the revitalization process**, a culture of effective leadership development existed within the church.
- Leadership development played a significant role in the revitalization process.

Prayer

25. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **prayer ministry** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.

26. Rate the following statements. (Highly Unimportant, Unimportant, Slightly Unimportant, Slightly Important, Important, Highly Important.)

- The **church leadership's** dependence upon prayer as a vital means for realizing revitalization in your ministry context.
- The **church congregation's** dependence upon prayer as a vital means for realizing revitalization in your ministry context.

27. Briefly describe your frequency and pattern of personal prayer **during the revitalization process**.

28. In what ways were the topic and act of prayer prioritized in corporate worship **during the revitalization process**?

Worship Gathering

29. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **primary worship gathering** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.

30. Please indicate what the most **difficult** element was to change in the primary worship gathering during the revitalization process and state the reason it was difficult.
31. Please indicate what the most **effective** element of change was in the primary worship gathering during the revitalization process and state the reason it was rewarding.

General Comments

32. What advice would you offer to a pastor seeking to lead a revitalization process?

APPENDIX 4

PHASE 3 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic Questions

1. Describe your ministry context: Rural Suburban Urban
2. How many years have you been in ministry?
3. How many years did you serve prior to the revitalization?
4. How many years have you served in your current role?
5. Describe your training and educational background.
6. What is your current age?
7. Describe your church (size, demographics, etc.)

Prayer Questions

8. Describe the church's prayer culture before the revitalization.
9. What initiatives did you implement to develop a prayer culture in your church?
10. How did you overcome any opposition in developing a prayer culture in your church?
11. Reflecting back, what would you have done differently regarding the development of the prayer culture?
12. What resources, if any, did you find helpful in developing a prayer culture in your church?
13. How did the emphasis on prayer development of a prayer culture contribute to the church's revitalization?
14. Which prayer initiatives remain in place since the revitalization?
15. A young pastor in your church is called to revitalize another church. What advice would you give to him as he seeks to revitalize their church?¹

¹ This purpose behind the question was meant to generate thought as to recommendations and advice a seasoned pastor would give to a new pastor tackling the task of revitalizing a church. However, the answers given by the interviewee can be extended to any pastor finding himself in a similar situation—revitalizing a church.

APPENDIX 5

EMAIL INVITATION FOR PHASE 2

Dear Church Leader,

My name is Dean Clark and I am researcher writing on behalf of a research team of doctoral students from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, under the supervision of Dr. Michael Wilder. The purpose for my letter to you today is to thank you for your leadership of your church. Based on current Annual Church Profile (ACP) data, You are in the 3.2% of Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Churches that have been led to revitalization in the last decade!

In a day of incessant reports of sustained decline in attendance, baptism, and membership across the landscape of SBC churches, you have been part of a small but effective percentage of churches that have experienced a turnaround. As such, we want to . . . in fact, we need to learn from you.

We are asking if you would take a few moments to complete the survey located at the link below within the next seven days. Of all reporting churches in the SBC, less than one thousand meet the initial criteria to be considered for this research project.

Our research seeks to identify principles that may be transferrable to other churches . . . to other leaders who desperately desire for God to breathe life into their churches. We pray that God allows us to see His hand at work in your church and to tell part of His story in your church.

As a pastor, I know the daily pressures of the ministry. There is far more to do than there seems to be time to accomplish it. This is why I am humbly asking you to give me some of your most precious commodity: time. We anticipate that it will require approximately 15 minutes to complete this survey.

A select group of churches will be identified from the results of this survey and approached to commit to a more in-depth interview with one of our research team.

As an incentive, if you complete the survey in the next seven days and indicate a willingness to participate in a 20-30 minute personal interview if requested, you will be entered into a drawing for a 250 dollar Amazon Gift Card.

Would you please take a moment, even now, to help all of our SBC churches learn from you? Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will

your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

On behalf of our team, thank you for your leadership and for your prayerful consideration of this request.

For the sake of His Name,

Dean C. Clark

APPENDIX 6

COMPARISON OF WEEKLY ATTENDANCE TO
BAPTISM IN SBC CHURCHES DURING 2015-2017

Table A3. Comparison of weekly attendance to
baptism in SBC churches during 2015-2017

	2017	2016	2015
Cooperating Churches	47,544	47,272	46,793
Weekly Worship Attendance	5,320,488	5,200,716	5,577,088
Total Baptisms	254,122	280,773	295,212
Attendance-to-Baptism Ratio	20.94	18.52	18.89

APPENDIX 7
HUDSON’S COMPETENCY MODEL

Table A4. Hudson’s competency model¹

Traits	Knowledge	Motives and Self-Concepts
Desire to be a pastor	Biblical knowledge	Love for God
Above reproach	Teaching ability	Love for the Bible
Husband of one wife	Organizational Awareness	Humility
Sober-minded	Team Leadership	Passion for Evangelism
Self-control	Initiative	Glory of God
Respectable	Missional Focus	Godly
Hospitable	Gospel orientation	Perseverance
Well-managed household	Church discipline	Biblical centrality

¹ Joseph Stephen Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Convention Churches: A Mixed Methods Study” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 159.

APPENDIX 8

PHASE 3 SAMPLE EMAIL SENT TO PASTORS

Dean Clark is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Pastor and Dean Clark

Time: Jul 19, 2019 11:00 AM Pacific Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/397684565>

One tap mobile

+17207072699,,397684565# US

+16465588656,,397684565# US (New York)

Dial by your location

+1 720 707 2699 US

+1 646 558 8656 US (New York)

Meeting ID: 397 684 565

Name: _____

Church: _____

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify principles and practices that influenced the church's revitalization. This research is being conducted by Dean C. Clark, under the supervision of Dr. Michael Wilder, of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for purposes of identifying principles and practices employed by pastoral leaders to influence the church revitalization. In this research, you will be asked to respond to several questions pertaining to your experience in leading your church in revitalization. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses.

Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this interview, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

Prayer culture refers to the attitude of a congregation to engage in the practice of prayer both corporately and privately in order to affect change in the church.

Demographic Questions

1. Describe your ministry context: Rural Suburban Urban
2. How many years have you been in ministry?
3. How many years did you serve prior to the revitalization?
4. How many years have you served in your current role?
5. Describe your training and educational background.
6. What is your current age?
7. Describe your church (size, demographics, etc.)

Prayer Questions

8. Describe the church's prayer culture before the revitalization.
9. What initiatives did you implement to develop a prayer culture in your church?
10. How did you overcome any opposition in developing a prayer culture in your church?
11. Reflecting back, what would you have done differently regarding the development of the prayer culture?
12. What resources, if any, did you find helpful in developing a prayer culture in your church?
13. How did the emphasis on prayer development of a prayer culture contribute to the church's revitalization?
14. Which prayer initiatives remain in place since the revitalization?
15. A young pastor in your church is called to revitalize another church. What advice would you give to him as he seeks to revitalize their church?

APPENDIX 9
PHASE 2 AGGREGATE DATA

Table A5. Phase 2 aggregate data¹

HU	6	6	5	4	4	3
U	1	1	1	8	0	1
SU	2	2	1	6	1	2
SI	22	18	11	24	13	7
I	42	53	35	49	31	44
HI	64	56	83	45	88	80
Total	137	136	136	136	137	137
	Discipleship	Evangelism	Leadership	Mission	Prayer	Worship
HU	4.38%	4.41%	3.68%	2.94%	2.92%	2.19%
U	0.73%	0.74%	0.74%	5.88%	0.00%	0.73%
SU	1.46%	1.47%	0.74%	4.41%	0.73%	1.46%
SI	16.06%	13.24%	8.09%	17.65%	9.49%	5.11%
I	30.66%	38.97%	25.74%	36.03%	22.63%	32.12%
HI	46.72%	41.18%	61.03%	33.09%	64.23%	58.39%
	Discipleship	Evangelism	Leadership	Mission	Prayer	Worship
I + HI	77.37%	80.15%	86.77%	69.12%	86.86%	90.51%
Lickert Average	5.08	5.05	5.35	4.77	5.42	5.39
HU + U + SU	6.57%	6.62%	5.15%	13.24%	3.65%	4.38%
SI + I + HI	93.43%	93.38%	94.85%	86.76%	96.35%	95.62%

¹ For phase 2 ministry importance information, see table 8 (p. 98).

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ABSTRACT

TRANSFORMING THE PRAYER CULTURE IN CHURCH REVITALIZATIONS: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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Churches within the U.S. continue to decline at an alarming rate. Southern Baptist churches close their doors at a rate of approximately 1000 churches every year. Consequently, churches must be revitalized because church planting alone cannot replace or replenish dying churches. Those pastors graduating from seminaries face nearly a 75 percent chance that they will find themselves in a church revitalization situation. When faced with overwhelming odds, similar to the ones stated, the early church sought the Lord through prayer for direction and intervention. Likewise, twenty-first century churches have at their disposal the same power that the early church employed: seek God in prayer by developing the discipline of prayer to effect change in the church. This study examined the condition of Southern Baptist Convention churches over a period from 2006 to 2016. Having identified churches that have been revitalized, this study examined how pastors developed a culture of prayer in their churches during the revitalization process. By directing their congregation to pray at specific times, by remaining humble and patient in the process, and by teaching their congregations to pray, these pastors led their churches, through the power of the Lord, back to health.

Keywords: prayer, prayer culture, organizational change, revitalization, leadership.

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