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TRANSFORMING THE DISCIPLESHIP CULTURE IN CHURCH
REVITALIZATION: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY

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TRANSFORMING THE DISCIPLESHIP CULTURE IN CHURCH
REVITALIZATION: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY

Brian Carl Legg

Read and Approved by:

Michael S. Wilder (Chair)

Shane W. Parker

Date _____

For Angela,
you are my best friend,
my beautiful bride,
and my partner in life.

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PREFACE

The credit for this thesis should be given to a culmination of many people who have encouraged and helped to form my thoughts along the way. I want to first give credit to my Lord, Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of faith. It is for His church that I endeavor to share insights on church revitalization. Next, I want to give credit to the pastors whom I interviewed and thank them for taking the time to provide their insights and thoughts towards discipleship and transforming the discipleship culture in their churches. Their words of wisdom with regard to revitalization will not go void.

To my cohort at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. We grew from independent nervous future-minded academics to a collective group of professionals in our field of study. Over the course of the last three years we challenged each other, prayed for one another, cried together, and celebrated as life happened all around us. We have truly become a family, and we do what we can for each other. I especially want to thank my research team, Dean Clark and Don Sanders. They are the friends I didn't know I needed until God placed us together. They are my brothers in battle, who challenge and push, and who spur one another on towards a love of Christ and His people.

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pursuit even when it separated us for brief periods of time. But most of all I save my final thanks for my beautiful wife Angela. She is my partner in all of this. Thank you for supporting me by reading every paper, for challenging me, and providing a seemingly never ending series of edits and suggestions. She stood by as I ran after this crazy dream of research and education. Without you I would not have finished. We made it to the finish line in this marathon. I love you!

Brian C. Legg

Round Rock, Texas
December 2019

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Today's evangelical, North American churches face a crossroads of uncertainty. Between 80-90 percent of churches in America are not growing.¹ A similar decline is observed in the world's largest Baptist denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Between 2016 and 2017 the total membership of SBC churches dropped by 211,340 (1.39 percent) and the number of baptisms dropped by an astounding 9.49 percent.² The implication from this data implies the church is actually in decline in America.³ The decline in church growth coupled with church closures should cause all Christians to be concerned. What can be done? Thom Rainer and Ed Stetzer both write extensively on the issue at hand with data to suggest that churches can revitalize.⁴ Other

¹ Albert R. Mohler Jr., *A Guide to Church Revitalization* (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2015), 8. This compilation work leverages an 80-90 percent decline statistic. An article from the North American Mission Board estimates that 70 percent of SBC churches in North America have plateaued or are declining in number. "What Is Replanting?" NAMB, accessed February 21, 2018, <https://www.namb.net/church-replanting>. However, Thom Rainer argues that the number of declining churches is actually more akin to 65 percent declining, or plateaued, with 35 percent recovering. "Dispelling the 80 Percent Myth of Declining Churches," *ThomRainer.com*, July 12, 2017, <https://thomrainer.com/2017/06/dispelling-80-percent-myth-declining-churches/>. This research delves further into the nuances of these statistics and many more issues in chap. 2.

² "Annual Church Profile Statistical Summary," LifeWay, accessed August 28, 2018, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/lifewayblogs/wp-content/uploads/sites/66/2018/06/01111854/ACP2017.pdf>. The Annual Church Profile (ACP) is used to capture SBC associated church attributes such as membership numbers, weekly attendance, baptisms, and cooperative program monetary giving. Comparable data from 2015-2016 revealed a 1 percent growth in number of churches added to the SBC, a decline of 0.51 percent in membership, and a decline of 4.89 percent in baptisms.

³ Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 23-27. The data from 2007 implied that a growing number of church plants did not overcome the number of church closures. Because researchers do not know exactly which specific churches meet the criteria for revitalization, then research such as this intends to fill the gap and provide a starting point for finding answers and providing solutions.

⁴ Thom Rainer, *Breakout Churches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 20-21. Rainer, along with Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, provides many examples of churches who did manage to successfully revitalize. These examples inform the research purpose with the hope of replicating the positive experience of revitalization in other dying churches.

writers such as Brian Croft suggest the solution to the problem lies in addressing six major areas in the declining church: discipleship, evangelism, leadership, missions, prayer, and worship.⁵

The research consisted of an individual research study as part of a larger study conducted by a team of seven Doctor of Education students at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The study examined factors present in church revitalizations within the SBC. The larger study examined how changes in discipleship, evangelism, leadership, missions, prayer, and worship are present in church revitalizations. The research was conducted in three phases. The research team jointly conducted a two-phase quantitative study. Each individual team member then proceeded with a qualitative study drawn from the shared quantitative data. The final goal of the overall study is to provide holistic, empirical data to support revitalization assumptions and efforts. This portion of the overall study is focused on churches who transformed their discipleship culture to aid in church revitalization.

Introduction to the Research Problem

Church revitalization is difficult to endure from beginning to end.⁶ In fact, most church revitalization efforts are not successful, leaving churches to face a replant or worse, closure.⁷ If a church is going to successfully turn from decline to growth and

⁵ Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying & Divided Churches* (London: Christian Focus, 2016), 117-21. These six attributes provide a holistic view of revitalization, but within this framework are the specific leadership attributes of perseverance, tenacity, and humility. The church will not experience overnight success by changing only one attribute, but will need to work diligently in all areas to revitalize. Additionally, the culture itself should be changed in order to move the whole organization towards revitalization.

⁶ Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), xv-xvii.

⁷ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, x-xi. See also, Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 15-16. Each author analyzed empirical data to demonstrate the decline of the American, evangelical church as a whole. Stepping from this point, they also claim that most efforts at revitalization fail to meet threshold criteria for demonstrating positive church growth in a 3-5-year time frame.

reproduce to fulfill the Great Commission it must do so by changing the culture towards embracing change and letting go of some long-held traditions.⁸

The main way churches are intended to grow numerically is through conversion of non-believers. These new believers are then disciplined in the faith to go witness to other non-believers. In other words, discipleship is showing someone the path to Jesus then walking towards that goal together as believers and through the process shifting the focus from self to Christ and then to others. The fundamental purpose of discipleship is to glorify God, “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16).⁹ A fundamental reason for the existence of the church is to disciple followers of Jesus.¹⁰

The current literature on church revitalization and discipleship falls into three categories: (1) empirical research on church revitalization, (2) anecdotal summaries of church revitalization from pastors, and (3) general writings on discipleship themes. Each category of the literature possesses strengths and weaknesses in addressing the issue of church revitalization and discipleship; however, no single writing addresses changing the discipleship culture as a means of revitalizing. Empirical studies identify the importance of biblical leadership in the process of church revitalization, but do not give details on leading the change towards discipleship.¹¹ Anecdotal and practical summaries identify

⁸ William Henard III, *Can These Bones Live? A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 9-10. See also, Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 7-9. Both Henard and Clifton reference the Great Commission as the principle guiding the church to meet God’s intention to witness to the nations and make disciples. Aubrey Malphurs speaks of changing the culture towards the vision of leadership: “A primary responsibility of today’s strategic leaders is to create, implement, and re-implement an organizational culture that rewards and encourages movement toward the church’s mission and vision.” Aubrey Malphurs, *Look before You Lead: How to Discern & Shape Your Church Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 7.

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the English Standard Version.

¹⁰ Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville: B&H, 2012), 10. In Col 1:25-29 Paul attests how his goal was to labor in order to present everyone mature in Christ.

¹¹ Examples of empirical research include Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*; Rainer, *Breakout Churches*; Joseph Steven Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Churches: A Mixed Methods Study” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017); Christopher Michael Aiken, “Church Revitalization and the Role of Pastoral Leadership: A Mixed-

the importance of discipleship in the life of the church, and some even offer specific programmatic direction such as creating individual or corporate discipleship models, but these resources generally lack empirical data.¹² Overall, there is a void in the literature with regard to transforming the discipleship culture in church revitalization. A few examples of the topics follow.

Transforming the Discipleship Culture to Aid Church Revitalization

The culture of the church must shift from surface level discipleship to a deepening, intimate knowledge of Jesus (John 14:21). The goal of discipleship must be toward aiding the disciple in the transformation of the heart toward, “holy affections, zeal for holy things, longings after God, longings after holiness, desires for purity.”¹³ This statement is a representation of what deepening, intimate knowledge is meant to accomplish: aiding the Christian in fully embracing God’s work in their lives. The work of a Christian leader must be partially rooted in aiding a disciple to fully embrace the role of follower of Christ and in doing so move the church towards health. Deep discipleship moves the believer to change. That change moves the church to focus on reaching the lost.

Effective discipleship naturally shifts the view of the believer from self to Christ and then to others. The Christian faith is rooted in relationship where believers

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).

¹² Examples of anecdotal and practical summaries include: Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*; Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*; Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*; Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville: B&H, 2016); Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church: Beyond Small Groups to Authentic Community*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013); Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God’s Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: B&H, 2011).

¹³ Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 29. The authors add, “The distinguishing mark of Christian discipleship is a transformed heart, transformed affections. When someone becomes a true disciple, Christ radically changes the person’s appetite” (29). The theme of heart and affections permeate the Scriptures.

actively engage in their communities to live out faith intentionally.¹⁴ Randy Frazee and Steve Gladen both argue that a shift in discipleship focus must include ways to link the community to the church by shaping the culture of the church with a missional focus.¹⁵ Shifting the culture of a church from an inward to an outward focus is part of creating a healthy church in order to facilitate revitalization. Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger argue that in order to facilitate outward growth the first step is to establish strong inward relationships spurred by a love of Christ and Scripture using small groups to leverage transformation and then from transformation to witnessing to non-believers.¹⁶

Discipleship Models

The process by which discipleship is engaged varies from church to church. For instance, a church may choose a one-on-one model, a group setting such as Sunday school or small groups, or even choose to leverage a whole congregation approach. Each church will choose the discipleship structure which best suits their purposes although typically it is a blended approach combining many of the above elements.

Discipleship models ranging from individual style to corporate models are used when teaching believers to become mature in Christ. Should the church seek one model of discipleship over another or try to blend best practices? What models for discipleship exist? Steve Sonderman argues for one-on-one discipleship, with intentionality, in order to achieve the greatest growth in a believer. Conversely, others

¹⁴ Alan Andrews, *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010), 65. Andrews views grace extending from God through His people within their community settings in a distinctly Trinitarian model. “The Trinity actually lives, loves, and leads together in a realm of grace, a community of grace where truth and trust are flowing in relationship. Heb 4:16 is God’s way of inviting His children to love and lead from within that same environment” (65).

¹⁵ Frazee, *The Connecting Church*, 200-202. Frazee uses the small groups model to invite non-believers into the fold with a goal of also bringing them into the church. The main concept is penetration into the community and work alongside with whom believers live. Likewise, Steve Gladen, *Small Groups with Purpose: How to Create Healthy Communities* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 63-64. Gladen views the imperative to share one’s faith in the community as a measure of discipleship growth.

¹⁶ Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 150-51.

such as Stephen Barton argue for a mixed-model of discipleship in which several Christians work together through corporate structures.¹⁷ Max Anders insists that discipleship models focused on twentieth-century strategies are doomed to failure, but strategies focused on holistic discipleship with the twenty-first century in view would be more successful.¹⁸ Regardless of the specific method used to affect discipleship the church must focus on efforts to make and grow disciples.¹⁹

Research Purpose

The overall purpose of the larger sequential explanatory mixed-methods study is to identify revitalizing churches and learn what methods they utilized to successfully move towards revitalization. However, the focus of this portion of the study is to determine and prioritize key cultural change characteristics and practices present within SBC churches which have experienced revitalization. This particular slice of the study investigates how transforming the discipleship culture of the church results in revitalization. The purpose of this study is to understand and describe the role that transforming the discipleship culture plays in revitalization for churches.

¹⁷ Steve Sonderman, *Mobilizing Men for One-on-One Ministry* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2010), 65. Stephen C. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 204-05. The crux of Barton's argument for plurality in discipleship structures rests in the pericope of Matt 19:27-30 and the similar text of Mark 10:28-31. Within this discussion, Peter tells Jesus how the disciples left everything to follow Him. The discourse involves marriage rules, attitudes to children, property, and household ties before the appearance of the Rich Young Man episode. The climax of this discussion rests on the "good thing" he must do (τί ἀγαθὸν ποιήσω). Jesus takes this opportunity to show the disciples what is necessary to be followers. The main focus is that although each must give up his own idols to be a disciple, the process for teaching rests in a corporate environment.

¹⁸ Max Anders, *Brave New Discipleship: Cultivating Scripture-Driven Christians in a Culture Driven World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 26-29. Anders' main motivation in arguing for holistic models is a recognition that culture will fill in the gaps which the church leaves open. A complete discipleship strategy is thus necessary when formulating a plan to grow believers in Christ.

¹⁹ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 170.

Research Questions

This study was guided by seven primary research questions as it sought to discover how churches transformed the discipleship culture to facilitate church revitalization.

Quantitative Research Questions

The quantitative questions are as follows:

1. What percentage of SBC churches are plateaued or declining?
2. Of those churches that have experienced decline, what percentage have experienced revitalization?
3. Of those SBC churches experiencing revitalization, what percentage emphasized discipleship in the process of revitalization?

Qualitative Research Questions

The qualitative research questions are as follows:

4. How does transforming the discipleship culture contribute to church revitalization?
5. What organizational culture changes occurred to facilitate transforming the discipleship culture during the revitalization process?
6. What primary changes to the church's discipleship ministry contributed to the revitalization process?
7. Which discipleship methods (structures/processes) were used by leadership to disciple church members during the revitalization process?

Research Population

The research population consisted of churches that are members of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). These churches experienced revitalization and have identified a transformed discipleship culture as a significant factor in church revitalization efforts.

Delimitations of the Research

The research was delimited to SBC churches that completed the Annual Church Profile (ACP) during the reporting years of 2006-2016 and met the criteria

established for revitalization. Second, the research was delimited to churches who agreed to participate in the study and indicated that transforming the discipleship culture was a significant factor in the church revitalization efforts.

Limitations of Generalization

The population and sample were derived from SBC churches in North America. The quantitative attributes are generalized to SBC churches experiencing revitalization.²⁰ The qualitative attributes are 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 are generally mirrored in other evangelical congregations beyond SBC churches.

Research Assumptions

This research design acknowledges that the Holy Bible is true, infallible, and authoritative. Further, true revitalization is not possible without God leading the way; however, there are skills and lessons to be learned from those who go before us in these efforts:

1. While revitalization is ultimately an act of God, it is assumed that God uses faithful servants to execute the growth of the church.
2. Revitalization is a skill to be learned.
3. Discipleship is one key to affecting revitalization in churches.
4. Organizational culture change is necessary to move towards discipleship which will positively affect church revitalization efforts.

²⁰ John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011), 9.

Methodological Design Overview

The study examined factors present in church revitalizations within the SBC. The larger study examined how changes in discipleship, evangelism, leadership, missions, prayer, and worship are present in church revitalization. This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. In this multi-phase design, seven different researchers worked in parallel with the same overarching focus on church revitalization. The first phase began by identifying churches who meet the criteria to be considered a revitalizing church. The second phase employed a quantitative survey of churches meeting the criteria to assess the presence of transforming discipleship culture during the church revitalization. The last phase identified participants from the survey to interview to explain the quantitative results. This last phase employed a phenomenological qualitative strand to explore how churches changed the culture to focus on discipleship.²¹

Phase 1–Annual Church Profile Data Sort

The research team jointly screened the Annual Church Profile (ACP) data to determine which churches met the criteria to be assessed as a revitalizing church. The research team then applied the revitalizing criteria to SBC churches to select the population for phase 2.

Phase 2–Quantitative

The research team jointly developed a survey containing critical questions related to church revitalization and questions related to each specific study area for

²¹ Purpose statement adapted from the template provided in Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 159.

distribution to the selected churches identified in phase 1.²² The results of phase 2 were shared with each research team member in order to move to phase 3.²³

Phase 3–Qualitative

Phase 3 of the research study was conducted individually by each researcher using purposeful sampling. Those churches who met the selection criteria in phases 1 and 2 were pursued for interviews as part of the qualitative phase. Twelve church leaders were interviewed to explore the phenomenon of church revitalization with a distinctive focus on identifying the methods used by church leadership to transform the discipleship culture. This study relied on the interviewees’ perspectives to inform the researcher of the phenomenon. Data from the interviews were analyzed to validate findings.²⁴

Terminology

For the purpose of this study, the following operational definitions were used:

Adoption. When a stronger, healthier church is willing to embrace a sick and declining church to help it get back on its feet and grow again. Usually an agreement takes place between the adopting church and the church being adopted through a covenant.²⁵

²² Lesley Andres, *Designing & Doing Survey Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 66-89. Andres provides details for crafting surveys which include how to determine whether the questions are open-ended or closed, clearly written to gain a single answer, nuanced to cause the respondent to think through the answer, and even if the instructions on completing the survey are simple enough to follow or detailed enough to complete. The questions for this survey are crafted with as few questions as possible to attract participation while containing enough depth to allow each research member the opportunity to select candidates based on response criteria. Additionally, the questions were designed to fit a 1-6 Likert scale for ease of sorting. The design took into account best practices in survey construction while offering each researcher a voice in the process.

²³ See appendix 1, “Revitalization Survey Phase 2.”

²⁴ Creswell, *Research Design*, 14.

²⁵ Mark Devine and Darrin Patrick, *Replant: How a Dying Church Can Grow Again* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2014), 85-86.

Annual Church Profile (ACP). The Annual Church Profile is a report that a local SBC congregation completes each year and sends to its local Baptist association. In turn the local association passes the information along to the state convention, and eventually to the national convention.²⁶

Change agent. One who seeks to make changes in accordance with a pre-developed strategic plan in an effort to revitalize and renew a dying church. These individuals work towards engaging others in a new norm of growth and advancement while managing people's resistance and anxieties.²⁷

Church revitalization. "Revitalization is an intentional change of culture and praxis by members of a church community, after a period of church plateau or decline, which leads to greater church health and numerical growth."²⁸ For this study, a revitalized church is one that (1) experienced less than 10 percent growth in worship attendance over five years prior to the turnaround, (2) experienced 10 percent or greater growth in worship attendance in two of the following five years, while (3) also achieving a 20:1 average yearly worship attendance to baptism ration in those same years.

Church health. Healthy churches produce more and better disciples. Church health is about creating an ongoing culture of renewal and life. A healthy church is a community of believers with a shared vision, thriving ministry, and trusted leadership.²⁹

²⁶ Roger S. Oldham, "The Annual Church Profile: Vital and Reliable," *SBCLIFE*, June 2014, <http://www.sbclife.net/Articles/2014/06/sla13>.

²⁷ Gary L McIntosh, *Growing God's Church: How People Are Actually Coming to Faith Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 94-97.

²⁸ Hudson, "A Competency Model for Church Revitalization," 8. See also, Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 8-12. Henard defines church revitalization as a movement within Protestant evangelicalism which emphasizes the missional work of turning a plateaued or declining church by moving towards growth both numerically and in discipleship.

²⁹ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 71-89.

Declining church. Any church that at one point in time flourished, but now faces spiritual, physical, and numerical failure and is in danger of closing.³⁰

Discipleship. “Giving a willing person the assistance needed to grow to maturity in Christ (the work of the church as a whole).”³¹

Discipleship Culture. A culture in which the pastor teaches the congregation how to biblically disciple one another in order to make more disciples and increase the health of the body.³²

Historical drift. The term utilized to describe the predisposition for organizations to depart over time from their foundational beliefs and practices.³³

Influencer. Anyone who is able to exercise significant influence over the people, the focus or the future of a church, ministry, or organization.³⁴

Inwardly focused. The inwardly focused church has few outwardly focused ministries. Budget dollars in the church are spent on the desires and comforts of its church members.³⁵

Mentoring. When a “more experienced Christian, through personal relationship, encourages and coaches a less experienced Christian to grow spiritually.”³⁶

³⁰ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, xiii.

³¹ Anders, *Brave New Discipleship*, xiii.

³² Anders, *Brave New Discipleship*, xiii. See also, Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 73.

³³ James Reason, *Managing the Risks of Organizational Accidents* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 1997), 234-36.

³⁴ Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 151-54.

³⁵ McIntosh, *Growing God’s Church*, 20.

³⁶ Anders, *Brave New Discipleship*, xiii.

Plateaued church. A church that is neither growing nor declining but is in a perpetual state of polarization and unable to move forward to seek health. Such churches have a rate of growth roughly equivalent to the rate of attrition.³⁷

Revitalization. “The process whereby a church is refocused on its mission to both evangelism and nurturing, and renewed in its efforts to minister to others so that numerical, spiritual and organizational growth occur and are sustained”.³⁸

Conclusion

Church revitalization may be the best hope to save churches in the Southern Baptist Convention although it is a marathon and not a sprint.³⁹ The church who focuses on promotion of church discipleship can change their culture towards engagement with their community and grow again.⁴⁰ The stakes are too high not to learn through empirical research how to help declining churches. Focusing on discipleship structures and culture change is only one piece of this puzzle, but it is an important piece. The purpose of this sequential explanatory mixed methods study is to understand and describe the role that transforming the discipleship culture plays in revitalization for churches.

This chapter examined the need to pursue revitalization efforts with a focus on transforming the discipleship culture of churches experiencing revitalization. Chapter 2 will further examine church revitalization and discipleship focuses from both a theological and theoretical perspective with a discussion on discipleship structures, community involvement, and culture change from within.

³⁷ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, xiii.

³⁸ Michael F. Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization: How To Revitalize Your Church through the Pulpit* (Glasgow: Christian Focus), 21.

³⁹ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 142-45.

⁴⁰ Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 38-39.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 1 introduced the concepts and need for church revitalization as well as the critical importance of discipleship in the revitalization process. This study seeks to understand and describe the role that transforming the discipleship culture plays in revitalization for churches. The general purpose of chapter 2 is to examine the relevant precedent literature pertaining to church revitalization and the influential role of discipleship, specifically discipleship structures, organizational culture, and leading change in church culture, in order to situate the current research thesis within that body of literature. The specific aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that the current state of revitalization research suggests discipleship is one of, if not the most important factor for church revitalization. However, much of the writing in the field of church revitalization remains mostly anecdotal, based on individual case studies, or focused on inherent characteristics of church revitalizers rather than on specifics on how discipleship leads to revitalization.

The first topic evaluated is church revitalization. Several questions are addressed related to the topic of church revitalization including: descriptions, the need for revitalization, biblical foundations, and implications drawn from Scripture and the literature. Next, the topic of transforming church culture is explored. Specifically, an analysis of the general concepts of organizational culture, church culture, and leadership principles for transforming church culture will be considered. Finally, the topic of discipleship in church revitalization is addressed. In particular, defining discipleship, models of discipleship, and the purpose of discipleship in church revitalization are surveyed. The literature review will demonstrate that more research is needed to describe

how successful church revitalizers are utilizing discipleship efforts to transform the culture of their churches towards revitalization.

The State of the Church in North America

The church today has reached a crisis point. An estimation of 80-90 percent of churches in North America are not growing.¹ The first substantial research and writing on church revitalization efforts began with George Barna's 1998 book, *The Second Coming of the Church*. After four years of research the Barna Group sounded the alarm of church decline and called for radical solutions to revive the church from death.² In 2005, Thom Rainer, former President of Lifeway Publishing, answered this alarm and produced his own research, *Breakout Churches*. In this work, Rainer's research analyzed over 50,000 North American churches to determine how many of those churches broke out of the slump of decline. Of those who made it past the "breaking point," only thirteen total churches demonstrated the six criteria defined as a "breakout church."³ This alarming statistic called for action.

In 2006, Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger produced *Simple Church*, aimed at developing a process for simplifying a church's discipleship and assimilation process. The research involved a process design survey which utilized random stratified sampling in order to select churches from both growing and non-growing strata. The result of this study demonstrated that the more "simple" the church was the more "vibrant" the church

¹ Albert R. Mohler Jr., *A Guide to Church Revitalization* (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2015), 8. This compilation work leverages an 80-90 percent decline statistic.

² George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* (Nashville: Word, 1998), 1.

³ Thom Rainer, *Breakout Churches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 15-21. The six criteria include (1) the church has had at least 26 conversions annually since its identified breakout year, (2) the church as averaged a membership to baptism ratio of 20:1 or higher for at least one year since its identified breakout year, (3) the church was previously in decline or plateau for several years prior to its identified break out year, (4) the church has broken the slump and sustained new growth for at least several years, (5) the slump, reversal, and breakout took place under the same pastor, and (6) the church has made a clear and positive impact on the community since its breakout.

was.⁴ Their research implied the simpler the structure, the more effective churches are at making and producing mature disciples.

In 2007, Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson produced their version of research on revitalizing churches, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too*. In this research the authors identified 324 American churches from a multitude of denominations who demonstrated revitalization based on a set criterion.⁵ The key difference between Rainer's research and Stetzer and Dodson's research was their working definition of baptism ratios. Where Rainer chose a 20:1 worship attendance to baptisms, Stetzer and Dodson chose 35:1 membership to baptism ratio.⁶

The Baptist Press reported in June 2017 the number of SBC churches in 2016 increased by 1 percent while membership decreased by 0.51 percent, baptisms decreased by 4.89 percent, and weekly worship attendance decreased by 6.75 percent.⁷ Rainer followed this report in a series of blog postings that only about 65 percent of churches are in a plateaued or declining state dispelling what he called the 80 percent myth.⁸ In a follow-up article, Rainer noted that growing churches reported a small percentage of conversion growth as compared to transfers.⁹ The statistics indicate that church health

⁴ Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 243-48.

⁵ Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), xiii. The criteria established by Stetzer and Dodson include (1) The church experienced 5 years of decline or plateau and/or decline (since 1995), and (2) the decline or plateau was followed by significant growth over the past 2-5 years.

⁶ Rainer, *Breakout Churches*, 15-21; Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, xiii. Membership practices in many churches may not accurately reflect actually weekly worship attendance. In some cases, members stay on the rolls for many years. SBC churches are notoriously famous for not purging the membership rolls until a member has passed.

⁷ SBC Statistics by State Convention, June 8, 2017, accessed September 8, 2018, <http://www.bpnews.net/downloadhires-/images/bddf8726-31fb-4a26-8e2b-045f9df2065b-ACP2016-states.jpg>

⁸ Thom S. Rainer, "Dispelling the 80 Percent Myth of Declining Churches," *Growing Healthy Churches Together*, June 28, 2017, <https://thomrainer.com/2017/06/dispelling-80-percent-myth-declining-churches/>. A factor in the apparent disparity is the decision to measure worship attendance rather than church membership when assessing growth or decline.

⁹ Thom S. Rainer, "Five Sobering Realities about Evangelism in Our Churches," *Growing Healthy Churches Together*, July 10, 2-17, <https://thomrainer.com/2017/07/five-sobering-realities->

among existing churches is in decline and that new church plants have failed to compensate for reductions across the entirety of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Additionally, the Pew Research Center has worked extensively to catalog the changing landscape of North American churches. In a recent report they noted a sharp decline in Christian attendance as other religion attendance increased. The report demonstrates that Christianity, as a whole, is in a decline as compared to the rising population in the United States.¹⁰ A similar report reveals that the number of unchurched, or “nones” as they are called, in reference to those who espouse no religious affiliation, is outpacing those who regularly report some religious affiliation.¹¹ This report uses statistical analysis to attempt to understand why some attend church services while others choose to abstain from attending worship even when they self-report as having a religious affiliation.¹² In a most recent report by the Pew Research Center compares interviews conducted in 2009 to similar interviews conducted in 2019 and discovered that, “65% of American adults describe themselves as Christians when asked about their religion, down

evangelism-churches/. Rainer noted that the majority of growth experienced by growing churches could be attributed to transfer growth. Rainer observed that only 6.5-7 percent of churches were “evangelistically effective” meaning that true effectiveness is growth by sharing the gospel and making disciples as opposed to membership by transfer. Rainer further argues that the lower the membership to baptism ratio the better since most churches are growing by transfer and not by baptism.

¹⁰ Pew Research Center, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape: Christians Decline Sharply as Share of Population; Unaffiliated and Other Faiths Continue to Grow,” *Numbers, Facts and Trends Shaping the World*, May 12, 2015, <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2015/05/RLS-08-26-full-report.pdf>. The report uses data from 2007 to 2014 to demonstrate a decline. Christians, as a whole category, declined by 7.8 percent where Unaffiliated rose by 6.7 percent. The sharpest decline within the Christian category was found in Mainline Protestants at 3.4 percent compared to Evangelicals at 0.9 percent.

¹¹ Pew Research Center, “‘Nones’ on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation,” *The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*, October 9, 2012, <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2012/10/NonesOnTheRise-full.pdf>.

¹² Pew Research Center, “Why Americans Go (and Don’t Go) to Religious Services,” *Religion & Public Life*, August 1, 2018, <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2018/08/01115554/Attending-or-not-attending-relig-services-FOR-WEB.pdf>. See also, Pew Research Center, “The Religious Typology: A New Way to Categorize Americans by Religion,” *Religion & Public Life*, August 29, 2018, <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2018/08/28163522/Full-Report-08-28-FOR-WEB.pdf>.

12 percentage points over the past decade. Meanwhile, the religiously unaffiliated share of the population . . . now stands at 26%, up from 17% in 2009.”¹³

Since the publishing of *Breakout Churches* and *Comeback Churches*, other writers and researchers added their voice to this conversation. Mark Clifton writes, “Every year in the SBC nine hundred churches disappear from our rolls. There are fruitless churches all across North America, churches where new disciples aren't being made and neighboring communities aren't being transformed. A church that is not producing fruit does not accurately reflect God's glory.”¹⁴ Clifton's voice must not be ignored; however, the term *church revitalization* needs more definition to understand how to help churches recover and blossom to full health as God intended them to do.

Church Revitalization Defined

The term *church revitalization* is both ambiguous and ubiquitous.¹⁵ Several authors provide frank narratives of churches experiencing “turnaround,” or similar terms. Likewise, other authors speak anecdotally of church revitalization with general descriptions while empirical studies all impose their own unique criteria for what qualifies as a revitalizing church. For instance, Andrew Davis in *Revitalize* defines church revitalization in terms of how God restores what was once present, “to describe the effort to restore by biblical means a once healthy church from a present level of

¹³ Pew Research Center, “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace: An Update on America's Changing Religious Landscape,” *Religion*, October 17, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>

¹⁴ Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 5-6.

¹⁵ Stephen Joseph Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Convention Churches: A Mixed Methods Study” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 21–23.

disease to a state of spiritual health, as defined by the Word of God.”¹⁶ Similarly, Steve Hudson describes 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.”¹⁷ However, the work of revitalization must not rest in a man-centered approach to restoration, but as a work by God for His glory. Bill Henard in *Can These Bones Live?* writes, “A pastor needs to have a plan in hand in order to see church revitalization occur. It must be a work of God, but God often times uses human means to bring about His purposes.”¹⁸ Taken all together, the definition for restoring declining churches must center on both the health of the members and a focus on extending the church body beyond the walls of the church building to engage in the community in evangelism and discipleship efforts.

Need for Church Revitalization

Based on the research already surveyed, churches are failing – the numbers are declining, the health of congregations are in decline. When a church begins to lose attendance numbers, over a sustained period of time, it generally does not recover.¹⁹ In fact, dying churches generally exhibit one of eight distinct characteristics (see table 1 below).

¹⁶ Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize*, 20. Davis further adds of the term *revitalization* “occurs when God restores a once healthy church, helping to change the course from its recent decline toward spiritual disease and death,” 30. He further adds, “However, numerical growth alone cannot be a measure of spiritual health. Some of the unhealthiest churches in the nation are characterized by the false doctrine of the prosperity gospel, but they are huge and growing numerically” (19).

¹⁷ Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization,” 8. See also, Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 8-12. Henard defines church revitalization as a movement within protestant evangelicalism which emphasizes the missional work of turning a plateaued or declining church by moving towards growth both numerically and in discipleship.

¹⁸ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 13.

¹⁹ George Barna, *Turn Around Churches: How to Overcome Barriers to Growth and Bring New Life to an Established Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993), 17.

Conversely, church growth does not necessarily lead to exhibiting healthy characteristics.²⁰ In contrast to obviously declining churches, a growing church, without proper biblical structure, tends to drift into consumption over discipleship which leads right back into decline. Consumption comes in many forms, from a popular pastor, to popular music, but without true discipleship of the body there will be a tendency to overconsume and lose community engagement. Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck in *Designed to Lead* observe,

Consumption and discipleship are very, very different. Jesus launched the Church with discipleship, and she drifted into consumption. Just as the Church drifted from discipleship to consumption, local churches have the proclivity to drift as well. Consumption is much easier. Consumption is tempting because it is focused on the masses and provides an immediate action.²¹

Table 1. Characteristics of a dying church²²

Characteristics of a Dying Church	
1	Value the process of decision more than the outcome of decision
2	Value their own preferences over the needs of the unreached
3	Have an inability to pass leadership to the next generation
4	Cease, often gradually, to be part of the fabric of community
5	Grow dependent upon programs or personalities for growth or stability
6	Tend to blame the community for a lack of response and, in time, grow resentful of the community for not responding as it once did
7	Anesthetize the pain of death with an overabundance of activity and maintaining less fruitful governance structure
8	Confuse caring for the building with caring for the church and the community

Likewise, Brian Croft observes in *Biblical Church Revitalization*, “If there are two primary marks of churches needing revitalization it would arguably be the absence of

²⁰ Gary McIntosh, introduction to *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement: 5 Views*, ed. Gary McIntosh (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 20. See also the discussion in Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles* (Nashville: B&H, 1993), 21-22.

²¹ Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 156-57.

²² Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 22-30.

spiritual life and the presence of hostile division among those in the church.”²³ Spiritual health leads towards unity, but as Croft rightly observes, divisions lead to decline.²⁴ Geiger and Peck identify discipleship as the primary means to overcome the drift which all churches, like all organic organizations, face. They write, “Churches will drift without a consistent and constant conviction for discipleship, to disciple people and develop leaders. Discipleship is the only means. Discipleship impacts all of life. Discipleship is the only way to produce leaders that serve and bless the world.”²⁵ Therefore, the need for revitalization must be rooted in a biblical approach to restoration. Geiger and Peck do an outstanding job of calling on discipleship as a key means for increasing church health, but do not directly tie discipleship structures/processes into the revitalization process for dying churches. The literature thus far is clear – there is a distinctive need to revitalize declining churches today. Analyzing the biblical foundations for church revitalization is helpful to understand the need for revitalizing a dying church.

Biblical Foundations for Church Revitalization

One of the problems with using the term revitalization is the tendency to confuse it with other general biblical themes. Several current authors who write on revitalization use Ezekiel 37 to illustrate the process of how God can restore dying churches and give them new life to become healthy again.²⁶ In order to understand how God brings about restoration a brief examination of Ezekiel 37 is helpful.

²³ Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying & Divided Churches* (London: Christian Focus, 2016), 30.

²⁴ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 31.

²⁵ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 159-60. See also, Rainer, *Breakout Churches*, 245, “Drift is always bad. You don’t drift into physical fitness or spiritual growth.” Additionally, Rainer and Geiger write, “We drift away from the core message of the Christian faith, the gospel. We move away from the essence of the Christian faith, the good news that our holy God rescued us from our sins by placing Himself on a cross in our place to secure our salvation. We drift from the core mission of the church: making disciples. We add so many extras to the essence of who we are: we drift.” Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 245-46.

²⁶ The following authors use Ezek 37 as an example of restoration: Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming*

Ezekiel 37:1-14 provides a picture of the promise of new life.²⁷ In this passage God takes the prophet Ezekiel, in a vision, to a valley of dry bones. The sheer magnitude of these bones and the condition of their dead dryness is shocking to Ezekiel. In the vision the disjointed bones come together to form a mass of humans; however, the bodies are lifeless and without breath. God commands Ezekiel to “Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, son of man” (Ezek 37:9) and the breath came into them and a huge army stood before Ezekiel.²⁸ The vision was a representation of Israel who was in exile. Ezekiel was to prophesy to Israel to be brought back from death to life with God breathing His Spirit into them.²⁹ Dying churches, like the bones in Ezekiel can come back to life and experience revitalization.³⁰ The once dead church can become healthy again. What does a healthy church look like? A healthy church demonstrates six key biblical foundations as outlined in table 2 below.

Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 13-15; Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 23-33; Davis, *Revitalize*, 31; Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 1-2.

²⁷ Steven Tuell writes, “The vision of the dry bones, is arguably the most famous and influential passage in this book [Ezekiel].” Steven Shawn Tuell, *Ezekiel*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 250.

²⁸ Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 2*, Word Biblical Commentary 29 (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 185. Allen noted that the in-breathing of life echoes Gen 2:7 where God breathed life into Adam. Likewise, there is a similarity to God creating the cosmos in Gen 1:2. The concept of the Spirit of God breathing life into non-life is a prevalent theme: “It was the pervading power that gave continued life to a finite world (Ps. 104:29-30; Job 34:14-15).”

²⁹ Leander E. Keck, ed., *Introduction to Prophetic Literature*, in vol. 6 of *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001). Keck writes, “Ezekiel urges his audience to view their situation through the eyes of God for whom all things are possible,” 1504. See also Tuell, *Ezekiel*. Israel’s, “restoration will involve more than resettlement. God will restore Israel spiritually as well – renewing, enlivening, and enabling them.” Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 253.

³⁰ Lamar Eugene Cooper, *Ezekiel*, New American Commentary Series, vol. 17 (Nashville: B&H Publishers, 1994), 320. Cooper argues that the main purpose of Ezekiel’s vision was the restoration of Israel and not the resurrection (e.g., 1 Cor 15:1-58). Instead, it was for Ezekiel to believe in the power of God to bring new life back to a hopeless situation such as Israel living in exile. Similarly, Croft, writes, “Ezekiel 37 reveals that God is powerful enough to do what a dying and divided church needs: Breathe life where there is no life and unite those who cannot be united.” Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 24.

Table 2. Comparison of biblical foundations to key passages³¹

Biblical Foundation	Key Passages
Scriptural Authority	Acts 17:2-3; 2 Tim 3:15-17
Biblical Leadership	Jer 23:3; Eph 4:11-12; 1 Tim 5:17
Preaching and Teaching	Rom 10:14; John 8:32; 2 Tim 2:15
Observation of the Ordinances	Acts 2:41-42; 1 Cor 11
Covenant Community	Acts 2:42-47
Maintaining a Mission Focus	Acts 1:8; Rev 2:4-5

The early church, as presented in the book of Acts, provides a summary picture of these biblical foundations,

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

Scriptural authority. The passage indicates that the early believers devoted themselves to the teaching of the Word with a distinct focus on a community aspect of fellowship. The apostles were dedicated to teaching (*διδασκαλία*) and fellowship (*κοινωνία*). This two-pronged approach to ministry is evidenced by the scriptural command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31). The highest authority were the Scriptures. The best evidence about Jesus was what the Scriptures told about him.³² The teaching may have been evangelically deliberative to seek converts but was probably also meant to edify the believers by providing instruction.³³

³¹ Table 2 adapted from Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 2-4.

³² See the sermons by Peter and Stephen in Acts 2 and 7 for examples.

³³ Craig Keener writes, “Some scholars distinguish teaching here from proclamation, which in

Biblical leadership. The apostles were demonstrating good, effective leadership in discipling the community of believers who then produced more disciples. Timothy Laniak, in *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, writes, “Figuratively, the health and multiplication of a community was a sign of a good leadership (Jer 23:3).”³⁴ True biblical leadership is appealing to the church since it demonstrates passion, sacrifice, gospel centrism, soul care, and evangelism.³⁵

Preaching and teaching. The Apostles taught the Word of God to the believers. They preached the good news of the gospel to the lost.³⁶ Gospel preaching is a form of worship just as singing and responses proceed a sermon. At the temple they preached the gospel to those who would hear (2:46). The Temple, unlike in-house meetings, provided the largest space to publicly teach about Jesus.³⁷ In their homes they shared the good news and labored together in discipleship as they broke bread.

Observation of the ordinances. In their homes they broke bread together. This breaking of bread could represent a shared meal of fellowship, but as Craig Kenner notes, “On a literary level, the breaking of bread here very likely alludes to and includes

Acts tends to be especially deliberative (seeking converts), but it is possible that the apostles also ‘proclaimed’ to believers (Acts 20:25).” Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol 1, *Introduction and 1:1-2:47* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 1002. Keener clarifies that a Greek hearing of this report of “continual learning” would elicit respect for Luke; however, he adds, “Jewish hearers might think more specifically of learning God’s message in Scripture. Learning Torah was a pervasive element of Palestinian Jewish life, pursued whenever possible” (1002). The evidence from the passage indicates that teaching involved by recitation of Torah with explanation in a gospel context.

³⁴ Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 51.

³⁵ Croft writes, “This biblical approach advocates that the local church should be appealing, but for specific scriptural reasons: passionate biblical preaching, loving sacrificial fellowship, practical gospel application, zealous soul care, intentional evangelism, and authentic Christ-likeness – to name a few.” Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 17. Croft further writes, “Ezekiel 37 reveals that God is powerful enough to do what a dying and divided church needs: Breathe life where there is no life and unite those who cannot be united” (24).

³⁶ Keener, *Acts*, 1001.

³⁷ Keener comments, “Jewish traditions suggest that sages often taught in the temple, and Jesus set a precedent for the disciples there (Luke 21:37).” Keener, *Acts*, 1031.

the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:19; cf. 24:30)."³⁸ In Acts 2:41 Jesus commissioned the disciples to reach the nations and baptize them. Baptism and communion are the primary means of obeying Christ in the great commission (Matt 28:16-20).

Covenant community. The passage in Acts points towards the believers, those who professed faith in Jesus Christ as participating in the communal aspects of the faith community: they shared with others as they had need, they attended the temple worship together, prayed together, and they broke bread in their homes together.³⁹ Their faith was evangelistically and discipleship focused as they attended the temple together to worship God, to proclaim Christ, and to edify one another. This communal aspect defines the community of faith within the local church.⁴⁰ Prayer was a continuing part of the communities' life together. Keener notes, "Prayer is one of Luke's primary emphases, but this emphasis also presents an accurate reflection of early Christian life (e.g., Rom 1:9-10; Eph 6:18; Phil 2:3-4; Col 4:2-4, 12; 1 Thess 3:19; 5:17; 2 Thess 3:1; 1 Tim 2:1-2; 5:5; Jas 5:13-18; 1 Pet 4:7)."⁴¹

Maintaining a mission focus. The entire body was engaged in the work of evangelism, discipleship, and fellowship. This engagement extends past the primary leaders of the local church and includes the whole body. Benjamin Merkle in

³⁸ Keener, *Acts*, 1003. Keener further notes, "If, for Luke, the Lord's Supper represented a meal believer's shared together in memory of what Jesus had done for them (22:19), then ideally all early Christian meals together may have represented the Lord's Supper or at least been taken in the same spirit (cf. Acts 2:46:20:7, 11)" (1003-4).

³⁹ Keener adds, "Most scholars recognize four elements in the community life (the apostle's teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers)." Keener, *Acts*, 1000.

⁴⁰ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 55-75. Stetzer and Dodson point their readers towards Luke 9:23 as an example of spiritual growth through prayer: "To grow spiritually, these leaders spend time in the Word of God, listen for a word from God, pray fervently until they see God move, witness to those who are without Christ, and serve in the power of the Spirit," Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 156. Stetzer and Dodson single out three distinct faith factors necessary for church revitalization: (1) a renewed belief in Jesus Christ and the mission of the church, (2) a renewed attitude for servanthood, and (3) a more strategic prayer effort.

⁴¹ Keener, *Acts*, 1011.

Shepherding God's Flock writes, "Although Paul recognized leaders within the local churches, he also believed that all parts of the body were essential and therefore appealed to all people of God, not just the leaders, to solve difficulties in the church."⁴²

The consummation of the passage in Acts 2:42-47 is "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." God had given favor χάρις (*charis*) to the early church.⁴³ The biblical foundations observed in Acts 2:42-47 represent a healthy and growing church centered on relationship with Christ and with believers in community. These six foundations make up the core of a spiritually healthy and vibrantly growing church. From the biblical foundations above, three implications of church revitalization may be assumed.

Implications of Church Revitalization

As the church grows spiritually, and God adds members to the community of believers in that local church, new opportunities for workers will naturally arise.⁴⁴ Three implications of church revitalization are drawn from the biblical foundations above: (1) the need for workers, (2) endurance, and (3) stewardship.⁴⁵

The need for more workers. Acts 2:47 says, "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." The first implication of church revitalization is that as the church grows a natural need emerges for more workers to

⁴² Benjamin L. Merkle, "The Pattern of Leadership in Acts and Paul's Letters to Churches," in *Shepherding God's Flock: Biblical Leadership in the New Testament and Beyond*, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle and Thomas R. Schreiner (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 77.

⁴³ Keener, *Acts*, 1037.

⁴⁴ Rainer states, "A simple church is a congregation designed around a straight forward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth." Rainer, *Breakout Churches*, 60.

⁴⁵ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 36-38. Croft identified seven attributes necessary for revitalization: (1) distinct authority, (2) proper leadership, (3) meaningful membership, (4) biblical knowledge, (5) gospel clarity, (6) love for one another, and (7) love for neighbor. Croft further notes, "For a church to move toward lasting health and life, the structure of the church needs to be evaluated in order to determine whether it is conducive to facilitating health growth" (36).

serve the body. Acts 6:1-6 is a prime example of a growing church in need of more qualified servants.⁴⁶ The contrast to this model is to create workers where the need for work does not exist. With the need for more workers implies opportunities for leadership develop within the body of these new workers.

Endurance. The second implication of church revitalization centers on the concept of endurance. A leader needs endurance to last from beginning to end, but the source of this endurance cannot be sustained by mere sheer will from the church leadership.⁴⁷ John Piper notes, “Jesus Christ is the deepest root of endurance. Seeing and savoring him is the source of strength that keeps us striving against sin and Satan and sickness and sabotage.”⁴⁸ Therefore, the long road of revitalization takes spiritual endurance not just physical.

Stewardship. The last implication of church revitalization emerging from the literature review is a theme of stewardship. The pastor stewards the process of revitalization as God’s agent. The pastor also stewards the spiritual life of the members already present in his church. Stetzer and Dodson identify a differentiation between simply approaching church revitalization through the lens of evangelism and growth with a perspective of recognizing the inherent responsibility placed on church leaders to

⁴⁶ Merkel, “The Pattern of Leadership in Acts and Paul’s Letters to Churches,” in Merkle and Schreiner, *Shepherding God’s Flock*. Using the story of the calling of the first deacons in Acts 6:1-6 as a model, Merkle writes, “The need for the Seven to be chosen arose from growth in the church. As the church grew, there arose more spiritual and physical needs among the new converts” (65). The authors point to the fact that the disciples chose the seven men who would serve (διακονέω). The apostles provided the guidelines for whom to choose, but the congregation (the professing believers of the church) selected those who would serve.

⁴⁷ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 127. See also, Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization,” 45.

⁴⁸ John Piper, *The Roots of Endurance: Invincible Perseverance in the Lives of John Newton, Charles Simeon, and William Wilberforce* (Wheaton, IL: Good News, 2002), 165. See also Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 43-49. Croft focuses on a theme of suffering to lead the pastor into resting in the Holy Spirit for support during the long duration of church revitalization.

steward those whom He has already provided.⁴⁹ Stewardship is based on tending to something that the person does not own but is entrusted to take care of. All members of the church are to be stewarded, not just new Christians or new church members.

The literature review has demonstrated thus far that a definition for restoring declining churches must center on both the health of the members and a focus on extending the church body beyond the walls of the church building to engage in the community in evangelism and discipleship efforts. However, the work of revitalization must not rest in a man-centered approach to restoration, but as a work by God for His glory. The need for revitalization must be rooted in a biblical approach to restoration. The six biblical foundations and three implications will help a church leader to shepherd through a culture change focused on discipleship efforts to aid in revitalization.

In the next section an analysis of the general concepts of organizational culture, church culture, and leadership principles for transforming church culture will be considered. Lastly, literature on the topic of shepherding church change is explored to explain how a church leader acts to shepherd the culture change which God initiates in a church. The literature thus far is void with regard to how specifically changing the discipleship culture affects church revitalization efforts.

Transforming the Discipleship Culture

In order to lead a church revitalization effort, the church needs a leader who will change the culture of the church towards discipleship. A discipleship culture is one in which the pastor teaches the congregation how to biblically disciple one another in order to make more disciples and increase the health of the body.⁵⁰ George Barna writes, “Indisputably, one of the primary requirements for turning around a dying church is

⁴⁹ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 19.

⁵⁰ Barna writes, “Leadership is the sum of the spirit and activity generated by the person who seeks to do the right things at the right times for the right reasons to achieve a specific, predetermined set of outcomes.” Barna, *Turn Around Churches*, 50.

selecting a true leader who will take loving but firm command of the church.”⁵¹

Therefore, in this section a review of literature related to organizational culture, church culture, leading organizational change, and shepherding church change will be explored and synthesized to provide a holistic picture of transforming the discipleship culture in church revitalization.

Organizational Culture

Culture is difficult to define by itself or without context.⁵² However, when analyzed with social norms, expectations, and beliefs in focus, the definition begins to solidify around people who are walking in a similar direction with a similar purpose. The church, like any organic organization, exhibits a specific culture. Culture may be simply defined as, “the shared beliefs and values that drive the behavior of a group of people.”⁵³ Edgar Schein in *Organizational Culture and Leadership* points towards the artifacts of the organization in order to understand how structures, processes, and observed behaviors provide context to understanding the culture.⁵⁴ Aubrey Malphurs and Warren Wiersbe capture the distinctive nature of culture in that it, “profoundly shapes and influences all of our life and beliefs, and most of us aren’t aware of it. We use culture to order our life, interpret our experiences, and evaluate behavior.”⁵⁵ The dynamics of organizational culture are observable from both internal and external observations. Each of these observations are defined as beliefs and values which the organization holds to.

⁵¹ Barna, *Turn Around Churches*, 62.

⁵² Aubrey Malphurs, *Look before You Lead: How to Discern & Shape Your Church Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 7.

⁵³ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 15.

⁵⁴ Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 24.

⁵⁵ Aubrey Malphurs and Warren Wiersbe, *Dynamics of Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 122.

Every organization maintains embedded beliefs and values which are reflected in their artifacts. These artifacts have a starting point, or origination event which, over time, results in shared or competing values.⁵⁶ There are three distinctions between the values reflected in the artifacts: (1) those which are congruent with underlying assumptions that guide performance, (2) those that are part of ideology or philosophy of the organization, and (3) those that are merely rationalizations, or only aspirations, of the organization.⁵⁷

Every organization faces external adaption issues related to a group's energy and time allocated to task dimensions.⁵⁸ According to Schein, "Every new group or organization must develop a shared concept of its ultimate survival problem, from which usually is derived its most basic sense of core mission, primary task, or 'reason to be.'"⁵⁹ Likewise, every organization faces internal integration issues. These refer to the internal relationships between members of the organization.⁶⁰ The challenges inherent to any group include creating a common language and conceptual categories, defining group boundaries and criteria for inclusion and exclusion, distributing power/authority/status, developing norms of trust, defining and allocating rewards and punishments, and explaining the unexplainable.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Schein writes, "If the beliefs and values provide meaning and comfort to the group are not congruent with the beliefs and values that correlate with effective performance, we will observe in many organizations espoused values that reflect the desired behavior but are not reflected in observed behavior." Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 27.

⁵⁷ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 45.

⁵⁸ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 93.

⁵⁹ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 74.

⁶⁰ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 93.

⁶¹ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 94. Schein clarifies, "The rules for governing intimacy cover a broad range of issues – what to call each other, how much personal life to share, how much emotion to display, whom to ask for help and around what issues, how open to be in communicating," 105. Schein also clarifies, "Every group inevitably faces some issues not under its control, events that are intrinsically mysterious and unpredictable and hence frightening" (110). See also, Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 103. Malphurs observes that leaders exert power to influence a group.

The ideal primary embedding mechanisms which leaders should employ include: what they pay attention to, how they react to critical incidents and organizational crises, how they allocate resources, deliberate role modeling, teaching and coaching, how they allocate rewards and status, and how they recruit, select, promote, and excommunicate.⁶² The ideal secondary embedding mechanisms which leaders should employ include: organizational design and structure, systems and procedures, rites and rituals, design of physical space, stories about important events, and formal statements of organizational philosophy, creeds, and charters.⁶³ Churches also exhibit an organizational culture; however, church culture needs contextual clarification in order to understand how to change the culture towards discipleship.

Defining church culture. Every local church shares in these same attributes mentioned above with similar challenges for leadership. William Henard in *Can These Bones Live?* notes, “Churches operate under an assortment of organizational styles and a number of variations within those structures.”⁶⁴ Even though churches operate under similar organizational constructs, the culture of a church possesses key distinctives which separate it from its native counterparts in secular culture. In the context of church, culture is simply defined as the pattern of shared experiences and beliefs by a group who respond to external and internal dynamics where change is inevitable.⁶⁵

One key difference in the context of church culture vs secular culture is the centrality of Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the believers; Jesus

⁶² Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 236.

⁶³ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 236.

⁶⁴ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 187.

⁶⁵ D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 77. See also, Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 18.

Himself was guided by the Holy Spirit in selecting leaders.⁶⁶ That same pattern is continued throughout the book of Acts. The presence of the Holy Spirit was a qualifier for leadership when choosing seven leaders to care for widows (Acts 6:3-6). The Holy Spirit guided the selection of two leaders—Saul and Barnabas—and commissioned them to preach the Gospel in Salamis (Acts 13:2-5). The Holy Spirit chose and appointed leaders to shepherd the church. In reference to church leaders Acts 20:28 states, “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.” Likewise, all believers have the Holy Spirit living inside them, guiding and directing them away from sin and darkness towards the light (1 John 1:5-9).

A second key difference which distinguishes church culture from secular organizations is a distinctive focus on community. This community aspect naturally occurs as a result of the discipleship mandate found in Matthew 28. The discipleship mandate strengthens the community where the church body exists. Dietrich Bonhoeffer relates Christians to their community when he writes,

In a Christian community, everything depends on whether each individual is an indispensable link in a chain. The chain is unbreakable only when even the smallest link holds tightly with the others. A community which allows to exist within itself members who do nothing, will be destroyed by them. Thus, it is a good idea that all members receive a definite task to perform for the community, so that they may know in times of doubt that they too are not useless and incapable of doing anything. Every Christian Community must know that not only do the weak need the strong, but also that the strong cannot exist without the weak. The elimination of the weak is the death of the community.⁶⁷

The community thrives when the church thrives. Conversely, a dying church negatively impacts their surrounding community. Geiger and Peck write, “Unhealthy church culture

⁶⁶ The principle of Jesus being led by the Spirit and dependent on the Father in choosing the disciples is evident in Mark 3:13-15 (cf. Luke 6:12). Following a whole night in prayer, Jesus called and appointed disciples. He commissioned them to two major responsibilities: (a) that they might be with Him and (b) that He might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.

⁶⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian in Community* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 50.

is ultimately a theological problem. Eventually, people behave consistently with their most fundamental beliefs. What the church community believes about God, themselves, and the world will drive the way they interact with each.”⁶⁸ These interactions make changing the culture extremely difficult. “Yet leadership is about change, about moving a group of people within an organization towards a new future.”⁶⁹ Members of an organization share in the culture.

The shared culture determines the direction. It is easy to place the responsibility for vision and change squarely on the designated leadership, but every Christian believer has the Spirit of God working in them. The end goal of culture improvement, change, or vision is to meet the will of God.⁷⁰ God has the ultimate authority; the church culture needs to reflect the mission and vision of God. In order to lead the church towards health and to positively impact the community, as an organization, there must be leadership to lead the members towards change.

Leading Organizational Change

Cultural change can be both scary and necessary because every organization maintains embedded beliefs. These embedded beliefs are intrinsic to the identity of the organization; however, Carson notes that every culture changes and it does so by almost an immeasurable number of factors.⁷¹ Internally, the church may need to change to adapt to new members, new leaders, or ever new technologies. Externally, the church may need to adapt its strategy to survive external pressures and stresses. In the case of revitalization, the church must make a change to survive.

⁶⁸ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 102.

⁶⁹ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 135.

⁷⁰ Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 143.

⁷¹ Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 77.

The literature points to leadership as the key to organizational change.⁷² However, leadership deserves differentiation from a simple understanding of management. Management is centered more on the processes of planning, organizing, directing, controlling, and coordinating than on influencing.⁷³ The key distinction between leader and manager is that leadership works with individuals to reshape organizational systems. Management is merely the process of facilitating the operations of the organizational system.⁷⁴

Leadership experts speak of this style of leadership in terms of transformational leadership.⁷⁵ According to James Burns in *Leadership*, transformational leadership “occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.”⁷⁶ In contrast to transactional leadership, transformational leadership focuses on shaping motivation within the follower to want what the leader wants and be as committed to achieving those goals as the leader himself connoting a sense of ownership and responsibility in the vision.⁷⁷ Transformational leadership focuses on transformative

⁷² Bernard M. Bass, *The Bass Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, & Managerial Applications*, 4th ed. (New York: Free Press, 2008), 23. See also, Joseph C. Rost, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1991), 102. Additionally, W. Warren Burke, *Organizational Change: Theory & Practice*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018), 299. Bass recognized a motivating force embedded within leadership whereas Rost focused on the influential relationship between leaders and followers. In a slightly different tone, Burke argues that leadership was about influence within organizational structures. Malphurs approaches the concept of leading change through the lens understanding the culture. In this argument, a leader who understands the culture they are entering into will be more successful in moving the change forward; however, a leader who fails to understand the culture will be affected by the culture itself in a negative aspect. Malphurs, *Look before You Lead*, 15-16.

⁷³ Edward Shelton, *Transformational Leadership*, 29. See also Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 301.

⁷⁴ John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2102), 28.

⁷⁵ Bass, *Bass Handbook of Leadership*, 41.

⁷⁶ James M. Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 20.

⁷⁷ Bass observes that Burns’ distinction between transactional leaders (those who exchanged one thing for another, i.e., jobs for votes) and transformational leaders (those who, in inspiring followers toward a higher purpose, convert followers into leader) resulted in followers becoming part of a movement of reform or revolution. Bass, *Bass Handbook of Leadership*, 41.

change which implies follower's and leader's desires align. In essence, transformational leadership leads the follower into adopting the same goals and vision as the leader for the organization. In simple terms this is labeled buy-in.

Organizational change is an intentional and strategic effort designed to improve the organization.⁷⁸ Leadership is responsible for initiating change for the improvement of the organization. The management of change may be approached from many avenues; however, change should be founded on discovering the best solution to make improvements in the life of the organization. To make the change the leader(s) must choose the right model in order to be effective.

Several prevailing change models have been used in the past to facilitate change within organizations such as the models by Kurt Lewin, John Kotter, Edgar Schein, and Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James Harold Furr (table 3 below provides an overview of comparisons).

Kurt Lewin's model has influenced other researchers and writers to explore the dynamics of how leadership change processes impact organizational change and adaption.⁷⁹ The shared commonality of these models is (1) establishing a necessity to change which involves creating a vision for the change, (2) leaders work at creating urgency for the change, (3) leaders develop a strategy for communicating the change

⁷⁸ Tupper F. Cawsey, Gene Deszca, and Cynthia Ingols, *Organizational Change: An Action-Oriented Toolkit*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012), 4.

⁷⁹ Kurt Lewin's model has been leveraged by other researchers for many years. See James A. Schellenberg, *Masters of Social Psychology: Freud, Mead, Lewin, and Skinner* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 6. See also, Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 94. Schein gives credit to Lewin for laying the groundwork for any change in human systems. Kurt Lewin, *The Complete Social Scientist: A Kurt Lewin Reader*, ed. Martin Gold (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1999), 282. Gerald Biberman, "Kurt Lewin's Influence on Business Education," in *The Lewin Legacy: Field Theory in Current Practice*, ed. Eugene H. Stivers and Susan A. Wheelan (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1986), 122. Biberman noted that Lewin's change process theory is often cited within business education as one of the dominant theories in change management. See also, Schellenberg, *Masters of Social Psychology*, 64-65. Schellenberg views Lewin's work as very practically minded as opposed to mere theory. John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 22. See also, Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James Harold Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 52-53.

within the organization, and (4) leaders involve other leaders from within the organization to share in the change process and empower these leaders to lead the change itself.

Table 3. Comparison of organizational change models

Kurt Lewin (1947)	Schein (2010)	John Kotter (1996)	Herrington, et al. (2000)
Unfreeze	Unfreeze: create the motivation to change	Establish a sense of urgency	Make personal preparation
		Create a guiding coalition	Create urgency
		Develop a vision and strategy	Establish a vision community
			Discern the vision and determine the vision path
Move to a higher level	Learn new concepts, new meanings for old concepts and new standards for judgement	Communicate the change vision	Communicate the vision
		Empower a broad base of people to take action	Empower change leaders
		Generate short-term wins	Implement the vision
Refreeze at the higher level	Internalize new concepts, meanings, and standards	Consolidate gains and produce even more change	Reinforce momentum through alignment.
		Institutionalize new approaches in the culture	

Purposefully changing an organization, or changing the direction of previously stated goals, will cause conflict within the organization. However, the leader must not fear the conflict itself.⁸⁰ Steve Hudson observes, “Change is difficult for members of any organization. When organizations go through transitions, stakeholders naturally go

⁸⁰ Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 38.

through a distressing psychological process. Participants in the organization typically feel mistrust toward the leaders and resistant to change.”⁸¹ Therefore, the first possible area of conflict is an issue of trust. Members may lose trust in the transformational leader as changes are presented.⁸² The key to overcoming issues of trust is through promotion of healthy teamwork.⁸³

A second possible area of conflict is the issue of fear. Fear can take many forms. Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee suggest that leadership is emotional at its core, “No matter what leaders set out to do—whether it’s creating strategy or mobilizing teams to action—their success depends on *how* they do it. Even if they get everything else just right, if leaders fail in the primal task of driving emotions in the right direction, nothing they do will work as well as it could or should.”⁸⁴

The way in which the change is conveyed is also important. For instance, members of an organization will adopt change when (1) there is a perception of disaffection with the status quo, (2) there is a perception of the benefits of change, and (3) the perception of the probability of success is greater than the cost of change.⁸⁵ Creating

⁸¹ Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization,” 39. See also, Joana Probert and Kim Turnbull James, “Leadership Development: Crisis, Opportunities and the Leadership Concept.” *Leadership* 7, no. 2 (2011): 143. Probert and James write, “Organizational members involved in either extreme or change-based crises will devote most of their cognitive resources to dealing with the problem of resolving the situation, and as a result, very little or no resource will be available for them to consciously contemplate everyday issues, such as the enactment of leadership” (143).

⁸² Dennis Tourish makes the argument that the majority of research in the field of leadership presents leaders as heroic, charismatic, and/or transformational visionaries. In this context the leader is the most important factor in determining whether organizations succeed or fail. This is commonly referred to as the “dark side of transformational leadership.” Dennis Tourish, *The Dark Side of Transformational Leadership: A Critical Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 3-7.

⁸³ Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 28. Lencioni clarifies, “Teamwork begins by building trust. And the only way to do that is to overcome our need for invulnerability” (28).

⁸⁴ Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2013), 22.

⁸⁵ Jiseon Shin, et al., “Maintaining Employees’ Commitment to Organizational Change: The Role of Leaders’ Informational Justice and Transformational Leadership,” *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 51, no. 4 (2015): 521. Shin et al. write, “Employees with higher levels of affective commitment to their organization’s change at the later phase of the change are less likely to think about leaving the organization and more likely to engage in behaviors that support the change.”

early buy-in to the change begins with articulating a specific problem statement then creating a collaborative solution.

Beyond addressing trust and fear concerns, the change leader must assess, improve, and leverage his emotional intelligence when articulating and implementing change. Goleman, asserts that research, “clearly shows that emotional intelligence is the *sine qua non* of leadership. Without it, a person can have the best training in the world, an incisive, analytical mind, and an endless supply of smart ideas, but he still won’t make a great leader.”⁸⁶ Emotional intelligence is a key component of affecting positive change within any organization.⁸⁷ Leaders should work at developing the emotional intelligence of themselves first then work with their group in order to facilitate buy-in and reduce the impact on emotions related to changes. It will take a perseverant, emotionally healthy, and Spirit-led leader to turn around a declining church and shepherd it into positive organizational change.⁸⁸

The connection between generic organizational change and church change assumes many of the same components discussed above; however, the nuances specific to the unique context of churches deserve discussion to understand how pastors are in a unique situation when dealing with revitalization.

⁸⁶ Daniel Goleman, “What Makes a Great Leader,” in *HBR’s 10 Must Reads on Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2015), 1. See also, Vanessa Urch Druskat and Steven B. Wolff, “Building the Emotional Intelligence of Groups,” in *HBR’s 10 Must Reads on Emotional Intelligence*, 71-75. Druskat and Wolff propose that emotional intelligence may be developed individually and within a group.

⁸⁷ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More than IQ*, 10th anniversary ed. (New York: Bantam Dell, 2005), 130.

⁸⁸ George Barna, *Turn Around Churches*, 34. Barna observes, “More often than not, the churches that declined found themselves with a pastor who failed to provide effective leadership” (47). Barna adds, “The first step may be the most important. To turn around a church, a new pastor must be brought in to lead the revolution” (47).

Shepherding Church Change

To lead organizational change and transform the discipleship culture of a church the leaders should follow the shepherding example of Jesus Christ.⁸⁹ Jesus declared that He was the Good Shepherd (John 10:11).⁹⁰ Andreas Kostenberger in *Shepherding God's Flock* writes, "Jesus came in order to permanently fill the shepherd-vacuum that existed among God's people in a way that prior shepherds—Moses, Joshua, David—were unable to fill because of sin and death."⁹¹ Timothy Laniak in *Shepherds After My Own Heart* writes,

Shepherd leadership is comprehensive in scope . . . tasks of shepherds is determined daily by the changing needs of the flock under their care. To be a good shepherd - and this is consistently the biblical concern—means to be accountable for the lives and well-being of the sheep. Good shepherding is expressed by decisions and behaviors that benefit the 'flock,' often at great personal cost.⁹²

Church leaders must follow the example of caring for the church members with Jesus as the standard to follow.⁹³

⁸⁹ Don N. Howell Jr., *Servants of the Servant: A Biblical Theology of Leadership* (Eugene, OR.: Wipf & Stock, 2003). Howell observes, "Jesus trained leaders who could endure suffering because they expected lasting fruit to come from their labors and because they believed that beyond their sacrifices awaited a glorious kingdom" (131). The shepherd/sheep motif in both Old and New Testaments paint of picture of careful and intentional leadership where the sheep are the focus of care and protection.

⁹⁰ Andreas J. Kostenberger, "Shepherds and Shepherding in the Gospels," in *Shepherding God's Flock: Biblical Leadership in the New Testament and Beyond*, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle and Thomas R. Schreiner (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 47. In John 10 Jesus explains the contrast between the Son of God as the shepherd who properly keeps the sheep and the Pharisees who led the sheep astray.

⁹¹ Kostenberger, *Shepherding God's Flock*, 43.

⁹² Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart*, 247. Laniak views shepherding in the context of Matt. 9:35-36,

What prompts his pastoral compassion specifically is the leaderless people. The phrase 'sheep without a shepherd' suggests a people without a king, or an army without a commander (Num. 27:17; 1 Kgs. 22:17; 2 Chr. 19:16; cf. Isa. 13:14). It is not simply human need that moves Jesus, but their predicament as a flock not properly led. Without (good) leadership, this crowd is 'troubled' and 'downcast.' In Ezekiel 34 God is grieved over shepherds whose harsh and brutal rule (v. 4) was the cause of their flock becoming scattered on the hills and left as food for wild beasts (v. 5). In Matthew this vision becomes the basis and call to more complete discipleship, now with hints of succession (cf. Num. 27:17) "Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. As the Lord for the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into the harvest field'" (9:37-38). (Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart*, 185)

Additionally, Laniak writes, "The disciples were sent as shepherds to feed his sheep. They were also sent out as sheep among wolves. There were called to lead God's people as pilgrim tent-dwellers, living on the margins of settled society, to their eternal home" (23).

⁹³ Henry T. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's*

Likewise, the apostle Paul instructed the leadership of the church at Ephesus, “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).⁹⁴ Therefore, the issue at hand is leading the church in order to restore health in all aspects of spiritual and physical matters. Geiger and Peck write, “Jesus didn't simply ransom a random collection of individuals; rather He purchased a new community, a special people. This people, whom He named the Church, are called, not only to God, but for God's glory.”⁹⁵

Shepherds need the wisdom of God, provided by the Holy Spirit, as revealed in the Scriptures, in order to be effective leaders.⁹⁶ Geiger and Peck write, “No matter how convincing modern wisdom may seem, apart from the wisdom and activity of God, all

Agenda, rev. and exp. (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 189. Blackaby and Blackaby state,

Some leadership proponents suggest leaders should determine their talents and their passion, and in so doing they determine their calling. They argue if you understand the passion God has given you and you identify the gifts God placed in your life, then you can deduce the kinds of things God has prepared you to do. The problem with this line of thinking is the lack of biblical support. Consider Moses herding sheep in the wilderness. Had he discovered his gifts and passions, he would never have returned to Egypt to deliver the Hebrews. But that was God's agenda. Second, it is tempting to assume God wants us to do things we enjoy and are good at doing. However, for God to accomplish his purposes, he may ask us to do things we do not consider enjoyable (he asked his Son to die on a cross), but they are necessary tasks for God's will to be fulfilled. It's great to be passionate about the work you do. However, spiritual leaders are driven by God, not their passion and talents. (Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 189)

⁹⁴ Howell commented that Paul never provided structural prescriptions with regards to local governance of the church. Instead, “His greatest concern is the spiritual maturity and emotional stability of those who are appointed to leadership. Paul felt comfortable leaving the specifics of church governance to the local leadership of whom the Spirit of God was more than capable of guiding.” Howell, *Servants of the Servant*, 287.

⁹⁵ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 23. See also, Andrew Davis, *Revitalize*: “A healthy church will have a regular pipeline of godly men begin raised up to do the work of shepherding and leading the church” (183).

⁹⁶ Christopher A. Beeley, *Leading God's People: Wisdom from the Early Church for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 34. Beeley adds, “The most immediate and practical means for maintaining a theologically centered leadership is Holy Scripture. It is through what the Apostle Paul calls the interpretation of scripture ‘according to the Spirit’ that pastors are enabled to be effective guides. The centrality of scripture in the life of faithful church leaders can hardly be exaggerated.” Beeley further adds, “The aim of church leaders should be to balance active ministry and compassion for our neighbors with prayer and a life of study and contemplation, so that our hearts dwell constantly with God and at the same time are mindful of the needs of others” (104). See also, Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 3. The authors make an argument that effective leadership is not unidirectional but empowered by the Holy Spirit in which God's people are actually designed to impact and influence each other for God's work on earth.

human leadership will prove futile in the end. Leadership, apart from the work of God, cannot produce true flourishing or eternal results.”⁹⁷ Andrew Davis comments, “What the church needs in every generation are blood-bought, Spirit-anointed, biblically driven leaders who are not mere managers, but who are compelled to apply the timeless truth of Scripture to a constantly changing world in constant rebellion against God.”⁹⁸ Church leaders shepherd church change by resting in Christ for directing the change.

As the church leader rests in Christ for directing the change, there are still action steps to take in order to facilitate the change. The four primary ways in which church leaders shepherd what God is doing in the church is by (1) building relationships, (2) casting a vision for culture change, (3) implementing successful culture change, and (4) overcoming obstacles. These three steps encompass the overarching change models describe previously in a reduced form.⁹⁹

Building relationships. Leaders shepherd change by building relationships with their people. The main way leaders build relationships is by serving. Jesus served His apostles; He washed their feet and demonstrated service to others. Dave Wheeler writes, “Our natural inclination is to be served, not to serve others.” This self-focused inclination is contrary to what is commanded to Christians.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, Aubrey Malphurs notes that leaders display at least four critical characteristics: humility, service, focus on others, and love.¹⁰¹ The greatest example and teacher of servanthood was the

⁹⁷ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 2. Geiger and Peck also comment, “True leaders are servants who die to themselves so others may flourish” (5).

⁹⁸ Andrew M. Davis, “Leading the Church in Today’s World: What it Means Practically to Shepherd God’s Flock,” in Merkle and Schreiner, *Shepherding God’s Flock*, 311.

⁹⁹ See table 3 above as a reference to various change models.

¹⁰⁰ Dave Earley and David Wheeler, *Evangelism Is...How to Share Jesus with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 149. See also, Will McRaney Jr., *The Art of Personal Evangelism* (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 46.

¹⁰¹ Malphurs, *Being Leaders*, 34

Lord Jesus Christ. Paul said of Him that He took “the very nature of a servant” (Phil 2:7), and Jesus said of Himself that “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt 20:28). A servant leader, who builds relationships through service, creates opportunities for transformative change by creating alignment between the followers and the leader. In this way the shepherd fosters buy-in from church members.

Casting a vision. Shepherds are responsible for guiding the sheep and casting the preferred vision for the direction the sheep move to. They cast a vision for others to follow, because without vision there is no reason to change, and without leadership there is no path to follow.¹⁰² John Kotter’s eight steps are helpful for developing a plan to carry the vision forward: (1) establish a sense of urgency, (2) create a guiding coalition, (3) develop a vision and strategy, (4) communicate the change vision, (5) empower a broad base of people to take action, (6) generate short-term wins, (7) consolidate gains and produce even more change, and (8) institutionalize new approaches in the culture.¹⁰³

Implementing successful culture change. Moving a church towards developing a culture of discipleship rests in mission and motivation.¹⁰⁴ Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James Furr, in *Leading Congregational Change*, describe the process of discerning and agreeing on God’s mission, vision, and path for congregational

¹⁰² Barna, *Turn Around Churches*, 37. See also, Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 42. Stetzer and Dodson recognized that leaders must demonstrate strong, committed leadership to change people's attitudes in order to work at revitalization and change the culture. See also, James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *Christian Reflections on the Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 87. Kouzes and Posner identify the need for servant leadership in casting a vision for change.

¹⁰³ See discussion above on leading organizational change. Kotter, *Leading Change*, 22.

¹⁰⁴ Mark Mittelberg and Bill Hybels, *Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 89. Mittelberg and Hybels add, “The mission of an organization is an extension of the mission of the leaders. So if you want to reshape the priorities of the organization, you're going to have to reshape the priorities of the men and women who guide it” (89). Stetzer and Dodson add, “The process of motivating and mobilizing the people provides opportunities for them to discover and utilize their unique giftedness and serve in the power of the Holy Spirit,” Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 133.

change.¹⁰⁵ The main argument is that the congregation works with the leadership in furthering the organizational change process. God works through His people to change. Church leaders shepherd the process of change in order to move the congregation into the direction which God describes in the Scriptures.

Overcoming obstacles. Overcoming the obstacles to change includes overcoming the natural inclination of people to resist change. The leader is tasked with convincing the people to accept new ways for new outcomes to occur.¹⁰⁶ A wise leader will implement constructs to help develop leaders and to provide a path for execution of the vision they cast.¹⁰⁷ These constructs occur in many forms, ideas, planning, etc., but are focused ultimately on advancing the spiritual life of both the leader and the followers. Additionally, a revitalizing church must determine what systems, or variants, will enable the church to climb out of decline and move towards revitalization through health and growth.¹⁰⁸ The literature review is clear that the need for revitalization is necessary and that the challenge to shepherd change rests in obedience to God's direction for the church; however, the literature is also void with regard to how specifically changing the discipleship culture affects church revitalization efforts.

Therefore, in the final section the topic of discipleship will be defined, models of discipleship are explored, and the purpose of discipleship in church revitalization

¹⁰⁵ The authors describe, in detail, how to move from mission to vision, and to what they describe as a "visionpath." The vision originates in God who empowers congregational leaders. Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James Harold Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 52-53. The key distinction between authors Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, and authors Kotter and Cohen, *The Heart of Change*, rests in a theological understanding of the need for organizational change.

¹⁰⁶ Barna, *Turn Around Churches*, 88.

¹⁰⁷ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 15. Beeley adds, "To attempt to lead others in the Christian life without having advanced in that life is not merely unadvisable or difficult; it is in fact impossible, not to mention hypocritical and destructive to the faith of others." Beeley, *Leading God's People*, 30.

¹⁰⁸ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 187.

surveyed. The literature review will demonstrate that more research is needed to describe how successful church revitalizers are utilizing discipleship efforts to transform the culture of their churches towards revitalization.

Discipleship in Church Revitalization

As the literature has demonstrated thus far, discipleship efforts result in church health and wellness. Declining churches, who are unintentional in their process of actively leading discipleship efforts, are noted by the literature as declining churches. Therefore, in this section a review of the literature related to discipleship is assessed. Emerging from the literature is a definition of discipleship, a discipleship purpose, tasks of discipleship, and models of discipleship. Each theme is explored and synthesized to provide a holistic picture of transforming the discipleship culture in church revitalization. Lastly, a void in the literature with regard to discipleship as transformative towards revitalization is demonstrated.

Discipleship Defined

The church cannot be successful in making disciples without understanding the purpose of discipleship and the intended outcomes for the disciple. Although the term discipleship is not a purely biblical expression, it is a derivative of disciple-making.¹⁰⁹ Many authors lend a voice of opinion on how to define discipleship. For instance, Max Anders in *Brave New Discipleship* defines discipleship as “giving a willing person the assistance needed to grow to maturity in Christ (the work of the church as a whole).”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor: Leading Others on the Journey of Faith*, rev. and exp. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 54. The term “discipleship” does not occur in the Bible; however, the term is implied in the command to make disciples. See also, Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 37.

¹¹⁰ Max Anders, *Brave New Discipleship: Cultivating Scripture-Driven Christians in a Culture Driven World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), xiii. John Piper notes, “The word *disciple* in the New Testament does not mean a second-stage Christian. There are some ministries that are built around this distinction that is just so unbiblical, as if there were converts, then there are disciples who are little stage-two Christians who learn more, and then there are disciple makers.” John Piper, “What Is Discipleship and How Is It Done?,” *Ask Pastor John*, January 25, 2016, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is->

Brad Waggoner offers that discipleship is a daily routine to move Christians forward spiritually.¹¹¹ Further, Waggoner argues that the way in which the routine is approached affects the type of disciple produced.¹¹²

Eric Geiger, Michael Kelly and Philip Nation in *Transformational Discipleship* identify eight attributes for discipleship: (1) Bible engagement, (2) obeying God and denying self, (3) serving God and others, (4) sharing Christ, (5) exercising faith, (6) seeking God, (7) building relationships, and (8) being unashamed of the gospel.¹¹³ These eight attributes show up consistently in the life of a maturing believer who is actively engaging in discipleship.¹¹⁴ Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck in *Designed to Lead* write,

If we believe the command to make disciples (Matt. 28:19) is bigger and more beautiful than merely making converts and calling people to “make a decision,” then we understand the essential role of the Church in maturing people in Christ. The command to “make disciples” carries the connotation of forming believers who learn and develop over a lifetime. One result, then, of discipleship is believers who serve and influence others in all spheres of life.¹¹⁵

Discipleship is therefore defined as the process of creating followers who serve and influence others in more than just church life but in all of life.¹¹⁶ The habits engrained in the process of discipleship are meant to spur the Christian toward holiness as they grow

discipleship-and-how-is-it-done.

¹¹¹ Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship* (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 14.

¹¹² Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 12-14. Waggoner offers that if a person focuses on Bible study as the means of discipleship, then scholars are produced, if evangelism is the focus then evangelists are produced, or if effectiveness becomes then focus then administrators are produced.

¹¹³ Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville: B&H, 2012), 59.

¹¹⁴ Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 59. The authors also note, “The distinguishing mark of Christian discipleship is a transformed heart, transformed affections. When someone becomes a true disciple, Christ radically changes a person's appetite” (29).

¹¹⁵ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 3.

¹¹⁶ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*: “Churches should ensure that each of their members receives biblical teaching on the key habits of discipleship: reading Scripture, prayer, small group, tithing, witnessing, and other disciplines” (127).

in Christ. One can observe the New Testament command to make disciples in Matthew 28:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matt 28:16-20)¹¹⁷

A question to ask in regard to this passage: Is a disciple merely a converted Christian?

The passage indicates a two-fold process for being a disciple: (1) becoming a believer and identifying with the church as referenced in “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” followed by (2) “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”¹¹⁸ The literature also suggests that growth in Christ is not merely a conversion, but a long process of teaching in order to be mature in Christ.¹¹⁹ The process involves both the mature in Christ and the immature.¹²⁰ These two parties work together to grow one another in Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God. Jesus chose to invest in a small group of disciples, those who would follow,

¹¹⁷ Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: Discipleship in the Steps of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 40. The word *disciple* occurs 230 times in the Gospels and 28 times in Acts. See also, Evangelical Teacher Training Association, ed., *Growing toward Spiritual Maturity* (Wheaton, IL: Evangelical Teacher Training Association, 1988), 15. The word *disciple* carries a literal connotation of *learner*; the Greek word μαθητής (*mathētēs*) is the root of the English word for mathematics. Therefore, a disciple is a learner who endeavors to improve. Chris Shirley provides a historical account of the use of the term *disciple*: “The essence of the word disciple changed from the first time it is used in Matthew 5:1 to the last mention in Acts 21:16. In the gospels, disciple already had a meaning before Jesus used the word. In the first century, the cultural understanding of a disciple was one who was more than just a learner; the disciple was also a follower.” Chris Shirley, “It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple: An Integrative Model of Discipleship for the Local Church,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 50, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 209.

¹¹⁸ An example of the command to participate in believer’s baptism is found in Mark 16:16, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

¹¹⁹ Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 16-20. Peterson offers that many claim to be born again Christians; however, the evidence of maturity in Christ is lacking. The danger of packaging Christianity as response only without discipleship hinders an expectation of growth in a converted soul.

¹²⁰ Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 21. See also, Max Anders, *Brave New Discipleship*, 26-29; Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 77.

learn, and teach others. Jesus had no secondary plan. He clearly told His disciples to “go . . . and make disciples” (Matt 28:19).¹²¹

Making disciples is an explicit command for all Christians; however, the authority and power to make disciples rests in God and not man.¹²² Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He told the disciples to wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5).¹²³ He told them that they would be His witnesses in “Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).¹²⁴ The disciples stayed in the upper

¹²¹ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 155-56. See also, Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 27. Waggoner lists the marks of a spiritual maturity as learning the truth, obeying God and denying self, serving God and others, sharing Christ, exercising faith, seeking God through worship, and building relationships.

¹²² R. T. France argues that the authority given to Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit would be given to the disciples to go and make more disciples. France contrasts the Gospel of John (14:16-17) where the presence of the Spirit is emphasized with the Gospel of Matthew which emphasizes the presence of Jesus with the disciples in order to fulfill their mission. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 723-26. In a similar way Keener connects the promise of the Holy Spirit at the close of Luke’s gospel to the opening in Acts in a similar way in which the ministry of Elijah was transferred to Elisha. Keener, *Acts*, 641-42. Keener further writes, “The Spirit thus enables the witnesses to carry on Jesus’ mission after his ascension, just as Elisha received a double portion of the Spirit to carry on Elijah’s work after his ascension” (674). Keener adds, “In Luke 24:49, Jesus promises the believers ‘power’ for their mission, which probably includes signs and wonders that would confirm their powerful message” (677).

¹²³ There are varying perspectives about whether or not those under the old covenant were individually indwelt by the Holy Spirit prior to Pentecost. For instance, James Hamilton cites six specific positions on the question of whether or not the old covenant remnant was individually indwelt: (1) complete continuity, (2) more continuity than discontinuity, (3) some continuity, some discontinuity, (4) more discontinuity than continuity, (5) complete discontinuity, and (6) vague discontinuity. The right side of the spectrum (position 1, complete continuity) recognizes that old covenant believers were regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The left side of the spectrum involves both position 5 and 6. Position 5 (complete discontinuity) denies that the Holy Spirit had anything to do with faithfulness of old covenant believers with no indwelling. The farthest end of the spectrum (position 6, vague discontinuity) denies indwelling, but does not question regeneration of believers during the old covenant period. Hamilton’s thesis is that the Spirit acted to regenerate believers under the old covenant without individual, continual indwelling of believers. Instead, he argues that continually indwelling is a function of the Spirit during the new covenant. James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old & New Testaments*, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 9-23. Hamilton writes, “The indwelling Spirit by believers is an eschatological blessing only experienced after the glorification of Jesus,” Hamilton, *God’s Indwelling Presence*, 100. Hamilton includes a section in his appendix titled, “Rushing Wind and Organ Music: Toward Luke’s Theology of the Spirit in Acts,” where he offers three distinct aspects of the Spirit’s work in believers: (1) the Spirit baptizes, as a fulfillment of Israel’s eschatological hope, (2) the Spirit indwells and fills as a condition of the normal Christian experience, and (3) the Spirit specially empowers certain individuals for matters of inspiration and proclamation (183-93).

¹²⁴ Keener writes, “The promise of empowerment for mission is given directly to the apostles (1:8), but that same power is promised to all the church at Pentecost (2:38-39) implies that all Spirit-empowered believers will contribute to the same task (albeit in diverse ways).” Keener, *Acts*, 689.

room to pray and wait for the Holy Spirit.¹²⁵ They did not immediately go out to make more disciples until they were indwelt by the Holy Spirit who would give them the power to do so.¹²⁶ How is the explicit command to make disciples to occur? What is the model used besides to go, baptize, and teach?

Discipleship Models

The first century church grew from people hearing the Word of God preached on the day of Pentecost and responding in belief with the aid of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-41). The evangelistic efforts of preaching and sharing the faith produced converts who were also indwelt with the Holy Spirit. What can be observed from Scripture and the literature are two models of discipleship. The first is an individual or one-on-one model where mature Christians disciplined less mature Christians in the faith, walking alongside and teaching. The second model is the corporate, or community model where small groups of Christians live life together and share in the teaching and learning.

¹²⁵ There is some debate over whether the Holy Spirit was already given to the disciples according to John's gospel. For instance, within the passage of John 20:22 there is debate over whether this refers to an initial giving of the Holy Spirit or whether this was symbolism of what was to come. In the John 20:21-23 pericope, Jesus appears to the disciples (sans Thomas) on the day of the resurrection, "He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" Hamilton views this passage as Jesus giving the Spirit to the present believers; however, he also recognizes a distinction in the Spirit coming in power (baptism of the Spirit) during Pentecost and the usage by John here. Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence*, 183-87. In contrast, Don Carson views the John 20:22 episode as symbolic to what would come during Pentecost and presented to an audience which already understood the concept of the Holy Spirit indwelling believers. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 655. Carson writes, "John 20:22 is not mere symbolism anticipating an endowment of the Spirit that is nowhere mentioned, it is symbolism anticipating the endowment of the Spirit that the church at the time of writing as already experienced, and of which outsiders are inevitably aware" (655).

¹²⁶ In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit was constantly present working in various ministries. For instance, Ps 139:7, "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?" The Spirit also acted as Counselor (see Neh 9:20; Hag 2:5; Zech 4:6). However, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit was selectively and temporarily limited to certain individuals during the Old Testament period (for example, Ps 51:11; Judg 14:6, 15:14; 1 Sam 10:5-13; 1 Sam 16:13-14), Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence*, 27-34. Hamilton explains that in John 14:17 Jesus elucidated to the disciples about receiving the Spirit, "You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you." The change in prepositions and tense between "dwells with" and "will be in you" suggests a change in ministry between the past Old Testament engagement of the Spirit and the future ministry of the New Testament. Further, in John 16:7 Jesus explained to the disciples that it was good for Him to leave so the Holy Spirit would come to help them. The Spirit acted as Counselor (παράκλητος, paraklētos). Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence*, 63.

Individual model. Individual, or one-on-one model, involves a person investing a great deal of time, energy, prayer, and commitment into the life of another person – not just sharing the good news of the gospel but developing a relationship where the person being disciplined learns, grows spiritually, and draws closer to God in holiness.¹²⁷ In this model, the person leading the discipleship sets the example and the new believer learns and benefits from the relationship. Another way to view an individual model is the idea of role model, coach, mentor, encourager, or even accountability partner.¹²⁸

The first aspect of the individual discipleship model follows conversion. The believer must be willing to engage in total submission to Christ before they can be disciplined. The New Testament image of slave is helpful to understand this concept. Murray Harris in *Slave of Christ* writes,

The New Testament does not hesitate to use slavery imagery in a positive sense to depict the Christian life as a whole or in some specific aspect. Thus, Christians are called the slaves of God (e.g., 1 Pet 2:26) or of Christ (1 Cor 7:22; Eph 6:6) or of one another (2 Cor 4:5; cf. Gal 5:13), referring, in general, to their total availability and devotion to a person. They are also enjoined to show a character trait that was commonly associated with slaves, *viz*, the humble service of others.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 70.

¹²⁸ Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010), 147. According to Putnam, the mentor acts a “spiritual parent” helping to guide the believer into the life of discipleship. Accountability is the key point in the author’s argument.

¹²⁹ Murray J. Harris, *Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ*. New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 51. Harris adds,

The term *doulos* expresses both a vertical and horizontal relationship of the Christian, who is both the willing vassal of the heavenly Master and submissive servant of fellow-believers. The term epitomizes the Christian's dual obligation: unquestioning devotion to Christ and to his people. But the vertical relationship is prior and the horizontal secondary. Christians are devoted to one another as a direct result of being devoted to Christ. When they serve each other, they are demonstrating and expressing their slavery to the Lord Christ. (Harris, *Slave of Christ*, 104-5)

The slave imagery calls for a person to shed their autonomous identity and take on the identity of the master.¹³⁰ In this case, Jesus Christ is the master. Murray Harris writes, “For good reason slavery was often described as a 'yoke' (ζυγός, zygos), the piece of shaped wood worn on the necks of draught-animals (Num. 19:2). Christian conversion may be described as an exchange of yokes” in which the Christian sheds the autonomy of self in order take on the identity of the master in which they are yoked together.¹³¹ Shedding the autonomy of self and dedicating a life to Christ involves three elements: (1) humble submission to the person of Christ, (2) unquestioning obedience to the Master's will, and (3) an exclusive preoccupation with pleasing Christ.¹³² J. Todd Billings writes, “When you stop looking to yourself, something peculiar is likely to happen: God and neighbor can come back into focus as objects of love.”¹³³ Thus, the disciple grows in maturity with the goal of being like Christ while shedding the autonomy of self to be in Christ.

The second aspect of the individual model of discipleship is following a role model. The Apostle Paul describes being a role model to Timothy, “and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2).¹³⁴ God gave ministry to Timothy, not for him to keep to himself, but for him to pass on to others. Timothy was not to teach others his own

¹³⁰ Andrew D. Clarke, *First Century Christians in the Graeco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 21. Clarke argues that God's gracious, loving call is, a threat to the believer's autonomy, “our deep and pervasive strategies to keep hold of our lives rather than losing them for the sake of Jesus Christ” (21).

¹³¹ Harris, *Slave of Christ*, 93-94.

¹³² Harris, *Slave of Christ*, 143.

¹³³ J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 47. Billings adds, “Salvation is not self-centered but is a renewal and restoration of the self precisely through orienting the self toward God, toward the church as the body of Christ, and toward neighbor. Individual believers discover their true identity in communion rather than in a pragmatic individualistic approach to salvation, and tinkering is replaced by a posture of humble gratitude before God” (9).

¹³⁴ Other examples include 1 Cor 11:1; Heb 13:7.

particular ideas or theories, but simple apostolic doctrine and example. When Timothy looked for those whom he could pour apostolic doctrine and practice into, he was to look for the quality of faithfulness. Therefore, the individual model of discipleship is aimed at producing a disciple who will replicate and share his faith with others in order to make more disciples. A person mentors someone else and invests everything they know and have into the life of this person and then encourages them to do the same thing in the life of someone else. This is perhaps the greatest advantage of individual discipleship – the ability to mentor and shape another person and then send him or her out to do the same for someone else.

Corporate (community) model. The corporate model resembles some attributes of the individual model yet is practiced in larger numbers. Geiger, Kelly and Nation write, “When the first Christians responded to the gospel, they immediately threw themselves fully into partnership with one another. (Acts 2:42).”¹³⁵ Jesus taught His disciples in a variety of manners and medium.¹³⁶ Through this teaching variety a common theme of relationship emerges from the corporate discipleship model.¹³⁷

The teaching methods of Jesus may be replicated by a church today through the use of smaller groups of believers. In this model a believer gains an opportunity for interactions with younger Christians (less mature in the faith) Christians, peer group

¹³⁵ Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 163. The authors clarify, “*Koinonia* expresses participation not just association. Transformational community is much deeper than mere association because of proximity. It is shared partnership for spiritual growth” (163). Likewise Wayne Meeks observes, “[They] shared content of beliefs but also shared forms by which the beliefs are expressed [that] are important in promoting cohesiveness. Every close-knit group develops its own argot, and the use of that argot in speech among members knits them more closely.” Wayne Meeks, “Taking Stock and Moving On,” in *After The First Urban Communities: Social-Scientific Study of Pauline Christianity Twenty-Five Years Later*, ed. Todd D. Still and David G. Horrell (New York: T&T Clark International, 2009), 78.

¹³⁶ Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 165-71. The authors write, “Jesus engaged with his disciples through knowledge, experiences, and coaching.” See also, Tidball, *Ministry by the Book*, 42.

¹³⁷ Steve Gladen, *Small Groups with Purpose: How to Create Healthy Communities* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 72.

(same maturity level), and older Christians (more mature).¹³⁸ Small groups are one option for developing corporate discipleship in churches, “Small groups give people an opportunity to build significant relationships with a smaller number of people.”¹³⁹ Small groups may involve traditional forms of Sunday school, life groups, home groups, children’s ministry, youth ministry, men’s ministry, or women’s ministry just to name a few.¹⁴⁰

The limitation of the corporate model is that some churches reduce discipleship to merely classroom activities. Steve Gladen writes,

Historically, American churches have operated on the belief that discipleship is about gaining knowledge. If we can fill believer's minds with facts from the bible and if they memorize enough Scripture, then we have made disciples. Discipleship is not merely teaching; teaching of often too passive. We need to involve ourselves in the lives of other people.¹⁴¹

Knowledge, by itself, is not the end-goal of discipleship. While several dimensions exist to a well-rounded education including cognitive dimensions, the affective and behavior dimensions are equally important.¹⁴² Attitudes and actions are a reflection of belief in relation to Christ’s commands.¹⁴³ Creating a well-rounded disciple, who is mature in Christ, who conforms to the image of Christ should be the goal of discipleship.

¹³⁸ Age does not necessarily relate to maturity level; however, engaging with those of varying ages and maturity levels fits the pattern for a New Testament understanding of blended learning. See Prov 19:20; Job 32:9; 1 Tim 5:1; 1 Cor 1:30.

¹³⁹ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 151. The authors even go so far as to state, “Intentionally connecting people in community is not an option for the church. It’s a biblical mandate - the essence of what it means to be the body of Jesus Christ” (151).

¹⁴⁰ Gladen, *Small Groups with Purpose*, 191-202.

¹⁴¹ Gladen, *Small Groups with Purpose*, 73-74.

¹⁴² Derek Tidball, Derek, *Ministry by the Book: New Testament Patterns for Pastoral Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 139. See also, Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*. The authors argue, “Paul wanted to see maturity and development occur in the people he led, and this involved teaching with wisdom. The antithesis of teaching with wisdom is a haphazard plan or no plan for development. With similar images of intentionality, Paul described his ministry engagement as a skilled master builder in response to and empowered by God’s grace” (183).

¹⁴³ Clarke clarifies,

The benefit of a corporate model of discipleship is the growth of community. Community learning was a central theme and method of discipleship in the early church. Randy Frazee writes of the Acts church,

As followers of Christ, they devoted themselves to growing—in a lifelong journey to look more like Christ together as his body. To facilitate this, they devoured the teaching of the apostles, sitting back and loosening the ropes of their robes to recline around the dinner table after a scrumptious meal. The apostles' teaching reconnected and resocialized them for the life in a different kind of community, a community based not on selfish patterns of sin but on the life of love in the community of the trinity. God's word instructed them how to love their neighbors—those around them who did not yet know the good news about God's salvation.¹⁴⁴

Community is a theme which permeates the New Testament church. Community implies relationships. Mark Clifton writes, “If you want your church to become a congregation that makes disciples, you have to get your people into discipling relationships with one another. That has to be the foremost priority of your church.”¹⁴⁵ This theme should permeate the twenty-first century church as well.

The process by which discipleship is engaged varies from church to church. For instance, a church may choose a one-on-one model, a group setting such as Sunday school or small groups, or even choose to leverage a whole congregation approach. Churches will choose the discipleship structure which best suits their purposes though typically it is a blended approach combining many of the above elements. Bill Hull uses the term *classic discipleship* to describe a twentieth-century approach where several programs were used by the church to disciple: (1) one-on-one mentoring, (2) a disciplined

Paradoxically, the primal, human nature is good precisely because it is united to God in a subordinate relationship of active trust. The delineation of the nature of this union, this active trust, is the law. It is a creational gift from God because the law itself points to the telos of human beings in being united in active trust to their Creator and other creatures – a union and fellowship with other creatures that is characterized by justice. Thus, the fundamental polarity of the law is not just between good and evil but between communion and alienation, union and autonomy. To act in communion with God—to obey the law—is to be truly and fully human. To disobey the law is to trust in oneself, in the flesh. (Clarke, *First Century Christians in the Graeco-Roman World*, 110)

¹⁴⁴ Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church: Beyond Small Groups to Authentic Community*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 70.

¹⁴⁵ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 74-75.

program of Bible study, (3) Scripture memorization, and (4) formal training in evangelistic efforts such as witnessing and speaking.¹⁴⁶

Should the church seek one model of discipleship over another or try to blend best practices? Steve Sonderman argues for one-on-one discipleship with intentionality in order to achieve the greatest growth in a believer, while others such as Stephen Barton argue for a mixed-model of discipleship in which several Christians work together through corporate structures.¹⁴⁷ Max Anders insists that discipleship models focused on twentieth-century strategies are doomed to failure, but strategies focused on holistic discipleship with the twenty-first century in view would be more successful.¹⁴⁸ Regardless of the specific method used in discipleship work, the church must focus on efforts to make and grow disciples.¹⁴⁹

The literature demonstrated the importance of discipleship and various practical models to use in meeting the call to make disciples. In the next section, the purpose of discipleship within church revitalization will be surveyed to demonstrate that more research is needed to describe how successful church revitalizers are utilizing discipleship efforts to transform the culture of their churches towards revitalization. The literature highlights the purpose of discipleship in revitalization utilizing specific tasks

¹⁴⁶ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 15.

¹⁴⁷ Steve Sonderman, *Mobilizing Men for One-on-One Ministry* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2010), 65. Similarly, Stephen Barton argues for plurality in discipleship. The crux of Barton's argument for plurality in discipleship structures rests in the pericope of Matt 19:27-30 and the similar text of Mark 10:28-31. Within this discussion Peter tells Jesus how the disciples left everything to follow Him. The discourse involves marriage rules, attitudes to children, property, and household ties before the appearance of the Rich Young Man episode. The climax of this discussion rests on the "good thing" he must do (τί ἀγαθὸν ποιήσω). Jesus takes this opportunity to show the disciples what is necessary to be followers. The main focus is that although each must give up his own idols to be a disciple, the process for teaching rests in a corporate environment. Stephen C. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 204-5.

¹⁴⁸ Anders, *Brave New Discipleship*, 26-29. Anders' main motivation in arguing for holistic models is a recognition that culture will fill in the gaps that church leaves open. A complete discipleship strategy is thus necessary when formulating a plan to grow believers in Christ.

¹⁴⁹ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 170.

which support and build upon each other to shape and strengthen the body of believers in the local church who then reproduce to develop new disciples in the faith.

Discipleship Purpose in Church Revitalization

What has been demonstrated thus far is that a declining church has lost some sense of its purpose as the body of Christ. A church that is unintentional in the assimilation process does not know what a disciple is or at least does not have a well-defined understanding of God's purpose. At a minimum they do not know how to make disciples.¹⁵⁰

The literature suggests that the purpose of discipleship is to holistically grow a believing Christian into maturity with a goal of replicating, making more disciples. Geiger and Peck write, "The disciples Jesus developed bore fruit, fruit that lasts forever. Just as Jesus disciplined them, they poured their lives into others, and followers of Christ have been multiplying ever since."¹⁵¹ Discipleship is not just a church program or a singular aspect of church life, but a "biblically-ordained relevant vehicle for transformational discipleship."¹⁵² If the purpose of discipleship is to holistically grow a believing Christian into maturity with a goal of replicating, then the task of the church members is to lead others in discipleship.

Tasks of Discipleship in Church Revitalization

Brian Croft suggests the solution to the problem of revitalization lies in addressing six major areas in the declining church: discipleship, evangelism, leadership,

¹⁵⁰ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 128-29. The assimilation process includes conversion of an unbeliever then an effective strategy to teach the new disciples in the doctrines and beliefs of Christianity.

¹⁵¹ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 155.

¹⁵² Shirley, "It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple," 208. Stetzer and Dodson add, "Discipleship is based on the need for learning the 'basic doctrines and habits of the Christian life,'" Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 127.

missions, prayer, and worship.¹⁵³ What is missing from the literature is a cohesive application of discipleship as a measure of church change and revitalization. Further, each of these elements relating to church revitalization (evangelism, leadership, missions, prayer, and worship) are, in reality, distinct products or tasks of discipleship. These distinct tasks are not possible without discipleship. Chris Shirley argues, “Each task alone is insufficient to shape authentic disciples; however, the tasks in concert provide a synergism that creates a productive environment for discipleship.”¹⁵⁴ The tasks of church revitalization are interrelated and support one another in strengthening and growing a healthy body of believers in the local church who reproduce to develop new disciples in the faith.

Evangelism. Evangelism is the starting point for discipleship. In Acts 14 Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel. This preaching required a response.¹⁵⁵ In the city of Antioch, the first disciples were called Christians (Acts 11:26). John Piper writes, “People need to become Christians and people need to be taught how to think and feel and act as a Christian. That is, a disciple, a follower of Jesus, one who embraces him as Lord and Savior and Treasure.”¹⁵⁶ The process of becoming a believer rests in response from being called by God: belief, confession, and repentance.¹⁵⁷ Shirley notes, “The

¹⁵³ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 117-21. These six attributes provide a holistic view of revitalization, but within this framework are the specific leadership attributes of perseverance, tenacity, and humility. The church will not experience overnight success by changing only one attribute but will need to work diligently in all areas to revitalize. Additionally, the culture itself should be changed in order to move the whole organization towards revitalization.

¹⁵⁴ Shirley, “It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple,” 217.

¹⁵⁵ “When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch” (Acts 14:21).

¹⁵⁶ Piper, “What Is Discipleship and How Is It Done?,” 1. See also, Acts 17:24-8 as the starting point for coming to Christ.

¹⁵⁷ Dave Earley and David A. Wheeler, *Evangelism Is--: How to Share Jesus with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 71-73. The authors note two distinctions between a true convert: turning from something (sin) to someone (God). The three aspects of conversion are knowing, feeling, and acting.

practice of evangelism, as a component of discipleship, also provides a starting point for making authentic disciples. When a person makes a commitment to follow Christ, he begins a lifelong relationship of living in Christ.”¹⁵⁸ Thus, evangelism means bringing someone into the community of faith.¹⁵⁹ Evangelism is the starting point.

Leadership. A simple definition of leadership is leading disciples to make other disciples. However, leadership, as already surveyed, rests in the authority of Christ with the power of the Holy Spirit. Stetzer and Dodson write, “Faithful leaders expend the effort to grow spiritually. They continually mature in Christ, realizing that they cannot rely on their past experiences with Him. It’s a daily relationship.”¹⁶⁰ Leadership uses teaching as a model for leading others. A disciple cannot grow without being taught and the Scriptures guide relationships between the leader, the disciple, and Christ.¹⁶¹

Missions. The mission of Jesus is to rescue sinners from sin through His death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus called His disciples to mission (Luke 19:10) and during His earthly ministry, Jesus prepared His disciples for future service (Luke 9; Mark 6:6-13). Likewise, He called the seventy-two to a missional ministry (Luke 10:1-16). The call to missions today is to make disciples. This mandate is for both those locally and for those afar. George Barna identifies the corporate role of the church “to introduce other people to Jesus, help them to accept Him as Savior, and enable them to live the life worthy of someone known as Christian.”¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Shirley, “It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple,” 217.

¹⁵⁹ Will McRaney, *The Art of Personal Evangelism: Sharing Jesus in a Changing Culture* (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 17-20. McRaney views the Genesis narrative as a community aspect where the existence of the trinity describes the relational process whereby Christians should interact as a community of believers.

¹⁶⁰ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 156.

¹⁶¹ “The 2000 Baptist Faith and Message,” n.d., accessed September 9, 2018, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp>. Article I.

¹⁶² George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ*, 1st ed., Barna reports for highly effective churches (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press,

Prayer. A disciple communicates with God through prayer.¹⁶³ Prayer exists in both a personal aspect and a corporate aspect. The apostle Paul commanded, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you,” (1 Thess 5:16-18). Gregory Frizzell in *Releasing the Revival Flood* notes, “Very little could be more unbiblical (or arrogant) than to assume we can do fine without a major emphasis on church-wide prayer meetings.”¹⁶⁴ Prayer is directly linked to discipleship.

Worship. Worship is observed in three specific forms: corporate worship, personal worship, and life stewardship.¹⁶⁵ As the local church gathers for corporate worship the body of Christ celebrates the risen Savior through singing, public reading of Scripture, and exposition of the Word (Eph 5:19; 1 Tim 4:13). An extension of corporate worship are the daily disciplines of the faith in which a disciple engages: reading Scripture, meditation on the text, prayer, and fasting.¹⁶⁶ Brian Croft, in *Biblical Church Revitalization*, provides a worship template to include: preaching, reading, praying, singing, and seeing the Word of God.¹⁶⁷ Worship is a natural extension of discipleship in a believer.

2001), 23. See also Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to come*, 146.

¹⁶³ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), 184.

¹⁶⁴ Gregory R. Frizzell, *Releasing the Revival Flood: A Churchwide Journey to Miraculous Unity and God-Glorifying Fellowship* (Union City, TN: Master Design, 2005), 93.

¹⁶⁵ Shirley, “It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple,” 218.

¹⁶⁶ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 158. Willard bifurcates the disciplines into two distinct categories: Disciplines of Abstinence and Disciplines of Engagement. Abstinence included, solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, and sacrifice. Engagement included, study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, and submission. Likewise, Foster divides spiritual disciplines into three categories: inward, outward, and corporate. Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 1998), 23-27.

¹⁶⁷ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 93-97.

Each of the tasks of revitalization listed above support and build upon each other to shape and strengthen the body of believers in the local church who then reproduce to develop new disciples in the faith. This cycle repeats itself as believers share the gospel and multiply. Discipleship may be considered the umbrella task in which the others rest under with the goal of fulfilling the mandate of the Great Commission. Disciples share their faith, they lead, they live on mission, they pray, and they worship the living God. The core of the gospel message is spreading the good news of Jesus Christ to the nations and the best way to create gospel-centered change in the church is to support other believers through encouragement and reinforcement.¹⁶⁸ When the church at Antioch received a letter from Jerusalem with instructions, “they rejoiced because of its encouragement” (Acts 15:31). Discipleship is an important factor in rebuilding a dying church. Leaders shepherd the change God provides in transforming the discipleship culture of the church in revitalization.

Conclusion

Churches across America are failing – the numbers are declining, the health of congregations are in decline, and an increasing number of authors are writing on revitalization. Pastors, seminary graduates, and doctoral students are engaged in the tough work of church revitalization. The literature is clear that the biblical foundations of scriptural authority, biblical leadership, preaching and teaching, observation of the ordinances, covenant community, and maintaining a mission focus produce a healthy church. Every person in the local church has an important role in revitalizing their church: discipleship. The overwhelming body of literature suggests that biblical leadership is essential to change a culture of a church towards discipleship and that discipleship results in health and restoration.

¹⁶⁸ For instance, in Acts at the Jerusalem Council, “the apostles and elders, with the whole church” used their collective voice to influence the church at Antioch (Acts 15:22).

The premise of this thesis is that effective, biblical discipleship causes health in the local body and grows the body of believers. The implications from the literature review point to two models of discipleship: individual and corporate. Both models work to transform the life of a believer towards being like Christ. Both models point to replicating disciples who love and care for others as Christ does. The literature also points to potential conflicts when attempting organizational change.

The culture of the church, which is in decline, must be changed to place discipleship at the front of its efforts. However, conflict will arise, and the leader of the change must be prepared both physically and spiritually to lead the revitalization efforts. While many studies have been conducted on different facets of church revitalization, a void exists in the current literature in demonstrating the relationship between discipleship culture and appropriate models of discipleship. Chapter 3 will explain the methodology and rationale for this mixed-methods study that seeks to contribute to the body of literature in examining this void.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

The existing literature on church revitalization relates not only the need for church revitalization but also identifies discipleship as a critical factor of the revitalization process. However, a need exists in the literature to not only obtain quantitative results relating to church revitalization, but to explain the results in more detail in terms of participant perspectives relating to the role of discipleship experiences.¹ This study seeks to fill that need.

This chapter describes the methodology employed in this study. The state of existing literature on the role of discipleship in church revitalization recommends an explanatory sequential mixed methods design be used.² Specifically, this study utilizes the participant-selection variant of the explanatory mixed methods design. “This variant is used when the researcher is focused on qualitatively examining a phenomenon but needs initial quantitative results to identify and purposefully select the best participants.”³ Figure 1 illustrates the design structure while the following two sections state the purpose of the study along with a synopsis of the research questions.

¹ John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 151.

² Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 82: “This design is most useful when the researcher wants to access trends and relationships with quantitative data but also be able to explain the mechanism or reasons behind the resultant trends” (82).

³ Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 85-86. The authors note two variants of the explanatory mixed methods design. The “follow-up explanations variant” is most common and places a priority on the quantitative phase and uses the qualitative phase to explain the quantitative results. However, the less common participant-selection variant places a priority on the second qualitative phase.

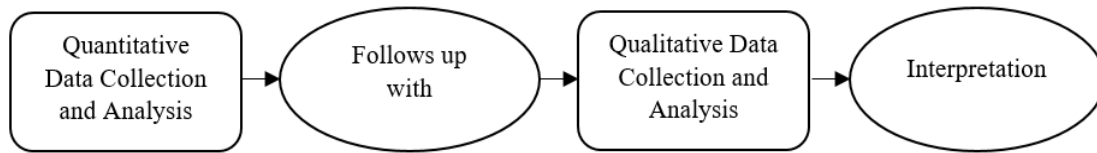


Figure 1. Explanatory sequential mixed-methods design

Research Purpose

The overall purpose of the larger sequential explanatory mixed-methods study is to identify revitalizing churches and learn what methods they utilized to successfully move towards revitalization.⁴ However, the focus of this portion of the study is to determine and prioritize key cultural change characteristics and practices present within Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) churches which have experienced revitalization. This particular portion of the study investigates how transforming the discipleship culture of the church results in revitalization. The purpose of this study is to understand and describe the role that transforming the discipleship culture plays in revitalization for churches.

Research Questions Synopsis

1. What percentage of SBC churches are plateaued or declining?
2. Of those churches that have experienced decline, what percentage have experienced revitalization?
3. Of those SBC churches experiencing revitalization, what percentage emphasized discipleship in the process of revitalization?

⁴ Creswell explains,

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

4. How does transforming the discipleship culture contribute to church revitalization?
5. What organizational culture changes occurred to facilitate transforming the discipleship culture during the revitalization process?
6. What primary changes to the church's discipleship ministry contributed to the revitalization process?
7. Which discipleship methods (structures/processes) were used by leadership to disciple church members during the revitalization process?

Design Overview

The study examined factors present in church revitalizations within the Southern Baptist Convention. The larger study examined how changes in discipleship, evangelism, leadership, missions, prayer, and worship are present in church revitalization. This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. In this multi-phase design, seven different researchers work in parallel with the same overarching focus on church revitalization. The first phase began with identifying churches who met the criterion to be considered a revitalizing church.⁵ The second phase employed a quantitative survey of churches meeting the criterion to assess the presence of transforming discipleship culture during the church revitalization. The last phase identified participants from the survey to interview to explain the quantitative results. This last phase employed a phenomenological qualitative strand to explore how churches changed the culture to focus on discipleship (see figure 2).⁶ The following sections detail the purpose and design of each component and strand of the study.

⁵ For this study, a revitalized church is one that (1) experienced less than 10 percent growth in worship attendance over five years prior to the turnaround, (2) experienced 10 percent or greater growth in worship attendance in two of the following five years, while (3) also achieving a 20:1 average yearly worship attendance to baptism ration in those same years.

⁶ Purpose statement adapted from the template provided in Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 159.

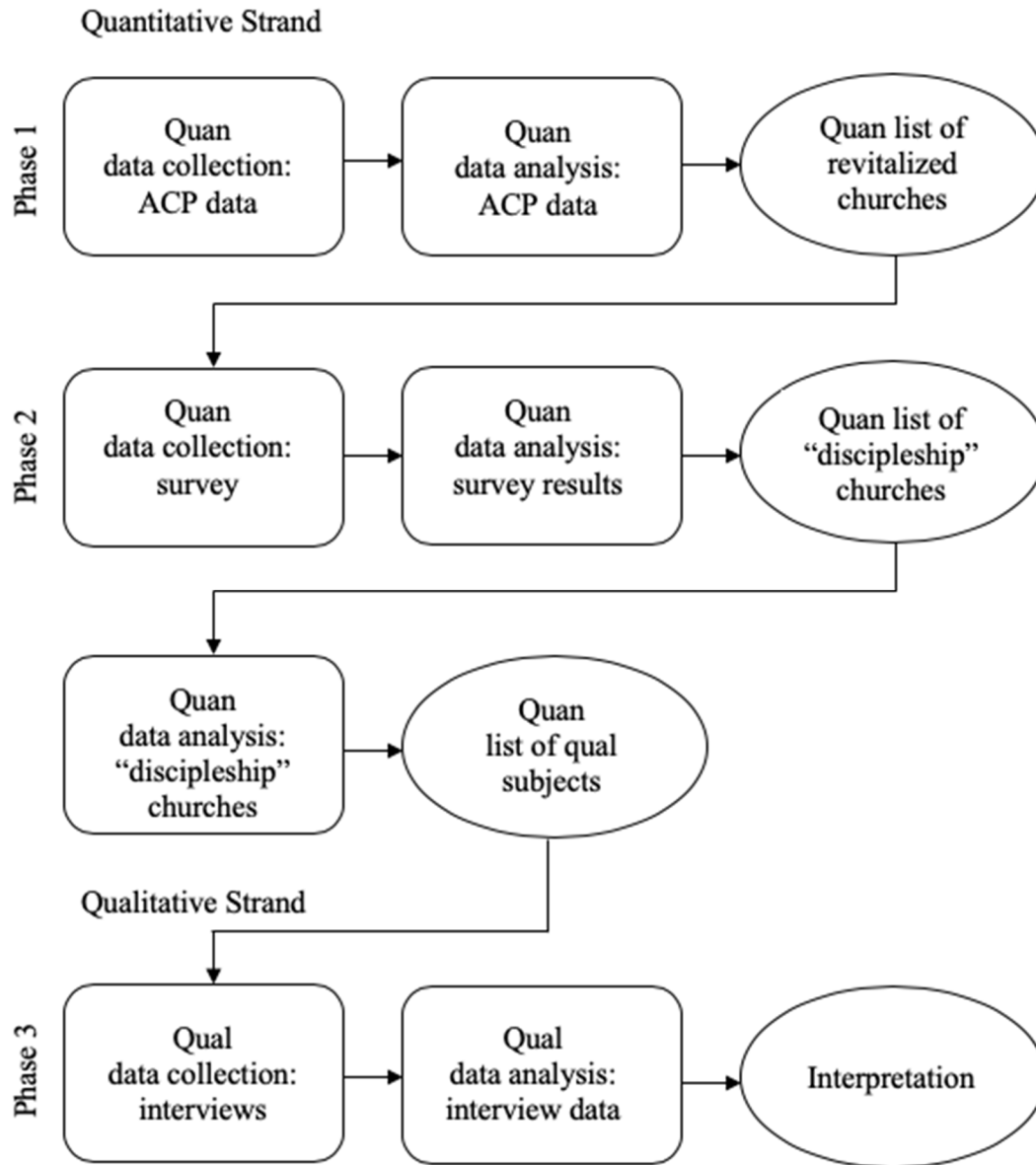


Figure 2. Design overview

Quantitative Strand

The entire research team jointly conducted the quantitative phases of the study. In an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the purpose of the quantitative strand is to identify types of individuals (or churches in this case) to be selected for the

qualitative strand.⁷ The first three research questions are addressed in the quantitative strand. The purpose and specifics of each quantitative phase follows.

Phase 1. The purpose of phase 1 is to define the criteria of revitalization and identify the churches that meet that criterion. The data for this phase was drawn from the Annual Church Profile (ACP) submissions for SBC churches in North America. The data analysis for this phase consisted of applying the revitalization criteria to the ACP data. The product is a list of churches in the SBC that have experienced revitalization. This list of revitalized churches provides the sample for phase 2.

Phase 2. The purpose of this phase is to discover churches from phase 1 that identified discipleship as a significant factor in the church's revitalization. For this phase, the research team administered a survey to churches from phase 1 that met the criteria for revitalization. This survey included items relating to church demographics, a respondent's role in the revitalization, and sections specifically related to each of the team members' emphasis. Data analysis for this phase consisted of compiling survey responses to measure and rank churches in each of the categories of emphasis. The product of the analysis was a list of churches that rated discipleship as a significant factor in the revitalization process. This list of *discipleship* churches provided the sample for the following qualitative strand.

Qualitative Strand

The third phase was conducted individually by each research team member and focused on the specific emphases of revitalization. In an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the qualitative data is drawn from participants identified in the

⁷ Creswell, *Research Design*, 224.

quantitative strand and helps explain in more detail the initial quantitative results.⁸ The following section details the purpose and components of the qualitative strand.

Phase 3. The purpose of this phase was exploring how discipleship contributed to the revitalization of churches from phase 2. This qualitative strand employed a phenomenological approach in an attempt to understand the shared experience of discipleship within a church revitalization context.⁹ For this phase, the data collection was through the administration of semi-structured interviews from the *discipleship* church list produced in phase two. The data analysis consisted of transcription, coding, and content analysis of the interviews. The product of this phase were findings represented by themes and categories in the form of models of discipleship in churches that have experienced revitalization.

This section provides an overview of this study. The research design allowed for the qualitative strand to inform the results of the quantitative strand. Table 4 correlates the research design components with corresponding research questions.

Interpretation

The final component of the study is interpretation. Both the quantitative and qualitative results were summarized and interpreted as well as research questions answered. This section will “discuss to what extent and in what ways the qualitative

⁸ Creswell, *Research Design*, 224.

⁹ Creswell writes,

Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence . . . The inquirer then collects data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals. This description consists of ‘what’ they experienced and ‘how’ they experienced it. (John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. [Los Angeles: Sage, 2013], 76.)

results help to explain the quantitative results.”¹⁰

Table 4. Research design and research questions

Research Design	RQ's
Quantitative	
Phase 1	1, 2
Phase 2	3
Qualitative	
Phase 3	4, 5, 6, 7

Research Population

The population for this study are members or affiliate churches of the Southern Baptist Convention within North America who have experienced revitalization. This research is limited to churches in the SBC who voluntarily returned the ACP to LifeWay Research for data collection.¹¹ Churches within the SBC share a common culture and confessional context, which allows for greater commonality in sampling. The following section describes the process of delimiting the population in each phase of the study.

Sample and Delimitations

The research was delimited to SBC churches that completed the ACP during 2006-2016 and met the criterion established for revitalization. Second, the research was delimited to churches who agreed to participate in the study and indicated that

¹⁰ Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 84.

¹¹ LifeWay Research is a ministry of LifeWay Christian Resources which exists to “assist churches and believers to evangelize the world to Christ, develop believers, and grow churches by being the best provider of relevant, high quality, high value Christian products and services.” Southern Baptist Convention, “LifeWay Christian Resources,” accessed January 16, 2019, SBC.net. <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/entities/lifeway.asp>

transforming the discipleship culture was a significant factor in the church revitalization efforts. The research design includes four specific points of delimitation to arrive at the population and sample for this study. The first delimitation occurred prior phase 1. To be eligible for the study, a church must be a member or affiliate of the Southern Baptist Convention and have completed the ACP in the years of 2006 through 2016. Therefore, churches that have not submitted ACP data for every year in the timeline are excluded from consideration in the population.

The second delimitation occurred during phase 1 in which churches must meet the definition for revitalization to be included in the population. The definition includes three criteria:¹²

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

Churches that met the three criteria served as the population of the study. This number of churches experiencing revitalization was used to calculate the percentage of SBC churches that are experiencing revitalization, plateaued, or declining (Research Questions 1 and 2).

¹² This definition of revitalization was determined by the larger research group in consultation with the group's doctoral thesis supervisor. See also, Thom Rainer, *Breakout Churches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 20-21. Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson use the 10 percent increase in attendance. Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), xiii. Joseph Stephen Hudson defines plateaued and declining churches as churches that have maintained an average attendance growth rate less than or equal to 5 percent over at least 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. See also, Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2016) and Albert R. Mohler Jr., *A Guide to Church Revitalization* (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2015). Both authors provide a similar picture of declining criteria.

The third delimitation occurs in phase 2 in which the list of churches experiencing revitalization is surveyed to produce a list of churches that emphasize discipleship as a contributing factor to revitalization. The specifics of the survey are provided below in the section on instrumentation and the entire survey is listed in appendix 1 (Revitalization survey: Phase 2). It was anticipated that the results would yield a 95 percent confidence level and a 5 percent confidence interval. Once the survey collection was completed, the criteria for inclusion into the sample of *discipleship* churches were applied to the survey responses.

To be included in the list of churches that emphasize discipleship as a contributing factor to revitalization, a church must have met the following criteria:

1. Complete and submit the survey.
2. On survey item 8, rate “Discipleship” as “important,” or “highly important,” OR¹³
3. On survey item 11, provide an answer that describes how changes in church’s discipleship ministry contributed to revitalization, OR¹⁴
4. On survey item 12, rate either bulleted statement as “agree,” or “strongly agree.”¹⁵

¹³ 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.)

Discipleship
 Evangelism
 Leadership
 Missions
 Prayer
 Primary Worship Gathering
Other (please specify): _____

¹⁴ Survey item 11. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church’s discipleship ministry which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.

¹⁵ Survey item 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.)

- a. The church has a clearly defined discipleship process.
- b. The majority of active members were able to explain the discipleship process.

The product of this delimitation was a list of churches that emphasized discipleship as a contributing factor to revitalization. This list provided the answer to Research Question 3.¹⁶ The participants for the qualitative strand of the study were selected from this list in the next phase.

The final delimitation occurred in phase 2 in which the list of churches emphasizing discipleship as a contributing factor to revitalization was reduced to produce the sample for inclusion in phase 3 of the study. Initially, a respondent must have agreed to participate in a follow up interview (question 6 on the survey) to be eligible for the sample. This purposeful selection employed maximal variation to produce a diverse sample based on the demographic categories of church context (rural, suburban, and urban).¹⁷ This delimitation produced a potential list of 12 churches that were invited to participate in the qualitative strand of the study in phase 3 (semi-structured interviews).¹⁸ The data analysis of the phase 3 qualitative interviews provided the answers to Research Questions 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Limitations of Generalization

The population and sample were derived from SBC churches in North America. The quantitative attributes are generalized to SBC churches experiencing

¹⁶ The answer to Research Question 3 (number of churches that experienced revitalization who listed discipleship as a significant fact in the revitalization process) was calculated as a percentage based on the number of churches that experienced revitalization (from the second delimitation).

¹⁷ Creswell states,

This approach consists of determining in advance some criteria that differentiate the sites or participants, and then selecting sites or participants that are quite different on the criteria. This approach is often selected because when a researcher maximizes differences at the beginning of the study, it increases the likelihood that the findings will reflect differences or different perspectives—an ideal in qualitative research. (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 156–57)

¹⁸ The number of recommended participants in qualitative phenomenological interviews varies from author to author, but consensus among authors is a sample size between 5 and 25 participants. The key is for all participants to have the experienced the same phenomenon. Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 11th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2016), 255; Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 186; Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 155.

revitalization.¹⁹ The qualitative attributes are 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 are generally mirrored in other evangelical congregations beyond SBC churches.

Research Instrumentation

This study employed two primary instruments. First, during phase 2 of the quantitative strand, the research team administered an online survey. Second, during phase 3 of the qualitative strand, I conducted interviews either via electronic video or phone media utilizing recording software for later transcription. The following sections detail the content and rationale for each instrument.²⁰

Church Revitalization Survey

Phase 2 in the quantitative strand employed a survey as the data collection instrument. The purpose of the survey was twofold: (1) to provide an answer to Research Question 3 (“Of those SBC churches experiencing revitalization, what percentage emphasized discipleship in the process of revitalization?”), and (2) to provide the data from which the sample for phase 3 in the quantitative strand was drawn. The details of the Church Revitalization Survey follow.

Design. The research team chose a self-administered, Survey Monkey web survey as the mode for delivery and collection of data.²¹ This design allowed for three

¹⁹ Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 9.

²⁰ All of the instrumentation used in this thesis research were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in this thesis.

²¹ For additional information about Survey Monkey, see <https://surveymonkey.com>.

advantages. First, using a website survey service leveraged technology for question sequencing and skip logic.²² Second, data collection was automatic, and a certain amount of data analysis was queried via the website. Last, the speed of collection provided a significant saving in terms of time.²³

Content. The survey consisted of thirty-two questions in ten sections (see appendix 1 for specific questions). The first section was comprised of six demographic questions related to the role the respondent held with the church in relation to the revitalization. The second section contained a question for contact information. The third section covered the revitalization process in general with three questions. Sections 4 through 9 consisted of questions relating to the specific factors that may have contributed to the revitalization (discipleship, evangelism, missions, leadership, prayer, and worship.) The final section provided an open-ended field for general comments.

Section 4 of the survey pertained specifically to discipleship. Each question addressed a unique facet of discipleship in relation to the revitalization process and was drawn from the research questions or precedent literature. Question 11 was an open-ended question while question 12 used a six-point Likert rating scale.²⁴ Question 13 pertained to programmatic elements in use by the church to facilitate discipleship. Question 14 required the respondent to choose between either individual or collective

²² Lesley Andres clarifies, “Web surveys have the advantage of being able to program skip questions so that the respondent is automatically directed to the next relevant question.” Lesley Andres, *Designing & Doing Survey Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 86.

²³ Andres, *Designing & Doing Survey Research*, 50-51. Three disadvantages also accompany a self-directed web survey. First, because the link to the survey will be embedded in an email invitation, churches without accurate or complete email information will not receive the invitation. Second, self-administered surveys inherently include an inability for respondents to ask follow-up or clarification questions. Last, the most qualified person to complete the survey may not receive the invitation or be the one actually responding.

²⁴ All questions with rating scales have no midpoint. The nature of the question recommends that respondents choose a side. According to Andres, “If there is no midpoint, individuals are not allowed to sit on the fence.” Andres, *Designing & Doing Survey Research*, 74.

mindsets towards discipleship efforts.

Administration. The entire research team participated in collecting data for the survey. Collection protocol occurred as follows:

1. The research team divided the list of churches that experienced revitalization. Each member was assigned a number of churches to check and validate contact information. This check was accomplished through website searches.
2. An email invitation (appendix 2) was sent to the primary email address of the church (either the general office email or the pastor, if available). The email invitation explained the purpose of the survey and included a link to access the survey via a web browser. For an incentive, respondents who submitted the response within seven days, and agreed to a follow-up interview, were entered into a drawing for a \$250 gift card.
3. Follow-up phone calls were placed by the research team to churches that did not respond after seven days. Hard copies of the survey were made available for churches that do not have email or internet access. Churches that did not respond after another 30 day waiting period were mailed a hardcopy with a return envelope.

Validation and reliability. First, the survey was submitted to an expert panel for feedback and approval. The expert panel included experienced church revitalizers, denominational leaders, and researchers in the field.²⁵ Second, the survey is field tested among the research team and select pastors to ensure deliverability, functionality, and clarity.

Discipleship Interviews

Phase 3 in the qualitative strand employed semi-structured recorded interviews as the data collection instrument.²⁶ Whereas the Revitalization Survey was conducted

²⁵ The expert panel consisted 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 & Divided Churches*, 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*, 2012; 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).

²⁶ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 160.

with the entire research team, the discipleship interviews were conducted individually. The purpose of the interviews was to collect qualitative data to formulate answers to Research Questions 4-7. The details of the discipleship interviews follow.

Content. The phase 3 qualitative interview questions combined demographic information and open-ended questions (appendix 4).²⁷ The first section was comprised of six demographic questions. The second section asked thirteen questions related to discipleship and revitalization. Each of the open-ended questions correlated to one or more research questions. Table 5 displays the correlation of phase 3 qualitative interview questions to research questions.

Table 5. Research questions and interview questions

Research question	Interview questions
4. How does transforming the discipleship culture contribute to church revitalization?	1, 11, 13
5. What organizational culture changes occurred to facilitate transforming the discipleship culture during the revitalization process?	2, 3, 4, 10
6. What primary changes to the church's discipleship ministry contributed to the revitalization process?	5, 6, 7, 12
7. Which discipleship methods (structures/processes) were used by leadership to disciple church members during the revitalization process?	8, 9

²⁷ The interview questions in appendix 4 consisted of anticipated questions. However, the nature of the explanatory mixed-method design anticipated some adjustment in the qualitative strand based on the analysis of the quantitative strand. Creswell and Plano Clark state,

The researcher connects to a second phase . . . by identifying specific quantitative results that call for additional explanation and using these results to guide the development of the qualitative strand. Specifically, the researcher develops or refines the qualitative research questions, purposeful sampling procedures, and data collection protocols so they follow from the quantitative results. As such, the qualitative phase depends on the quantitative results. (Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 83)

Administration. The timeline for each interview included seven points of contact between the researcher and participant. The following list includes all points of contact:

1. An initial email alerting the participant to the initial phone call.
2. Phone call to set up the interview.
3. Email containing the list of questions and video instructions along with confirmation of the interview time.
4. Video interview.
5. Thank you email with instructions for transcript verification.
6. Email containing the interview transcript.
7. Email containing the preliminary conclusions with instructions for verification.

Each interview was conducted according to the following protocols:²⁸

1. The interview was facilitated using Zoom video conferencing software that allowed for recording the entire interview either through video or phone.²⁹ Permission for recording was gained from the participant.
2. Read the informed consent statement and asked the participant to agree.
3. Conducted the interview.
4. Thanked the participant and previewed the remaining points of contact.
5. Informed of the transcript validation process.
6. Informed of the preliminary interpretation validation process.

Following the interview, the data was processed according to the following protocols:

²⁸ Interview protocol sequence adapted from Stacy A. Jacob and S. Paige Furgerson, "Writing Interview Protocols and Conducting Interviews: Tips for Students New to the Field of Qualitative Research," *The Qualitative Report* 17, no. 6 (2012): 7–10.

²⁹ For additional information about Zoom meeting software, see <https://zoom.us>.

1. Each interview was transcribed using NVivo software.³⁰
2. Each interview was coded using emerging codes.
3. The qualitative data was analyzed into themes.³¹ Themes centered on the content and ideas contained within the research questions.

Validation and reliability. Six specific protocols were followed to ensure validation and reliability in this phase of the study. 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.³² Second, the researcher maintained a research journal of each step taken with dated entries, completed tasks, and observations. Third, the interview content and process were triangulated through use of peer reviews. Members of the research team audited the content and process, along with the project supervisor. Fourth, two pilot interviews were conducted to ensure the video software and transcription process worked properly prior to conducting live interviews.

The fifth protocol involved member checking.³³ First, interview participants were given the opportunity to review their interview transcripts to ensure accuracy. After the interview was transcribed, each participant was provided a copy of the transcript to review and offer corrections. After ten days, if no revisions were recommended by the

³⁰ For additional information about NVivo software, see <https://qsrinternational.com/nvivo>.

³¹ Creswell states, “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*, 186.

³² The expert panel consisted of Brian Croft, Senior Fellow at the Mathena Center for Church Revitalization and author of *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying & Divided Churches*, (London: Christian Focus, 2016); William Henard III, *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 in Southern Baptist Convention Churches: A Mixed Methods Study” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), Kenneth Priest, Director of Convention Strategies for the Southern Baptists of Texas and co-author of *Rubicons of Revitalization: Overcoming 8 Common Barriers to Church Renewal* (Littleton, CO: Acoma, 2018).

³³ Creswell states, “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.

participant, I proceeded with the understanding that the transcripts were accurate and valid. Second, the preliminary interpretation of the study was provided to each interview participants for their reflection and feedback. As with the interview protocol, a period of ten days was allocated for responses regarding the preliminary interpretation.

The final protocol for validation involved clarifying researcher bias.³⁴ I acknowledged three primary areas where bias had the potential to influence the interpretation of the data. First, the researcher is a student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a member of a SBC church. Second, the researcher has previously served as a pastor. Finally, the researcher has served in both small and large churches teaching discipleship classes for the last 10 years.

Research Procedures

The methodology for this research project was reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary prior to any surveys or interviews conducted with human participants. A risk assessment profile was created for research involving human subjects, as well as the assessment of risk to human subjects in research. All interview participants were provided an informed consent statement before participating in an interview.

Profile of the Current Study

The current study used a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design to identify revitalizing churches and learn what methods they utilized to successfully move towards revitalization. Mixed-methods designs make the assumption that combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, “provide a better understanding of research

³⁴ Creswell states, “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.

problems than either approach alone.”³⁵ Since the focus of this portion of the study was to determine and prioritize key cultural change characteristics and practices present within SBC churches which have experienced revitalization it was necessary to collect qualitative data to learn what variables needed studying in phase 3 of the research.

³⁵ Creswell, *Research Design*, 5.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The overall purpose of the larger sequential explanatory mixed-methods study was to identify revitalizing churches and learn what methods they utilized to successfully move towards revitalization. However, the focus of this portion of the study was to determine and prioritize key cultural change characteristics and practices present within Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) churches which have experienced revitalization. This particular portion of the study investigated how transforming the discipleship culture of the church resulted in revitalization. The purpose of this study was to understand and describe the role that transforming the discipleship culture plays in revitalization for churches. This chapter provides detailed descriptions of the research protocol, the demographics of the research participants, and the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the research. The relative strengths and weaknesses of the research design are also addressed.

Compilation Protocol

The research design of this study was an explanatory mixed-methods study that examined SBC churches in three distinct phases.¹ Phase 1 data collection for the study began by contacting LifeWay Research to obtain the Annual Church Profile (ACP) data on select SBC churches. All churches selected for the second phase met the following

¹ The research protocol for phase 1 and phase 2 was conducted as part of a research team consisting of seven doctoral students under the supervision of Michael Wilder. While different team members carried out different responsibilities, the product of the research was a joint effort. In protocol explanations, there is no effort to distinguish the actions of a particular team member in contrast to another.

criteria: (1) the church had ACP data for 2006-2016, (2) the church experienced a decline in primary worship attendance of at least 10 percent during the five-year period between 2006 and 2011, and (3) the church experienced at least 10 percent annual growth in primary worship attendance for at least 2 of 5 years following the turnaround while maintaining a 20:1 worship to baptism ratio in the same years.² A total of 716 churches were invited to participate in the survey for phase 2 (see appendix 1). The survey was administered electronically via e-mail invitation and through mailed hard-copies with return envelopes and postage provided. The survey consisted of twenty-four questions pertaining to church revitalization and eight general demographic questions, including two questions pertaining to willingness to participate in phase 3 interviews. A total of 12 participants were purposefully selected and invited to participate in an interview pertaining to discipleship and discipleship culture considerations. Selection for phase 3 interviews included, (1) a general requirement that the participant complete and submit a survey, (2) the participant rated discipleship as important or highly important to the revitalization process, or (3) the participant provided an answer that described how changes in the church's discipleship ministry contributed to revitalization, or (4) rated the question regarding their church having a clearly defined discipleship process as agree or strongly agree. The interview sessions with selected churches were recorded via Zoom technologies by either telephone or video conferences.³ The 12 interviews were transcribed, appropriately coded with NVivo software, and analyzed to identify principles and trends among the revitalized churches and leaders.⁴

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: 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>.

³ For additional information about Zoom meeting software, see <https://zoom.us>.

⁴ For additional information about NVivo software, see <https://qsrinternational.com/nvivo>.

Phase 1

In phase 1, a request was made to Lifeway Research to identify churches that existed in 2016, which was the most current year of data for ACP information at the time the request was made. Based on this data, the first delimitation of participation occurred at this point. To be eligible for participation in phase 1, churches must have submitted ACP data for 2006-2016. This initial data was obtained in June 2018. At that time, 28,046 churches existed that had sufficient data to calculate five-year worship attendance trends during the period between 2011-2016.⁵ The following criteria was used to identify churches eligible for study: (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). Among these churches, 25.60 percent (7,180) were growing churches, 25.71 percent (7,211) were plateaued, and 48.69 percent (13,656) were declining. Only churches that were in need of revitalization were eligible for participation (declining or plateaued churches.) Thus, 7,180 (25.60 percent) were excluded because they were growing churches in 2016. This left a population of 20,867 (74.40 percent) as declining or plateaued churches.

After this number of eligible churches had been determined, the second delimitation occurred. At this point, criteria 1 and 2 for being considered a *revitalized* church were applied. This first step in the second delimitation analyzed the decline and growth rates of the church. For the first criterion, a church must have, in 2011, declined ten percent or more as compared to 2006, and in 2016 grown ten percent or more as compared to 2011. The second criterion excluded churches that had less than two of the last five years with one-year worship attendance growth of ten percent or more, or had less than two of the last five years with a 20:1 or higher attendance to baptism ratio. This

⁵ The total number of churches reported as participating in the SBC in 2016 was 47,272. Thus, only 59.3 percent of SBC churches had submitted sufficient data to initially be considered for participation. "ACP: Churches up in 2016; Baptisms, Membership Decline," Baptist Press, accessed November 25, 2018, <http://www.bpnews.net/49005/acp--churches-up-in-2016-baptisms-membership-decline>.

left 3,364 churches eligible.

The second step in the second delimitation applied a third criterion for being considered a *revitalized* church. This third criterion excluded churches that did not have both two years of ten percent worship attendance growth per year and a 20:1 baptism to attendance ration or better. The final result of the second delimitation resulted in the identification of 716 churches, representing 5.24 percent of the previously declining population (see Table 6).⁶ Isolating the churches in decline, yet still revitalized, gave the research the opportunity to observe the most extreme cases of church revitalization.

Phase 2

The researchers divided the sample, consisting of 716 churches, in order to identify and verify contact information among the churches. The research team then sent an email (see appendix 2) to the 716 churches in the sample providing an invitation to participate in a survey on church revitalization, along with a link to the survey instrument (see appendix 1). Those participants completing the survey within seven days, and agreeing to be interviewed for phase 3, if selected, were placed into a drawing for an incentive. Following the initial seven-day period, members of the research team redistributed the list of churches who had not responded and contacted them to further solicit their participation. Some follow-up calls indicated that churches did not use email for communication; therefore, paper copies of the survey were made available to encourage greater participation. 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

⁶ Of the 28,046 churches with sufficient data related to 2011 to 2016 worship attendance trends, 44.47 percent (13,656) also demonstrated a decline in worship attendance of at least 10 percent from 2006- 2011. The research sample was identified from among these declining churches because they represented the most significant trend reversals resulting 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).

129 churches responding to the survey resulting in a confidence level of 7.82.⁷

To encourage more responses, the research team sent out another email to non-responding churches with a link to the survey to increase response in an effort to come closer to the target confidence level of 5. The team decided to further limit the sample to churches with worship attendance greater than 50 people.⁸ This resulted in a sample of 466 churches with worship attendance greater than 50 people in 2016. To further increase participation, the researchers sent paper copies of the survey with enclosed return envelopes to the remaining list of 466 churches who had not previously responded in April, 2019. The researchers divided the reduced list of remaining churches out of the 466 churches that had not completed the online survey nor the mailer. The team made an additional and more aggressive effort to contact potential participants within the sample. As of July 1, 2019, resending the email with the survey link and the additional mailer, resulted in 145 completed surveys. The confidence level was lowered from 7.82 in the previous iteration to 6.71.

The survey instrument consisted of eight demographic related questions and twenty-four 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 1). Lesley Andres states, “Questions and instruments can be piloted with experts on the topic of

⁷ The research team was comprised of students from three different cohorts at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Because the 2016 class was scheduled to graduate earlier, two of the students finalized their projects at this point in the study. The remaining students continued to solicit more survey responses over the following year. For the 2016 cohort results, see Christopher Michael Aiken, “Church Revitalization and the Role of Pastoral Leadership: A Mixed-Methods Study” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), and Aaron Thomas Colyer, “Church Revitalization and Evangelistic Emphasis: A Mixed Methods Study” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018).

⁸ The team decided to exclude churches with 50 or fewer 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 or declining.

the survey.”⁹ Therefore, an expert panel of pastors and denominational leaders with expertise in church revitalization provided review, insight, and suggestions for the survey questions.¹⁰

The research team chose different churches that met their selected criteria and the team made every effort to not overlap interviewing pastors from the same church.¹¹ Using the 145 survey responses, a third delimitation produced a list of churches that emphasized discipleship in the revitalization process. Additional selection criteria for phase 3 interview candidates included, (1) the participant rated discipleship as “important” or “highly important” to the revitalization process, or (2) the participant provided an answer that described how changes in the church’s discipleship ministry contributed to revitalization, or (3) rated the question regarding their church having a clearly defined discipleship process as “agree” or “strongly agree.” This delimitation produced a list of 18 churches that met the discipleship criteria for sampling.

The final delimitation occurred at the end of phase 2. The 18 *discipleship* churches were purposefully selected employing maximal variation to produce a diverse sample based on demographic categories of church context. This delimitation produced a list of 12 churches that provided the sample for phase 3. Table 6 illustrates the delimitations and sampling of the study.

⁹ Lesley Andres, *Designing and Doing Survey Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 27.

¹⁰ 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 & 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 Churches: A Mixed-Methods Study” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017).

¹¹ Team members from SBTS 2017 cohort provided to the remaining team members a list of pastors they interviewed. The remaining team members then submitted their interview choices to each other and compared for overlap. If overlap occurred, then team members negotiated between themselves for particular pastors to interview or contacted the pastor to determine if he would mind being interviewed by more than one researcher.

Table 6. 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	Declining churches	13,656
1	1	Plateaued churches	7,211
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 “discipleship” criteria	18
2	4	Purposeful maximal variation sample	12

Phase 3

Discipleship qualitative interviews began with 12 interview candidates who were purposefully selected from survey respondents indicating a willingness to participate in an in-depth interview.¹² Pastors from 12 churches were purposefully selected for interviews representing diverse experience levels, education, and generational influences.

Initially, an email invitation was sent to 18 selected pastors across the U.S. according to the phase 3 selection criteria. Initially, 5 pastors responded to the email and interviews were scheduled at their requested times. Phone call follow-ups secured interview times of 4 additional pastors on the initial email distribution. Of the initial pastors selected for interviews, 40 percent did not respond at all even though multiple attempts were made by sending additional emails, voicemails left on the church’s voice recorder, and messages sent through Facebook. After several more attempts, I was able to secure 3 additional pastors who met the phase 3 criteria and thus meeting the minimum count of 12 interviews.

Upon scheduling an interview appointment, each interviewee received an

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?

email containing the implied consent statement (see appendix 3), as well as the interview outline and questions (see appendix 5). Providing the questions in advance enabled the interviewees to be more thoughtful in providing responses to the questions.

All 12 interviews were conducted using Zoom video/phone conferencing service. Using the Zoom meeting format to connect with pastors resulted in increased ease of scheduling and recording for phase 3 transcription and analysis. Regardless of how technological savvy the pastor was, Zoom meeting provides access to either video or phone access by simply following a computer/smartphone link or calling into the provided number.¹³ 7 interviews were conducted using the video and audio feature and five were conducted using the audio only feature. The interview timeframe lasted from 36 to 69 minutes.¹⁴ Each interview was recorded via Zoom conferencing service then transcribed using NVivo Transcription Services.¹⁵

Prior to beginning the interviews with the selected pastors, 2 pilot interviews were conducted with church staff from my local church to help “ensure that the level of language used in the [interview] questions is appropriate and understandable to the

¹³ The benefits of using Zoom are not limited to the ones listed above but also include the ability to schedule interviews with different reminders but also the ability to record the interview automatically. The software allows the interviewer to pause the recording if needs be and also mute their microphone to obtain a clear recording for future transcription.

¹⁴ The interview was broken into two distinct parts with the first being demographic questions and the second part focusing on the discipleship culture of the church. See appendix 4 for interview questions. Nine hours of audio recordings were collected, which were transcribed and coded; however, due to the sensitive nature of the information shared at times, the transcriptions were not made part of this thesis. Phase 3 interview participants were asked to provide candid responses to specific questions about their church and its revitalization. At times, those responses related to personal leadership failures, discipleship challenges, moral failings among staff or members, and other pastoral leadership crises. The probative nature of the participant’s candor regarding these, often time, embarrassing or painful incidents required a commitment of confidentiality to the participants that would not identify a pastor or his church with any particular answer. First, participant names, church names, and city locations of the participants were not included with the study. Second, the complete transcripts are not included in this thesis. At times, direct quotations are used when deemed impactful. Otherwise, summaries of themes and responses are used. To ensure anonymity, any personally identifying information remains confidential. See Lesley Andres, *Designing & Doing Survey Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 130.

¹⁵ For additional information about NVivo Transcription Services, see <https://transcription.mynvivo.com>.

audience; to assess whether the questions are understood as intended.”¹⁶ Lesley Andres determines that, “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.”¹⁷ The pilot interviews were also helpful to test the Zoom software connectivity and recording software. Additionally, the pilot interviews served to test the feasibility of protocols surrounding timing of transcription and feedback from interviews.

Following interviews and transcriptions, the participants were emailed a copy of the transcripts for validation. Each participant was allowed ten calendar days to review the transcripts and return with any corrections. Twenty-five percent of the participants suggested corrections to the original transcription manuscripts. The transcripts were then coded using the research questions, precedent literature, and emerging themes via NVivo software. After all transcripts were analyzed and coded for emerging themes, a copy of the tentative analysis was sent to each participant and allowed ten calendar days to respond with any comments.

Findings

The findings from research in phases 2 and 3 are reported below. Phase 2 shows the results from the quantitative survey with a distinctive focus on discipleship. Phase 3 shows the results from qualitative interviews of purposefully selected pastors focusing on their experiences with how transforming a culture of discipleship aided in revitalization efforts in their church.

Phase 2

Phase 2 research consisted of a survey instrument sent to churches experiencing revitalization to determine what factors influenced their efforts. The survey

¹⁶ Andres, *Designing and Doing*, 27.

¹⁷ Andres, *Designing and Doing*, 27.

instrument covered six areas of emphasis of church revitalization—discipleship, evangelism, leadership, missions, prayer, and primary worship gathering—the analysis of these findings focuses on discipleship.

Demographics. More than 94 percent of the surveys were completed by pastors (see table 7). While pastors were the intended recipients of the survey, some of the respondents noted that they were presently without a pastor. No controls prevented a non-pastor from completing the phase 2 survey; however, phase 3 interviews were limited to pastors in order to provide continuity of perspective that aided in forming a baseline for analyzing responses.

Table 7. Phase 2 respondents’ current roles¹⁸

	Respondents (%)
Pastor/elder	94.32
Staff	4.25
Deacon	0.70
Volunteer	0.70

In survey item 2 respondents were asked about their role prior to the revitalization, whereas survey item 3 asked about their role during the revitalization process. Approximately one-half of the respondents (47.14 percent) indicated that they served in the role of pastor prior to the period of revitalization and almost 9 out of 10 (89.36 percent) indicated that they served in the role of pastor during the revitalization (see table 8).

¹⁸ Survey item 1, “Your current role with your church: pastor/elder, deacon, staff, or volunteer.”

Table 8. Phase 2 respondents' role related to revitalization¹⁹

	Respondent role prior to revitalization (%)	Respondent role during revitalization (%)
Pastor/elder	47.14	89.36
Deacon	--	0.70
Staff	7.14	6.38
Volunteer	1.42	0.70
Not at church	44.28	2.12

In survey item 4 respondents were asked to clarify their ministry context as rural, suburban, or rural. Just more than half of the respondents (53.19 percent) identified as serving in a rural context; whereas only 1 in 10 identified as serving in an urban context (see table 9).

Table 9. Phase 2 respondents' ministry context²⁰

	Respondent's ministry context (%)
Rural	53.19
Suburban	36.17
Urban	10.63

General revitalization. Survey items 8 through 10 were focused on the revitalization process in general. Survey item 8 of the survey instrument asked the respondent to evaluate the importance of each of the six areas identified in the revitalization process (see table 10).

Almost 8 of 10 respondents (77.38 percent) rated discipleship as highly important or important to their revitalizing efforts on the survey. This high rating is not surprising considering that the call to make disciples is intrinsic to the Great Commission mandate found in Matthew 28. The proclivity of Southern Baptists who hold to this

¹⁹ Survey item 2, "Your role prior to the revitalization process: pastor/elder, deacon, staff, volunteer, or not at the church." Survey item 3, "Your role during the revitalization process: pastor/elder, deacon, staff, volunteer, or not at the church."

²⁰ Survey item 4, "Your church context is best described as: rural, suburban, or urban."

commission, as an organizational ethos, is regularly found in SBC churches; however, what will be observed in the phase 3 findings is a substantial misinterpretation by the general church membership on the meaning of discipleship as reported by revitalizing pastors.

Table 10. Phase 2 ministry importance

Ministry Area	Highly Un-important	Un-important	Slightly Un-important	Slightly Important	Important (I)	Highly Important (HI)	Total HI and I
Primary Worship Gathering	2.91	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
Discipleship	4.38	0.73	1.46	16.06	30.66	46.72	77.38
Evangelism	4.41	0.74	1.47	13.24	38.97	41.18	80.15
Missions	2.94	5.88	4.41	17.65	36.03	33.09	69.12

Note: All numbers are stated as a percentage

Two additional survey items regarding change initiatives were used to identify where pastors encountered the greatest amount of acceptance or resistance to the change initiatives in the church during the revitalization. Among the initiatives receiving the greatest acceptance to change initiatives was the emphasis on worship (21.38 percent). Changes in discipleship efforts was ranked fourth (13.10 percent) (see table 11).

Changes in evangelism received the most amount of resistance as reported by church leaders on the survey (20.69 percent). Changes in discipleship and leadership were tied for second amongst all change initiative resistance (19.31 percent) (see table 12). Phase 3 analysis focuses on obstacles to discipleship change initiatives and how those obstacles were overcome.

Table 11. Member acceptability of change initiatives²¹

	Indicating greatest acceptance (%)
Worship	21.38
Missions	19.31
Leadership	15.17
Discipleship	13.10
Prayer	11.72
Evangelism	11.72

Table 12. Member resistance to change initiatives²²

	Indicating greatest resistance (%)
Evangelism	20.69
Discipleship	19.31
Leadership	19.31
Worship	17.24
Missions	8.28
Prayer	4.14

Survey items 11 through 14 were focused specifically on issues related to revitalization with discipleship as the vehicle for culture change and process changes. These four questions and responses provided an indicator for how the phase 3 questions were developed in conjunction with the overall research questions, literature review, and the general survey responses from survey items 1-10.

Survey item 11 asked the respondent to describe the primary changes to the church’s discipleship ministry which the respondent perceived as contributing significantly to the revitalization process. The question allowed for an open-ended text response. Of the 129 responses offered, eight specific themes emerged from this open-

²¹ Survey 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.”

²² Survey 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.”

ended response.²³ Several respondents provided more than one change in their discipleship ministry (see table 13).

Table 13. Discipleship ministry changes²⁴

Theme	Frequency
Small groups	44
Member engagement	27
Change in Sunday school	25
Focus on Scripture	21
Mentorship	14
Leadership development	14
Community engagement	8
Prayer	3
Total discipleship ministry changes	156

Survey item 12 sought to evaluate how well churches defined their discipleship process as part of the revitalization process. The majority of participants (37.25 percent) chose a rating of “agree” or “strongly agree” that their church had a clearly defined discipleship process during the revitalization. This data is in contrast to a minority of participants (19.99 percent) who chose a rating of “disagree” or “strongly disagree” on the survey instrument (see table 14).

The second portion of survey item 12 asked if individual members of the congregation could explain the discipleship process which the church adopted as the process for revitalization. Only a small minority selected “strongly agree” (4.83 percent) while less than 1 out of 5 (18.62 percent) agreed with the statement (see table 15).

²³ Of the original 145 respondents, only 129 chose to answer this question. This particular question was not required to be answered.

²⁴ Survey item 11, “Briefly describe the primary changes to the church’s discipleship ministry which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.”

Table 14. Church has a clearly defined discipleship process²⁵

	Level of Agreement (%)
Strongly Disagree	7.58
Disagree	12.41
Slightly Disagree	12.41
Slightly Agree	20.69
Agree	28.97
Strongly Agree	8.28

Table 15. Church members could explain the discipleship process

	Level of Agreement (%)
Strongly Disagree	8.97
Disagree	20.00
Slightly Disagree	16.55
Slightly Agree	21.38
Agree	18.62
Strongly Agree	4.83

Survey item 13 asked church leaders to state specifically which programmatic elements were related to the discipleship approach during the revitalization process. Church leaders were provided the choice of choosing multiple options. The highest rated response was age-grade ministry (78.62 percent) followed closely by traditional Sunday school model (73.79 percent). The lowest rated programmatic element reported was intergenerational mentoring (16.55 percent) (see table 16).

Church leaders were also asked to briefly describe the primary changes to the church’s discipleship ministry which was perceived as contributing significantly to the revitalization process.²⁶ Many indicated a change to the perception of what discipleship is

²⁵ Survey item 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.)

- a. The church has a clearly defined discipleship process.
- b. The majority of active members were able to explain the discipleship process.

²⁶ Survey item 11, “Briefly describe the primary changes to the church’s discipleship ministry which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.”

for the church and did not emphasize specific programmatic changes as much as engagement with members. For instance, in this open-ended response one respondent on the phase 2 survey instrument writes, “We had to redefine discipleship from sitting through a Bible study to intentionally seeking to have God transform us. We have even reformatted our Sundays around this idea and now have a 90% Sunday morning small group participation rate.” Another phase 2 survey respondent added,

We have emphasized discipleship as something everyone in the church is responsible for, and not just a programmatic area led by a few. We have also created opportunities to engage in church-wide prayer, which has led to a renaissance in attention to discipleship. After prayer emphasis, we became more deliberate in involving new Christians/new members in discipleship and have encouraged “regular” members to recommit.

Table 16. Programmatic elements in discipleship approach during revitalization

	Respondent selection (%)
Age-graded ministry	78.62
Traditional Sunday school model	73.79
Men’s and/or women’s Bible studies	61.38
Women’s ministry	53.79
Men’s ministry	42.76
Home-based small groups	35.86
One-on-one type discipleship groups	31.03
Intergenerational mentoring	16.55

Survey item 14 sought to differentiate between two perspectives in the discipleship mindsets during the revitalization process. The first is the individualistic mindset: members expect to select and shape most of their own discipleship process, with an emphasis on personal needs and intentional personal growth. The second is the 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. When polled, the majority of respondents chose the collective mindset option (51.72 percent). The individual mindset option garnered slightly more

than one-third (35.48 percent) with just over ten percent not choosing either response (see table 17).

Table 17. Individualistic vs. collective mindset

	Respondent selection (%)
Collective mindset	51.72
Individualistic mindset	35.48
No response	10.34

The final survey item in the phase 2 instrument was an open-text field asking the respondent for what advice they would offer to a pastor seeking to lead a revitalization process (see table 18 for complete list). A large variety of themes emerged from the open-text responses. The three highest responses identified on the survey were: prepare for change by prayer or fasting (17 percent), followed by placing an emphasis on strong preaching or teaching (11 percent), and focusing on being patient in the organizational change process (10 percent).

The majority of the emerging themes from this question centered on a balance between engaging with God and engaging with the people. For instance, love your people (8 percent), develop leaders (6 percent), and invest in in relationships (5 percent) all speak to member engagement whereas praying, preaching, and look to Scripture point towards interactions with God. Similar themes emerged during the phase 3 interviews as well which is discussed in detail below.

Table 18. Phase 2 respondent advice for revitalization²⁷

Theme	Response frequency (%)
Pray/fast	17
Emphasize strong preaching/teaching	11
Focus on slow organizational change; be patient	10
Love your people	8
Develop leaders	6
Invest in relationships	5
Love/exegete/engage/serve community	4
Be persistent	4
Look to Scripture	3
Be ready/anticipate resistance	3
Stay and don't leave	3
Trust God	3
All others (23 items with less than 3 percent)	23
Total responses	212

Phase 3

Twelve pastors participated in phase 3 interviews. Each interviewee was encouraged to provide candid responses and assured that neither he nor the church he served would be identified with the responses. The interviews were purposely designed to clarify and illuminate themes that emerged during the phase 2 survey responses. Further, the pastors were given multiple opportunities to reflect on and share insights on their work of revitalization and the role discipleship played in that work.

Demographics. The interviewees represented an average of 14.54 years of ministry experience and 7.75 years tenure in the revitalized church. The interviewees ranged in age from 36 to 65 years old (see table 19). Education levels among interviewees selected for phase 3 varied between college experience to a few holding doctoral degrees. Over half of the participants possessed a seminary education with a master level degree. Two were in the process of obtaining a PhD (see table 20).

²⁷ Survey item 32, "What advice would you offer to a pastor seeking to lead a revitalization process?"

Table 19. Phase 3 pastor age and experiences²⁸

	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Mean	Median
Ministry experience	6	45	39	14.54	12.75
Tenure in the church	2	27	25	7.75	6.5
Time in church prior to the revitalization	0.5	15	14.5	3.29	2.25
Pastor's age	33	65	32	42.58	39.5

Note: All numbers are in years

Table 20. Phase 3 pastor education level²⁹

Education Level	Count	Percentage (%)
Some College	1	8.33%
Bachelors	2	16.67%
Masters	7	58.33%
Doctorate	2	16.67%

The pastors selected for phase 3 interviews represented churches of diverse sizes and ministry contexts located across the United States. Geographical dispersion of churches is identified according to US Census Bureau, census divisions (see table 21).³⁰ Church representation by US Census division include South Atlantic-4, West South Central-3, East South Central-2, West North Central-1, East North Central-1, and New England-1.

²⁸ Interview demographic item 2, “How many years have you been in ministry? How many years did you serve prior to the revitalization?” Interview demographic item 3, “How many years have you served in your current role?” Interview demographic item 5, “What is your current age?”

²⁹ Interview demographic item 4, “Describe your educational background.”

³⁰ Regions were defined by the US Government census regional divisions. United States Census Bureau, “Geography: Divisions,” accessed July 29, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/geo/reference/webatlas/divisions.html>.

Table 21. Phase 3 church participation profile³¹

ID	Church Ministry Context	State	Region by US Census Division	ACP reported Worship Attendance (2016)	Self-reported Average Worship Attendance (2019)
1	Suburban	SC	South Atlantic	747	1,200
2	Rural	SC	South Atlantic	200	325
3	Suburban	GA	East South Central	152	130
4	Rural	MO	West North Central	199	300
5	Rural	IL	East North Central	189	300
6	Rural	NC	South Atlantic	141	300
7	Rural	LA	West South Central	97	150
8	Rural	VA	South Atlantic	78	130
9	Rural	VT	New England	60	70
10	Suburban	AR	West South Central	75	255
11	Rural	LA	West South Central	86	100
12	Rural	MS	East South Central	76	200

Note: Self-reported average worship attendance (2019) was obtained from each pastor as part of the background and demographic questions during the phase 3 interview session which represents the average attendance from January to July 2019

The *discipleship* focused interview portion of this research revealed several consistent themes related to pastors leading their church through transforming the discipleship culture of the church in the revitalization process. A coding process was used to “generate a description of categories or themes for analysis.”³² By coding these themes based off response frequency in the interviews, best practices could be derived from the raw information presented in each interview. From this data analysis major themes emerged. The discussion to follow will explore the findings for each theme.³³

³¹ Interview demographic item 1, “Describe your ministry context (type of community).” Interview demographic item 6, “Describe your church (size, demographics, etc.).”

³² John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage, 2009), 189.

³³ All phase 3 interview quotations will only be annotated by the ID randomly assigned in table 21 to protect anonymity.

Discipleship culture. A number of questions were related to the discipleship culture of the church before, during, and after the revitalization period. The pastors were asked to describe the culture of the church before the revitalization. Most pastors (ten of twelve) described a non-existent disciple-making culture prior to revitalization. In fact, an overwhelming theme emerged of tradition which was used in the pejorative. For instance, Pastor 5 indicated that if you did not come to Sunday school then you were ostracized since that was the primary discipleship vehicle. In contrast, another described the traditional nature of the church as King James (version of the Bible) only preaching coupled with sermon attendance as the primary culture indicator. The theme of tradition emerged in most interviews in the negative sense. When asked to clarify the negative intention of the use of the word tradition, pastor 12 stated of his congregation prior to the revitalization: “In the traditional sense they made a profession of faith; they joined the church at some point in the past. Their job was to show up on Sunday morning. And that was their job. It was fellowship. They did not have the desire of that early church, that Acts chapter 2 church and chapter 4 church of learning and coming together.”³⁴

Pastors were asked what resources they found helpful in developing a culture of discipleship (see table 22). The overwhelming majority suggested books such as *Simple Church* by Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger. Others that were noteworthy included titles such as the *Experiencing God* curriculum by Henry Blackaby, the *Gospel Project* produced by LifeWay, and *The Master Plan of Evangelism* by Robert Coleman.

The second most reported type of resource was mentors or other pastors who have gone through the journey of revitalization with success. Pastor 6 suggests, “Mentors, men that I trust. Men that I could see what was going on. The things that they had done in their congregations. I wasn’t trying to exactly copy what they were doing but

³⁴ Pastor 12, telephone interview by author, July 18, 2019. All interviews were confidential; the name of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

I wanted to pick their brain all the time.”³⁵ Several pastors also indicated they used assets and similar resources from their state convention such as those designed specifically for cultivating discipleship in church communities.

Table 22. Resources used by revitalizing pastors³⁶

Resources	Frequency of response
Books/curriculum	11
Mentors	4
State convention resources	2
Conferences	1

Organizational changes. During the phase 3 interviews specific themes emerged related to changing organizational structures and practices in order to facilitate revitalization (see table 23). The first major theme was leadership development. 9 of 12 pastors reported that they developed leaders who later supported and facilitated the discipleship culture changes. Pastors were asked who the primary change agent was in the discipleship and culture change process. In all but one interview the pastor indicated that he was the primary influencer for changing the culture of discipleship in the church. Pastor 3 reports, “I think always it’s primarily going to be the pastor. That’s been my experience. But you know by God’s grace I had a few key leaders who you would call early adopters. The Lord gripped their heart with what was possible through their obedience and they were influencers in the church.”³⁷ When asked who primarily led and/or effected the change in discipleship culture pastor 1 reports: “The senior team led by me. I have an executive pastor, I have a small group pastor, and a children’s pastor

³⁵ Pastor 6, interview by author, zoom video conference, June 19, 2019.

³⁶ Interview discipleship item 4, “What resources were most helpful in transforming a culture of discipleship?”

³⁷ Pastor 3, telephone interview by author, June 19, 2019.

who also is over the young couples. I also have a youth pastor and a worship pastor.” Leadership development in organizational change was also seen as creating more opportunities for lay leaders to emerge in roles such as Sunday school teacher or small group leader/facilitator.

The next major change theme identified was either a shift to, or a continuation of, an expository preaching style. In total, 9 out of 12 pastors identified the necessity of expository preaching and preaching verse-by-verse through books of the Bible. Pastor 7 states, “During that first year that I was here I went from being relatively comfortable with topical sermons to deciding, through leadership of the Lord, to do verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter, and book-through-book type preaching.”³⁸ Pastor 3 directly tied changing structures to Scripture. He states, “And so as much as we could we were tying change to Scripture, we were tying these steps that we were taking to the Scriptures and so I would always try to say, ‘hey in Matthew 28 it says’ or ‘in Acts chapter 1 it says’ and really try to build change off of what the Bible was saying.”³⁹

Half of the interviewed pastors described a change to the new member process. Of these reports the most common theme was to change from a person joining the church by the traditional “walking of the aisle” to creating an onboarding process for potential new members. In four of the six reported new member process changes a formal class was developed to engage with potential new members. The reported intention of the class was to assess spiritual development and provide general education about the church prior to official acceptance by the church body and granting membership to the church. All six pastors reported an increase in member accountability as a result of changing the new member/onboarding process.

Lastly, three pastors reported a change to either the church’s constitution or to

³⁸ Pastor 7, interview by author, zoom video conference, June 20, 2019.

³⁹ Pastor 3, interview.

the church bylaws as a means to move change initiatives forward. In conjunction with changing organizational rules, leaders also utilized the church staff to effect the change in discipleship culture. Pastor 1 states, “Our senior staff are our elders. So, we are the elders and the church does not vote on very much so we can implement change very easily. I think that we’re not bogged down by much. We do have bylaws and we’ve just redone it.”⁴⁰ The shift to elder-led polity vs. deacon board or single pastor was identified by two other pastors, although not directly in conjunction with a change in either the church constitution or a by-law change.

Table 23. Organizational change themes

Themes	Frequency of response
Leadership development	9
Expositional (verse-by-verse) preaching	9
New member process	6
Bylaws/constitution change	3

Discipleship ministry changes. Pastors were asked to identify which programmatic discipleship elements existed during the revitalization process. Pastors in the interview phase were also asked to describe what changes they made to processes and programmatic elements within their organization to facilitate the transformation of the discipleship culture during the revitalization process. The theme that overwhelmingly emerged was either shifting to small groups or changing Sunday school to incorporate small groups (see table 24).

⁴⁰ Pastor 1, interview by author, zoom video conference, June 25, 2019.

Table 24. Discipleship programmatic elements used during revitalization⁴¹

Discipleship programmatic elements	Frequency of response
Small groups	11
Women's ministry	9
Bible studies (men's and women's)	8
Age-graded ministry	8
Men's ministry	7
Sunday school	7
Intergenerational mentoring	6
One-on-one discipleship	5

When asked to describe their small group model only about half of the pastors called their small groups by the name *Small Groups*. The others used terms such as *Life Groups*, *D-Groups*, or even *Bible Groups*. In two instances interviewees indicated that the term *Life Group* was used to replace the term Sunday school but functioned more like a small group model. Only one pastor indicated an exclusive continued use of a traditional Sunday school model in a positive tone contributing to revitalization.

When asked to describe what traditional Sunday school meant, pastors (9 of 12) described traditional with a negative tone. Traditional Sunday school was described by all pastors as being centered on a teacher-pupil model where the teacher engages the class in a classroom environment while teaching from a standard lesson. Pastor 5 describes this traditional model as, “the students sit and learn, they are quiet and do not engage the same way that dynamic small groups do with large amounts of interaction around the material.”⁴²

Another theme emerging from the small group shift was that of leadership development. Pastor 1 notes, “We do the big push church-wide, but we also ask on the individual level where individuals are being approached and being recruited to get in a

⁴¹ Interview discipleship item 8, “You identified the following (Insert from survey Q13 results) as programmatic elements which existed in the church’s discipleship approach during the revitalization process. In what ways did you find these programmatic elements helpful to the revitalization process?”

⁴² Pastor 5, interview by author, zoom video conference, June 21, 2019.

life group. And we find those natural leaders that may not realize how good of a leader they are. And we tap into them and let them build their own group and they'll do their own recruiting.”⁴³ Most pastors indicated that training up new leaders to act as facilitators for small groups helps to grow the discipleship culture in the church.

In addition to asking what changes pastors made to their discipleship ministry processes, pastors were further asked to explain in what ways each element was helpful to the revitalization process. Several themes emerged from this line of inquiry (see table 25). First, the theme of membership engagement was reported (12 of 12 pastors). For this particular theme each element of the discipleship process in use was described as a way to engage members of the church and begin the replication process. Pastor 8 states, “So then we started life groups or small groups because there was none of that. So, all these people wanted to come in and get started because they needed to grow together. So, we started life groups.”⁴⁴ Pastor 7 states, “And as you disciple people personally then part of the goal is to teach them how to disciple. And then they go and they try to disciple someone personally and maybe it fails but the next person succeeds and then that person hopefully will learn and it begins to mushroom.”⁴⁵

The second theme, spiritual growth (9 of 12 pastors) was reported as a result of studying Scripture and engagement with other church members in small groups, men's and women's ministries, and age-graded ministry. Likewise, community engagement (8 of 12 pastors) was mentioned as a result of changing the discipleship ministry structure to home-based small groups and outreach efforts. Pastor 11 mentions, “We've really been intentional on outreach and doing ministry outside the walls of the church and intentional

⁴³ Pastor 1, interview.

⁴⁴ Pastor 8, telephone interview by author, June 20, 2019.

⁴⁵ Pastor 7, interview.

on getting everyone in the church in all age groups engaged.”⁴⁶ Pastor 9 states, “I would say our biggest shift was kind of an outward mentality and a little more emphasis on evangelism outreach because there was already a sense in which there was kind of a deepness going on in the church.”⁴⁷

More than half of the pastors interviewed reported some version of accountability being observed within their ministry groups as they shifted to focus more on discipleship. The theme of mentorship was often tied with accountability. This was most closely observed in comments regarding intergenerational mentoring and one-on-one discipleship.

Table 25. Discipleship programmatic change benefits

Themes	Frequency of response
Membership engagement	12
Spiritual growth	9
Community engagement	8
Accountability	7
Mentorship	6

When comparing the initial phase 2 survey data to phase 3 interview data, a distinctive shift was observed between which discipleship programmatic elements were utilized by churches during the revitalization process (see table 26). During the phase 2 survey the highest reported programmatic element during the revitalization process was age-graded ministry (78.62 percent); however, only 8 of 12 pastors (66.67 percent) in the phase 3 discipleship interviews identified age-graded ministry as a significant factor in the revitalization process. Likewise, home-based small groups ranked significantly lower (35.86 percent) in the original phase 2 survey as compared to phase 3 interviews. 11 out

⁴⁶ Pastor 11, interview by author, zoom video conference, July 8, 2019.

⁴⁷ Pastor 9, telephone interview by author, July 2, 2019.

of 12 (91.67 percent) pastors indicated home-based small groups as the top element for effecting discipleship changes in their churches.

Table 26. Comparison of phase 2 and phase 3 discipleship programmatic elements

	Phase 3 Interview selection (%)	Phase 2 Respondent selection (%)
Home-based small groups	91.67	35.86
Women’s ministry	75.00	53.79
Men’s and/or women’s Bible studies	66.67	61.38
Age-graded ministry	66.67	78.62
Men’s ministry	58.33	42.76
Traditional Sunday school model	58.3	73.79
Intergenerational mentoring	50.00	16.55
One-on-one type discipleship groups	41.67	31.03

Challenges. Pastors were asked to describe the obstacles, or resistance, they encountered during the discipleship change efforts and how they overcame those obstacles. The number one answer was the obstacle of traditional thinking within their church members at the onset of changing the discipleship culture or making changes to organizational processes. Half of pastors described member resistance to issues such as shifting to using small groups or changing Sunday school programs (6 out of 12 pastors). One-third of pastors reported threatening to be fired for making changes and at least one-fourth described encountering some sort of conflict with a deacon or “patriarch” of the church.

The second major theme emerging from the question of obstacles was the recurrence of traditional thinking with an additional component: complacency. In the words of Pastor 9, “The members were complacent, they were just not willing to change anything or understand why they were dying. This is how we have always done it was a

typical state of mind.”⁴⁸ One-third of pastors indicated the challenge of complacency coupled with “that’s how it has always been done” thinking.

Similar to the question on the phase 2 survey, the pastors during the phase 3 interviews were asked to differentiate between two perspectives in the discipleship process during the revitalization process. The first is the individualistic mindset: members expect to select and shape most of their own discipleship process, with an emphasis on personal needs and intentional personal growth. The second is the 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. During the phase 3 interview portion the question went deeper and asked whether they found the mindset they identified in phase 2 (collective or individualistic mindset) helpful or harmful to the revitalization process. The group was split almost in half between collective or individualistic reporting from phase 2 (41.67 percent collective; 58.33 percent individualistic).

The majority of the collective camp found the mindset helpful to the revitalization process. Pastor 2 states of the collective mindset, “For us it was all helpful. So, when we came to the church the people were at a desperate place and I think desperation has helped.”⁴⁹ In contrast, a majority of the individualistic camp found the mindset harmful to the revitalization process. Pastor 3 states of the individualistic mindset, “It was harmful, everyone wanted to do things their way.”⁵⁰ Pastor 10 states,

Harmful. Well they just don’t see outside themselves. They say coming to church is about them so they miss that church is first and foremost about loving God with all of who we are. And then they miss the part of the Gospel came to me because it’s on its way to somebody else. And we don’t just mean getting saved we mean the gospel that not only saves but also sustains us. Our individualistic western mindset has focused on me and people don’t realize the reason they hadn’t grown a lot is

⁴⁸ Pastor 9, interview.

⁴⁹ Pastor 2, interview by author, zoom video conference, June 25, 2019.

⁵⁰ Pastor 3, interview.

because they've never poured out what's been poured into them and into someone else.⁵¹

Overcoming challenges. When asked how these obstacles were overcome several major themes emerged (see table 27). The first emerging theme was to approach change slowly. Coupled with changing slowly was the concept of demonstrating patience and perseverance in the face of adversity (eleven of twelve used the term patience, perseverance or a derivative of these two words). Patience and perseverance were reported as a necessary commodity in the change process initiatives.

Table 27. Overcoming challenges to discipleship change efforts

Themes	Frequency of response
Change slowly, patience, perseverance	11
Invest in members, leadership development, mentoring	10
Prayer	7
Expository preaching	6

The second major emerging theme was leadership development and member engagement. Most pastors (7 of 12) mentioned the need to engage in the natural leaders of the church and bought-in early to the process. Two pastors found that creating their new member class was a way to overcome the challenges to change initiatives by bringing new members into the church early on with a clear direction. Pastor 2 states, “So we got a clear pathway of how we do ministry and missions and a vision is very clear . . . we send you to the new member’s class. Once you’ve done the class then we have a process to get you on board.”⁵² Being an active mentor to future leaders and being mentored by someone more experienced was mentioned in conjunction with engaging members.

⁵¹ Pastor 10, interview by author, zoom video conference, July 9, 2019.

⁵² Pastor 2, interview.

More than half of the pastors mentioned a clear posture of prayer to get them through the challenges facing them during the revitalization process. One-half of the pastors mentioned using the pulpit ministry through expository preaching to align the change initiatives with what the Bible says about discipleship and culture change. Pastor 6 passionately states,

I was literally living, loving, and breathing what I was telling them and they could see it whether it was in my tears, whether it was in my emotions, or whatever the case. And I think little by little they were coming under conviction about their own walls and wanting to have what it was that they believed that their pastor has. You know it was preaching of the Word. And I would emphasize the preaching of the Word with an absolute heart for what you're preaching, not just intellectually, but just allowing God to move in the orator, that people see it.⁵³

Summary of Research Findings

The objective of this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study was to examine select churches to determine the influence of changing the discipleship culture in church revitalization. In the first phase of the research, SBC Annual Church Profile (ACP) data was examined resulting in the identification of 716 revitalized churches. Attempts were made to reach each of these churches and to enlist their participation in the second phase of the study. The research team received survey responses from 145 churches resulting in a confidence interval of 6.71.⁵⁴ From these 145 respondents, 12 churches were purposefully selected to participate in an in-depth interview related to the subject of discipleship and discipleship culture. Each of these phase 3 interviews were conducted by telephone or video conferencing. During the interviews, participants were asked several questions related to discipleship culture, organizational change, and discipleship processes to identify practices and principles related to the revitalization process. Participants were encouraged to share specific cases of obstacles and how they

⁵³ Pastor 6, interview.

⁵⁴ The data analyzed in this phase was taken while the study was still ongoing; however, it was anticipated that while other members of the research team were continuing to seek further participation in the study, the results of the final analysis would be consistent with the analysis reported in this chapter.

overcame obstacles related to transforming the discipleship culture. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded for analysis.

The third phase provided clarity on the importance of focusing on discipleship for church revitalization from the perspective of practitioners leading churches in revitalization efforts. The interviews revealed that 11 of the 12 churches made a distinctive shift in their discipleship ministry from traditional Sunday school to small group ministry. Additionally, most churches made a distinct change in Sunday school classes to incorporate a dynamic interactive-type structure. The majority of pastors interviewed indicated using expository preaching and tying in the pulpit ministry to the other ministries in the discipleship processes. Many pastors identified the use and/or creation of a new member assimilation process to facilitate discipleship culture change. The results of these efforts to transform the discipleship culture of their churches was increased accountability, increased member engagement, increased community engagement, and increased spiritual growth.

Research Questions

At the outset of this research design specific research questions were established to guide the process. Now that the findings have been summarized, a brief description of each question and its answer is given next.

Research Question 1

“What percentage of SBC churches are plateaued or declining?”

As stated in the research protocol earlier, during the year 2016, of the 47,272 total churches in the SBC, 28,046 SBC churches existed having sufficient data to calculate their five-year worship attendance trend. Among this reporting group, 7,211 (25.71 percent) were plateaued, and 13,656 (48.69 percent) were declining for total of

20,867 (73.99 percent) churches plateaued or declining in the SBC (see table 6 above).⁵⁵

Research Question 2

“Of those churches that have experienced decline, what percentage have experienced revitalization?”

As stated earlier, 716 churches met the criteria for church revitalization as defined by this research design. Narrowing of the sample churches was completed according to 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). The field was then narrowed by eliminating congregations that (1) had less than 10 percent annual growth for 2 of the last five years and (2) had less than 2 of the last 5 years with a minimum worship attendance to baptism ratio of 20:1. We then narrowed further by requiring that the revitalized churches had to have both 2 years of 10 percent worship growth per year and 20:1 baptism ratio. Our actions resulted in the identification of 716 churches who were experiencing revitalization. 5.24 percent of the original churches which were previously in decline.⁵⁶

Research Question 3

“Of those SBC churches experiencing revitalization, what percentage emphasized discipleship in the process of revitalization?”

Based on the design criteria to define a *discipleship* revitalization church, 77.38 percent of revitalizing churches emphasized discipleship in the process of revitalization (see table 10 above).

⁵⁵ This percentage is calculated on the number of churches that had sufficient data (28,046).

⁵⁶ Of the 28,046 churches with reported ACP data, both the “growing” churches (25.50 percent) and the “plateaued” (25.71 percent) were removed from this calculation to isolate the population to only declining churches. The above 5.24 percent was calculated by dividing 716 churches by 13,656, which were in decline in the year 2016.

Research Question 4

“How does transforming the discipleship culture contribute to church revitalization?”

After analyzing data from the qualitative interviews, the following themes arose to inform research question 4:

1. Overcoming the challenge of tradition
2. Increased membership engagement
3. Increased community engagement
4. Increased leadership development
5. Increased spiritual growth
6. Developing a Bible-centered posture towards discipleship
7. Developing a mentoring culture
8. Developing a prayer culture
9. Increased levels of accountability in church members

Research Question 5

“What organizational culture changes occurred to facilitate transforming the discipleship culture during the revitalization process?”

After analyzing data from the qualitative interviews, the following themes arose to inform research question 5:

1. Leadership development
2. Expository preaching
3. New member process
4. Changes to church bylaws or constitution

Research Question 6

“What primary changes to the church’s discipleship ministry contributed to the revitalization process?”

After analyzing data from the qualitative interviews, the following themes arose to inform research question 6:

1. Shifting to small group ministry from traditional Sunday school structures
2. Change in style or curriculum of Sunday school classes
3. Shifting to expository preaching in conjunction with changing Sunday school or small group curriculum
4. Addition of new member assimilation process for joining church

Research Question 7

“Which discipleship methods (structures/processes) were used by leadership to disciple church members during the revitalization process?”

After analyzing data from the qualitative interviews, the following structures and processes were used by pastors during the revitalization process. The list is presented in order of frequency of response (see table 24).

1. Small groups
2. Women’s ministry
3. Bible studies (men’s and women’s)
4. Age-graded ministry
5. Men’s ministry
6. Sunday school
7. Intergenerational mentoring
8. One-on-one discipleship

Evaluation of Research Design

This study followed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design which utilized three phases. The first phase was to collect and analyze quantitative data in order to select and target a specific quantitative population for the second phase. The third phase of the research design used qualitative interviews and in-depth analysis to

explain the data from the quantitative phases.⁵⁷ The design was sufficient for the stated research purposes. Furthermore, the data was obtained from a population consisting exclusively from SBC churches. The continuity of doctrine, ecclesiological norms, and meticulous recordkeeping and reporting through ACP submissions of the church contributed significantly to the quality of data used in the study. The strength of this population is two-fold. First, the denomination has a voluntary reporting mechanism organized through the ACP reporting process. Given the access to data and the reporting mechanisms already organized through LifeWay Research, SBC churches were selected to gain insights of church revitalization that may be transferable to other denominations as well. Secondly, the SBC is the largest evangelical denomination in North America, consisting of over 46,000 churches with an estimated membership of over 15 million.⁵⁸ If SBC churches were experiencing revitalization due to certain priorities and practices, there may be applications for other evangelical churches in similar contexts as well.

Strengths

The primary strength of this study rests in the fact that empirical data was acquired from pastors involved in successful church revitalizations. The analysis of data in phase 1 precipitated the identification of specific churches that had demonstrated a statistical revitalization. The quantitative instrument used in the phase 2 survey was uniquely designed to solicit data about church revitalizations and to identify potential participants in the purposeful interviews in phase 3. Phase 3 participants were purposefully selected to represent a diversity of backgrounds, education levels, geographic regions, and unique ministry contexts in order to broaden the application of findings in this study. Phase 3 interviews employed open-ended questions regarding

⁵⁷ John W. Cresswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 70-71.

⁵⁸ According to the 2017 *Book of Reports of the 2017 Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville), 8, there were 46,793 churches reported as participating in the SBC comprised of 15,294,764 total members.

discipleship culture and processes before, during, and after the church revitalization. The semi-structured nature of the interviews promoted information gathering that was more comprehensive than could have been obtained with a more formal structure of inquiry. By keeping the identification of pastors and their churches anonymous allowed the pastors more freedom to speak openly about challenges they faced during the revitalization process.

The second primary strength of this research design was the cooperative nature of the researchers involved. Seven individual researchers worked together at different stages to gather data, research design concepts, and create two sets of questions (quantitative and qualitative) to cover a broad spectrum of revitalization topics while simultaneously keeping the survey data concise enough to prevent from overwhelming survey participants. Additionally, the research team leveraged their individual skills to find, contact, and encourage contribution of research participants.

Challenges

This study focused on church revitalizations and successful revitalization churches which represents a very small segment of SBC churches. The study sought to identify principled practices employed by successful revitalizers, therefore requiring stringent criteria for identification. Church growth does not always equate to church health, therefore identifying a healthy revitalizing church could be masked by mere worship attendance numbers rising over a given period of time. The first challenge existed for the research team to accurately identify healthy revitalizing churches and in doing so identified 716 churches across of all of North America in the SBC.

Secondly, and probably the most challenging aspect of the study, was the phase 2 survey dissemination and collection process. While 716 surveys were distributed, a less than optimum number (145) were completed. Several circumstances seemingly contributed to a lower than desired response rate. Despite repetitive and varied attempts,

a sufficient number of pastors did not respond to the survey to reach the desired confidence interval of 5.

Third, a challenge was related to data sourcing. For instance, only a large majority of all SBC churches completed enough ACP data for analysis. In addition, many times there is no personal contact data provided with the ACP report, thereby creating a challenge for the research team to reliably contact the appropriate pastor at a given church. Because of this challenge the research team struggled to get enough pastors to complete the phase 2 survey instrument to meet a confidence interval of 5.

Fourth, a challenge was observed in the phase 2 survey instrument. Pastors were required to identify their role during the revitalization. During the phase 3 interview portion most pastors struggled to identify when their own revitalization began or ended. Most assumed they were still in a revitalization. Future research like this one may benefit from providing clarity up front for participants on the exact criteria that they meet as part of the research population.

Lastly, a challenge was the composition of the research team itself. Initially this composition proved to be a strength; however, it also presented a challenge. With three different cohorts working at three different stages of their program at the same time on the project was challenging. For instance, two projects were completed a year before the other cohort.

Conclusion

This study collected quantitative data from 716 revitalized churches from SBC churches in North America. In phase 2 of the study, 145 churches completed a survey instrument regarding their experiences in revitalization and discipleship. Finally, in phase 3 of the study, 12 pastors were interviewed providing data, which shaped principles and best practices for churches and pastors seeking to revitalize within their local church context. In addition, the study revealed how pastors transformed the discipleship culture

of their church to facilitate revitalization.

These findings represent one of the largest studies on church revitalization in the last decade. Applications of this study will influence pastors and leaders desiring to see God revitalize their church, especially in connection to a discipleship emphasis. Additional insights, implications, applications of the research, and recommendations for further research are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The overall purpose of the larger sequential explanatory mixed-methods study was to identify revitalizing churches and learn what methods they utilized to successfully move towards revitalization. However, the focus of this portion of the study was to determine and prioritize key cultural change characteristics and practices present within Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) churches which have experienced revitalization. This particular portion of the study investigated how transforming the discipleship culture of the church results in revitalization. The purpose of this study was to understand and describe the role that transforming the discipleship culture plays in revitalization for churches.

After identifying 716 churches that were experiencing revitalization within the SBC, the research team acquired 145 survey responses from pastors and church leaders who are witnesses to how God can turn around a dying church and breathe new life into it. During the 12 in-depth interviews with pastors from these revitalizing churches, themes of principles and best practices were identified as contributing to church revitalization. Additional themes related to benefits of transforming the discipleship culture were also revealed. This chapter provides details on research implications, research applications, provides some additional insights, provides directives for declining churches, and makes recommendations for further research.

Research Implications

At the outset of this research, various reports from organizations such as the Baptist Press and Pew Research, and writers such as Thom Rainer, Ed Stetzer, and Mike

Dodson painted a picture of sweeping church decline. The Baptist Press reported that the number of SBC churches in 2016 increased by 1 percent while membership decreased by 0.51 percent, baptisms decreased by 4.89 percent, and weekly worship attendance decreased by 6.75 percent.¹ Thom Rainer followed this report in a series of blog postings that only about 65 percent of churches are in a plateaued or declining state dispelling what he called the 80 percent myth.² In a follow-up article, Rainer noted that growing churches reported a small percentage of conversion growth as compared to transfers.³ Stetzer and Dodson analyzed 300 churches to find areas of revitalization based on a set criterion.⁴ The statistics indicated at the time that church health among existing churches is in decline and that new church plants have failed to compensate for reductions across the entirety of the SBC. The findings of this research support those assertions; however, the picture of church decline is actually worse.

Within this research alone, the team discovered that of the 47,272 SBC churches in existence in 2016, 28,046 churches had sufficient data to calculate their five-year worship attendance trend. Among this reporting group, 7,211 were plateaued (25.71 percent), and 13,656 were declining (48.69 percent) for total of 20,867 (73.99 percent) churches plateaued or declining in the SBC (see table 6 above).⁵ Of the 13,656 SBC

¹ SBC Statistics by State Convention, June 8, 2017, <http://www.bpnews.net/downloadhires-/images/bddf8726-31fb-4a26-8e2b-045f9df2065b-ACP2016-states.jpg>

² Thom S. Rainer, "Dispelling the 80 Percent Myth of Declining Churches," *Growing Healthy Churches Together*, June 28, 2017, <https://thomrainer.com/2017/06/dispelling-80-percent-myth-declining-churches/>.

³ Thom S. Rainer, "Five Sobering Realities about Evangelism in Our Churches," *Growing Healthy Churches Together*, July 10, 2-17, <https://thomrainer.com/2017/07/five-sobering-realities-evangelism-churches/>. Rainer noted that the majority of growth experienced by growing churches could be attributed to transfer growth. Rainer observed that only 6.5-7 percent of churches were "evangelistically effective" meaning that true effectiveness is growth by sharing the gospel and making disciples as opposed to membership by transfer. Rainer further argues that the lower the membership to baptism ratio the better since most churches are growing by transfer and not by baptism.

⁴ Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), xiii.

⁵ This percentage is calculated on the number of churches that had sufficient data (28,046).

churches in decline, only a mere 5.24 percent actually reached a level of revitalization. However, the Annual Church Profile (ACP) data from Lifeway Research also found that over one-quarter of SBC churches reporting sufficient information during that same reporting year showed signs of growth; therefore, leading us to believe that hope exists for the future of SBC churches. The question arising from this research is how can this study aid church leaders to lead revitalization in their churches? How can this team of researchers help pastors to lead their churches towards health? Stetzer and Dodson report, “Some comeback churches discovered that they were not organized for growth, and therefore, had to make some changes in structure to prepare for growth and renewal.”⁶ As reported in chapter 4 of this work, the findings in regard to changing organizational structures echoes Stetzer and Dodson. Further, transforming the discipleship culture as part of the revitalization process was noted by all interviewees as positively impacting their revitalization efforts.

Within the quantitative portion of this study, pastors and church leaders indicated that their efforts in changing the discipleship culture acted as the central catalyst to move revitalization forward.⁷ During the qualitative portion it was observed that transforming the discipleship culture contributes to revitalization by (1) helping to overcome the challenge of tradition, (2) increasing membership engagement, (3) increasing community engagement, (4), increasing opportunities for leadership development, (5) increasing observed spiritual growth and maturity in members, (6) aiding in developing a Bible-centered posture towards discipleship, (7), aiding in developing a mentoring culture, (8), aiding in developing a prayer culture, and (9) increasing levels of accountability in church members. Pastors stepping into the arena of

⁶ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 197.

⁷ 77.38 percent of survey respondents ranked discipleship as the factor with 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 table 10).

revitalization should look hard at the data related to transforming the discipleship culture within church revitalization.

Research Applications

The three distinct phases of this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study of SBC churches began with 47,272 cooperating churches in 2016. It was narrowed to 28,046 churches who had sufficient ACP data for analysis, then was further narrowed to 716 churches experiencing revitalization. These 716 churches compromised the population for contact to discover how changing their discipleship culture affected their revitalization efforts. In total, 145 church leaders responded to this communication effort and provided data in the form of a quantitative instrument. Of these 145 churches, 12 pastors were interviewed to learn from their experiences and to share with others walking through revitalization. The unique narrowing effect of this research design allowed the research team to target in on very specific attributes within the field of revitalization. These interview participants are the experts in their own field and in their own context. Although this group was diverse in age, church size, and geographic location, three dominant themes emerged from the qualitative interviews. The applications from these themes are discussed below with their apparent connections to the precedent literature offered in chapter 2.⁸

Before introducing the applications from these themes a brief discussion on defining discipleship is warranted to provide the context of the discussion to follow. First, the church cannot be successful in making disciples without understanding the purpose of discipleship and the biblically intended outcomes for the disciple. Although the term discipleship is not a purely biblical expression, it is a derivative of the disciple-making command found in Scripture.⁹ Many authors lend a voice of opinion on how to define

⁸ A more detailed discussion of these topics and themes are found in chap. 4.

⁹ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor: Leading Others on the Journey of Faith*, rev. and exp.

discipleship. For instance, Max Anders in *Brave New Discipleship* defines discipleship as “giving a willing person the assistance needed to grow to maturity in Christ (the work of the church as a whole).”¹⁰ Brad Waggoner offers that discipleship is a daily routine to move Christians forward spiritually.¹¹

Second, the literature suggests that the purpose of discipleship is to holistically grow a believing Christian into maturity with a goal of replicating, making more disciples. Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck write, “The disciples Jesus developed bore fruit, fruit that lasts forever. Just as Jesus disciplined them, they poured their lives into others, and followers of Christ have been multiplying ever since.”¹² Discipleship is not just a church program or a singular aspect of church life, but a “biblically-ordained relevant vehicle for transformational discipleship.”¹³ If the purpose of discipleship is to holistically grow a believing Christian into maturity with a goal of replicating, then the task of the church members is to lead others in discipleship.

All participants in the qualitative phase described their church culture after the revitalization as discipleship-focused, growing in health, and evangelistic, replicating by sharing the gospel with others in their community. The collective interviews revealed

ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 54. The term “discipleship” does not occur in the bible; however, the term is implied in the command to make disciples. See also, Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 37.

¹⁰ Max Anders, *Brave New Discipleship: Cultivating Scripture-Driven Christians in a Culture Driven World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), xiii. John Piper notes, “The word *disciple* in the New Testament does not mean a second-stage Christian. There are some ministries that are built around this distinction that is just so unbiblical, as if there were converts, then there are disciples who are little stage-two Christians who learn more, and then there are disciple makers.” John Piper, “What Is Discipleship and How Is It Done?,” *Ask Pastor John*, January 25, 2016, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-discipleship-and-how-is-it-done>.

¹¹ Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship* (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 14.

¹² Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 155.

¹³ Chris Shirley, “It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple: An Integrative Model of Discipleship for the Local Church,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 50, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 208. Stetzer and Dodson add, “Discipleship is based on the need for learning the ‘basic doctrines and habits of the Christian life.’” Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 127.

three dominant themes for application in churches and for transforming the discipleship culture of their church: (1) changes related to small group ministry, (2) relying on Scriptural authority for organizational changes, and (3) leveraging a new member assimilation process.

Changes Related to Small Group Ministry

The overwhelming majority of pastors agreed that the single largest impact their efforts had in transforming the discipleship culture of their church was in either shifting from traditional Sunday school to small groups or incorporating small group dynamics into their ministry plan. With regard to revitalization, Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger argue that in order to facilitate outward growth the first step is to establish strong inward relationships spurred by a love of Christ and Scripture using small groups to leverage transformation and then from transformation to witnessing to non-believers.¹⁴

When asked to describe their small group model only about half of the pastors during the qualitative interview called their small group ministry by the name *Small Groups*. The others used terms such as *Life Groups*, *D-Groups*, or even *Bible Groups*. In two instances interviewees indicated that the term *Life Group* was used to replace the term Sunday school but functioned more like a small group model. The varied use of the small group model reported by the collective pastor group was consistent with Steve Gladen who defined small groups as one option for developing corporate discipleship in churches. In Gladen's example the small group ministry involved traditional forms of Sunday school, life groups, home groups, children's ministry, youth ministry, men's ministry, or women's ministry.¹⁵ Several pastors described changing the dynamics and

¹⁴ Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 150-51.

¹⁵ Steve Gladen, *Small Groups with Purpose: How to Create Healthy Communities* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 191-202.

structure of their traditional Sunday school model to shift from teacher-led curriculum to a dynamic facilitator-led, discussion-based type curriculum.

One pastor described the intense level of relationship building and church health in the small group ministry, “We put our attention into becoming healthy and developing as a church that was going to make small groups the backbone”.¹⁶ This theme is in alignment with Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson who state, “Small groups give people an opportunity to build significant relationships with a smaller number of people.”¹⁷ This small group model, and application, aids in bringing church members into a collective group where mentorship, inter-generational mentoring, and accountability grows and flourishes. Stetzer and Dodson go so far as to state, “Intentionally connecting people in community is not an option for the church. It's a biblical mandate—the essence of what it means to be the body of Jesus Christ”¹⁸

One interesting benefit from changing the small group ministry context, or changing Sunday school curriculum to include dynamic interaction aspects, was the opportunity to develop leaders and new small group facilitators. Leadership development was often times cited by pastors as the way in which the vision for culture change took root and moved forward as new leaders continued to teach and disciple others. According to Aubrey Malphurs, leaders display at least four critical characteristics: humility, service, focus on others, and love.¹⁹ The pastors in the collective interviews described their lay leaders with these same characteristics in relation to their small group ministry.

¹⁶ Pastor 2, interview by author, zoom video conference, June 25, 2019.

¹⁷ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 151.

¹⁸ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 151.

¹⁹ Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 34.

Relying on Scriptural Authority for Organizational Changes

In addition to leveraging small group ministry and changing Sunday school curricula, every pastor indicated the necessity of relying on the authority of Scripture to affect the transformation of the discipleship culture. Stetzer and Dodson likewise mention the priority of preaching in their study of “comeback churches.”²⁰ One pastor describes how the change in discipleship efforts was directly connected to the pulpit ministry, “And so as much as we could we were tying change to Scripture, we were tying these steps that we were taking to the Scriptures and so I would always try to say, ‘hey in Matthew 28 it says’ or ‘in Acts chapter 1 it says’ and really try to build change off of what the Bible was saying.”²¹ In this way pastors indicated that they were creating a community aspect of fellowship and discipleship centered on Scriptural direction as opposed to man-conceived direction.

One interesting note was that 9 out of 12 pastors identified the necessity of expository preaching and preaching verse-by-verse through books of the Bible. Many of the pastors described an early inclination of preaching topically during seasons of their ministry to shifting towards the style of expository preaching. One pastor described the shift as, “letting the Lord direct my pulpit ministry through a continual movement sequentially through books of the Bible.” The use of expository preaching as a style was identified by many of the pastors as an extension of their authority as under-shepherds of Christ over the flock.²²

²⁰ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 200.

²¹ Pastor 3, telephone interview by author, June 19, 2019.

²² Haddon Robinson defines expository preaching as, “communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers.” Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 20. Likewise, Michael Ross defines expository preaching as, “[It] is not so much defined by the actual structure of the message, or even by the style of delivery, as it is by the source of the message, the formation of the sermon, and the intent of the delivery.” Michael F. Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization: How to Revitalize Your Church through Your Pulpit* (Glasgow: Christian Focus, 2006), 175.

Several pastors tied the pulpit ministry to discipleship as a means of growing the church in health as a form of worship and as an extension of small group ministry. Timothy Laniak, in *Shepherds after My Own Heart* writes, “Figuratively, the health and multiplication of a community was a sign of a good leadership (Jer 23:3).”²³ Gospel preaching is a form of worship just as singing and responses proceed a sermon. At the Temple, in the early church, they preached the gospel to those who would hear (Acts 2:46). The Temple, unlike in-house meetings, provided the largest space to publicly teach about Jesus.²⁴ In their homes they shared the good news and labored together in discipleship as they broke bread. In this way non-believers were drawn in by the appeal of genuine fellowship and were converted, and then became disciples themselves.

Resting on the authority of Scripture for transforming the discipleship culture became very appealing for the pastors in the collective interviews. Most pastors acknowledged that resting on the authority of Scripture for organizational changes took the stress off of the pastor and placed it rightly onto the Lord. Brian Croft states, “This biblical approach advocates that the local church should be appealing, but for specific scriptural reasons: passionate biblical preaching, loving sacrificial fellowship, practical gospel application, zealous soul care, intentional evangelism, and authentic Christ-likeness – to name a few.”²⁵ Resting on Scriptural authority for transforming the discipleship culture is an application for pastors laboring through revitalization.

²³ Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 51.

²⁴ Craig S. Keener comments, “Jewish traditions suggest that sages often taught in the temple, and Jesus set a precedent for the disciples there (Luke 21:37).” Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol 1, *Introduction and 1:1-2:47* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 1031.

²⁵ Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying & Divided Churches* (London: Christian Focus Publications, 2016), 17.

Leveraging a New Member Assimilation Process

Every church faces the challenge of assimilating new members. The assimilation process includes conversion of an unbeliever then an effective strategy to teach the new disciples in the doctrines and beliefs of Christianity. Stetzer and Dodson describe a church that is unintentional in the assimilation process as one who does not know what a disciple is or at least does not have a well-defined understanding of God's purpose. At a minimum they do not know how to make disciples.²⁶

Thematically, as pastors described their changes in discipleship ministry efforts, the interviewed pastors described a change to their new member assimilation process. The natural flow from someone hearing the good news of the Gospel, to accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, biblically progresses towards church membership. As the collective pastor interviews unfolded, a common theme emerged of changing the process in which a person joins the church, either by conversion or transfer. For many of them it was a change from a person joining the church by the traditional "walking of the aisle" to creating an onboarding process for potential new members.²⁷ In four of the reported new member process changes a formal class was developed to engage with potential new members. The reported intention of the class was to assess spiritual development and provide general education about the church prior to official acceptance by the church body and granting membership to the church. The pastors reported an increase in member accountability and member engagement as a result of changing the new member assimilation process.

²⁶ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 128-29.

²⁷ In half of the interviews the pastors agree that "walking the aisle" was a first step, but after they came forward they were placed into the new member assimilation process. None of the pastors allowed a person to officially join the church body without going through some form of assimilation process. Some described a formal class, some a home visit by the pastor (staff), and some by spending time together with the potential new members before the church voted on membership.

The stated intention of these pastors was to provide a first-touch opportunity for discipleship and to truly engage and encourage these new members to be an integral part of the church. The description of accountability and engagement resonates with Eric Geiger, Michael Kelly, and Philip Nation who in *Transformational Discipleship* identify eight attributes for discipleship: (1) Bible engagement, (2) obeying God and denying self, (3) serving God and others, (4) sharing Christ, (5) exercising faith, (6) seeking God, (7) building relationships, and (8) being unashamed of the gospel.²⁸ These eight attributes show up consistently in the life of a maturing believer who is actively engaging in discipleship.²⁹ Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck in *Designed to Lead* add,

If we believe the command to make disciples (Matt. 28:19) is bigger and more beautiful than merely making converts and calling people to “make a decision,” then we understand the essential role of the Church in maturing people in Christ. The command to “make disciples” carries the connotation of forming believers who learn and develop over a lifetime. One result, then, of discipleship is believers who serve and influence others in all spheres of life.³⁰

Stetzer and Dodson likewise write, “Churches should ensure that each of their members receives biblical teaching on the key habits of discipleship: reading Scripture, prayer, small group, tithing, witnessing, and other disciplines.”³¹ The habits engrained in the process of discipleship are meant to spur the Christian toward holiness as they grow in Christ.

Every pastor in the collective interviews described a noticeable maturing affect in new members, and existing members, as they worked together, in community, to disciple one another, to mentor one another, and to grow as one body in health. Every

²⁸ Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville: B&H, 2012), 59.

²⁹ Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 59. The authors also note, “The distinguishing mark of Christian discipleship is a transformed heart, transformed affections. When someone becomes a true disciple, Christ radically changes a person's appetite” (29).

³⁰ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 3.

³¹ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 127.

pastor interviewed described how, as their church grew in health, they gained a heart for engaging their community in evangelism. The efforts of these pastors as they followed the leading of the Holy Spirit to transform the discipleship culture of their churches was the catalyst that kick started the revitalization in the church. While many implications and applications could be derived from this research, it certainly has not answered all the potential questions for pastors in need of experiencing church revitalization. Some areas of potential further study are offered next.

Further Research

This study specifically focused on transforming the discipleship culture in church revitalizations. The population of the study was churches affiliated with the SBC. In the course of this study, several areas surfaced as potential opportunities for further study: (1) connection to cross-cultural influences in church revitalization, (2) connection of regional location and revitalization, and (3) focus on health specific growth in church revitalization

Connection to Cross-Cultural Influences in Church Revitalization

This research focused generically on SBC churches; however, what was discovered in the course of analysis of quantitative data and qualitative interviews was an apparent disparity in cultural influences on revitalization. For instance, most pastors described their church as mostly representing the cultural make-up of their community but most could also not describe how the changing culture around them was impacting their evangelistic efforts. The assumption was that if the church was healthy with regard to discipleship that evangelism in the community would follow; however, as cross-cultural influences on the broader society continue to change there could be a correlative relationship between evangelistic strategies and discipleship methods for different church contexts. For instance, in one case a surveyed pastor described their church make-up as

90 percent Caucasian while their community population was identified as only about 60 percent *Caucasian* with 30 percent *African-American*, and about 10 percent *Other*. The interviewed pastor could not articulate a specific strategy for reaching the African-Americans in their community beyond a general approach to discipleship and evangelism efforts. Follow-up studies would be helpful to analyze cross-cultural influences with regard to church revitalization and discipleship methods/strategies.

Connection to Regional Location and Revitalization

The present research assessed churches from three ministry contexts: rural, suburban, and urban. A similar study such as this could build off the current research but focus more on churches in a specific ministry context. For instance, are there differences in the development of a discipleship culture in differing ministry contexts? How does a rural church disciple its members as compared to an urban setting? Is the small group model as effective in every context? A challenge with this 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 discipleship themes for specific ministry contexts informing a new pastor moving to a specific type of church (rural, suburban, or urban).

Focus on Health Specific Growth in Church Revitalization

Of the 28,046 churches reporting sufficient ACP data, 716 churches show demonstrable growth and health. Obviously, these churches must be doing something correct. An interested student in revitalization may consider studying the healthy church population as opposed to the revitalizing population to determine their practices in the disciplines studied in this research. Too many times, people focus on the problem areas to think of a solution. In this case, a researcher could focus on the successful churches and then apply the findings to the declining or plateauing churches. Numerous churches

employ successful practices. Determine what practices promote growth to assist declining churches to become healthy.³²

Conclusion

Today's evangelical, North American churches face a crossroads of uncertainty. Within this research, the team discovered that of the 47,272 SBC churches in existence in 2016, 28,046 churches had sufficient data to calculate their five-year worship attendance trend. Among this reporting group, 7,211 were plateaued (25.71 percent), and 13,656 (48.69 percent) were declining for total of 20,867 (73.99 percent) churches plateaued or declining in the SBC. Of the 13,656 SBC churches in decline, only a mere 5.24 percent actually reached a level of revitalization. The decline in church growth coupled with church closures should cause all Christians to be concerned. What can be done?

This research design was intended to observe and communicate the influence of transforming the discipleship culture has on church revitalization. Considering both the quantitative data and the analysis of the qualitative interviews, best practices from proven practitioners have been presented. Churches and their pastors who emphasize discipleship and helping to mature their members will grow in health and influence their immediate community. However, I am hopeful and encouraged that we do not have to rest on our own wisdom to aid declining churches to turn around towards growth and health. We have the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit to guide and direct our efforts. As the apostle Paul so accurately wrote, "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (Rom 11:33).

³² Determining what practices promote growth to assist declining churches to become healthy does not mean to promote a "cookie-cutter" mentality; 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: changing discipleship models, changing Sunday school curriculum, etc.

APPENDIX 1

REVITALIZATION SURVEY: PHASE 2

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:
 - a. Pastor/Elder
 - b. Deacon
 - c. Staff
 - d. Volunteer
2. Your role **prior** to the revitalization process:
 - a. Pastor/Elder
 - b. Deacon
 - c. Staff
 - d. Volunteer
 - e. Not at the church
3. Your role **during** to the revitalization process:
 - a. Pastor/Elder
 - b. Deacon
 - c. Staff
 - d. Volunteer
 - e. Not at the church
4. Your church context is best described as:
 - a. Rural
 - b. Suburban
 - c. Urban
5. Briefly describe what ways your community has changed over the last 10 years and ways your church as sought to adapt.
6. Are you willing to participate in a follow up interview regarding the revitalization process at your church?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Interview Participation Contact Information

7. Contact information: [Appears only if selected “Yes” in Q.6]
- 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**.
- [Drop-down menu: select one]
- Discipleship
 - Evangelism
 - Leadership
 - Missions
 - Prayer
 - Primary Worship Gathering
 - Other (please specify): _____
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**.
- [Drop-down menu: select one]
- Discipleship
 - Evangelism
 - Leadership
 - Missions
 - Prayer
 - Primary Worship Gathering
 - Other (please specify): _____

Discipleship

11. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **discipleship ministry** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process. [Open-text response]
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.)
 - a. The church has a clearly defined discipleship process.
 - b. 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.)
 - a. Age-graded Ministry (i.e. children, youth, college, adult)
 - b. Men's and/or Women's Bible Studies
 - c. Intergenerational Mentoring
 - d. Home-based Small Groups
 - e. Men's Ministry
 - f. Women's Ministry
 - g. One-on-one Type Discipleship Groups
 - h. 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. **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.)
 - b. **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. [Open-text response]
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.)
 - a. There was a demonstrable increase in personal evangelism among active members of the church.
 - b. The majority of active members could communicate the gospel in a personal evangelism encounter.
 - c. 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. [Open-text response]

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. [Open-text response]
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.)
 - a. The church had a vibrant missions ministry focused on financially supporting short-term and/or long term missionaries.
 - b. 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.)
 - a. The church had a vibrant missions ministry focused on financially supporting short-term and/or long term missionaries.
 - b. 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. [Open-text response]
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.)
 - a. Building Momentum
 - b. Conceptual Thinking
 - c. Contextual Awareness and Planning
 - d. Developing Others
 - e. Getting Members Engaged
 - f. Gospel Orientation
 - g. Individual and Corporate Repentance
 - h. Information Seeking
 - i. Initiative
 - j. Interpersonal Understanding
 - k. Missional Focus
 - l. Organizational Awareness
 - m. Relationship Building
 - n. Teamwork and Cooperation
 - o. Transparency
 - p. 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. [Open-text response]

24. Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning 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. [Open-text response]
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**. [Open-text response]
28. In what ways were the topic and act of prayer prioritized in corporate worship **during the revitalization process**? [Open-text response]

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. [Open-text response]
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. [Open-text response]
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. [Open-text response]

General Comments

32. What advice would you offer to a pastor seeking to lead a revitalization process? [Open-text response]

APPENDIX 2

EMAIL INVITATION FOR PHASE 2

Dear Church Leader,

My name is Brian C. Legg and writing on behalf of a research team of doctoral students from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, under the supervision of Dr. Michael Wilder, of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The purpose for my letter to you today is to thank you for the 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 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,

Brian C. Legg

APPENDIX 3

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your willingness to participate as part of the research project on Church Revitalization conducted by the research team under the supervision of Dr. Michael Wilder of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY.

This research is the most current and far-reaching of its kind, involving a study of SBC churches across the convention. You are part of a select, qualifying, group of churches based upon your Annual Church Profile (ACP) submissions in the recent past. Already, you have been helpful in completing the online research questionnaire and you have been selected to participate in a follow-up interview based on the responses you gave in the survey.

Below is the informed consent statement and the general questions that will serve as the backbone of a phone or video conference interview with Brian C. Legg, one of the doctoral students conducting the research. His area of focus is specifically in the area of discipleship and its role in influence on the church's revitalization.

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 Brian C. Legg, 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

Thank you for your help. I truly believe that the information we gather will assist thousands of pastors like yourself become more effective in leading their churches to experience revitalization.

Best regards,
Brian C. Legg
Ed.D. Candidate
Discipleship and Church Revitalization

APPENDIX 4

PHASE 3 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic Information

1. Describe your ministry context (type of community)
2. How many years have you been in ministry? How many years did you serve prior to the revitalization?
3. How many years have you served in your current role?
4. Describe your training and educational background.
5. What is your current age?
6. Describe your church (size, demographics, etc.)

Discipleship Questions

Before we begin with the discipleship questions, let me give you a few baseline definitions that will help you with the questions. For this research, the following definitions are used:

Discipleship – Giving a willing person the assistance needed to grow to maturity in Christ (the work of the church as a whole).

Discipleship culture – A discipleship culture is one in which the pastor teaches the congregation how to biblically disciple one another in order to make more disciples and increase the health of the body

1. Describe the discipleship culture before the revitalization.
2. Describe the changes in discipleship that contributed to revitalization.
3. Who primarily led and/or affected the change in discipleship culture?
4. What resources were most helpful in transforming a culture of discipleship?

5. What intentional steps were implemented to facilitate discipleship?
6. What obstacles were encountered in your discipleship efforts?
7. How were these obstacles overcome?
8. You identified the following (Insert from survey Q13 results) as programmatic elements which existed in the church's discipleship approach during the revitalization process. In what way did you find these programmatic elements helpful to the revitalization process?
9. You identified a more (Insert from survey Q14 results) individualistic or collective mindset as the majority of active church members at the beginning of the revitalization process. In what way did you find this mindset helpful or harmful to the revitalization process?
10. Reflecting back, what would you have done differently regarding discipleship?
11. How did the emphasis on discipleship contribute to the church's revitalization?
12. Have the discipleship initiatives remained in place since the revitalization?
13. What advice would you give to others seeking to revitalize their church?

APPENDIX 5

PHASE 3 SAMPLE EMAIL SENT TO PASTORS

Dear Pastor,
Brian C. Legg is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Pastor and Brian C. Legg
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 Brian C. Legg, 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

Demographic Information

1. Describe your ministry context (type of community)
2. How many years have you been in ministry? How many years did you serve prior to the revitalization?
3. How many years have you served in your current role?
4. Describe your training and educational background.

5. What is your current age?
6. Describe your church (size, demographics, etc.)

Discipleship Questions

Before we begin with the discipleship questions, let me give you a few baseline definitions that will help you with the questions. For this research, the following definitions are used:

Discipleship – Giving a willing person the assistance needed to grow to maturity in Christ (the work of the church as a whole).

Discipleship culture – A discipleship culture is one in which the pastor teaches the congregation how to biblically disciple one another in order to make more disciples and increase the health of the body

1. Describe the discipleship culture before the revitalization.
2. Describe the changes in discipleship that contributed to revitalization.
3. Who primarily led and/or effected the change in discipleship culture?
4. What resources were most helpful in transforming a culture of discipleship?
5. What intentional steps were implemented to facilitate discipleship?
6. What obstacles were encountered in your discipleship efforts?
7. How were these obstacles overcome?
8. You identified the following (Insert from survey Q13 results) as programmatic elements which existed in the church's discipleship approach during the revitalization process. In what way did you find these programmatic elements helpful to the revitalization process?
9. You identified a more (Insert from survey Q14 results) individualistic or collective mindset as the majority of active church members at the beginning of the revitalization process. In what way did you find this mindset helpful or harmful to the revitalization process?
10. Reflecting back, what would you have done differently regarding discipleship?
11. How did the emphasis on discipleship contribute to the church's revitalization?
12. Have the discipleship initiatives remained in place since the revitalization?
13. What advice would you give to others seeking to revitalize their church?

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ABSTRACT

TRANSFORMING THE DISCIPLESHIP CULTURE IN CHURCH REVITALIZATION: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY

Brian Carl Legg, EdD
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019
Chair: Dr. Michael S. Wilder, PhD

The numbers are alarming. Almost seventy-four percent of churches within the SBC are either in a state of plateau or decline. The church at large has a responsibility to reverse the trend and move the collective church body towards health. Now is the time to ask the hard questions about what leaders can do to reverse the trends of decline. The task of the church is to fulfill the Great Commission mandate. How can individual pastors and their churches meet this mandate and glorify God in their labor?

While revitalization is certainly a topic of interest among evangelical church leaders, with continuing efforts to create revitalization efforts such as the Mathena Center at SBTS or the Center for Church Revitalization at SWBTS, most of the research in the field is already dated or merely anecdotal. For these reasons this research was started in an effort to capture current empirical-based practices and principles to share with dying churches to revitalize.

This study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design to identify successful church revitalizations and determine what influence transforming the discipleship culture had on those successes. In the quantitative phase of this research 716 (5.24 percent) of SBC churches who had experienced decline or plateau from 2006-2016 were found to have experienced revitalization. These churches were contacted for survey, and 145 church leaders responded by completing the survey instrument. Of the pastors surveyed, 77.38 percent indicated discipleship as “Important” or “Highly

Important” in the revitalization process. Selection criteria were applied to identify churches to participate in the qualitative phase.

In the qualitative phase twelve in-depth interviews were conducted to identify best practices among pastors who have led their churches through changing their discipleship culture in revitalization. The top three practices included: (1) changes related to small group ministry, (2) relying on Scriptural authority for organizational changes, and (3) leveraging a new member assimilation process. Discerning these “best practices” not only has application for dying and plateaued churches, but also for growing churches to maintain church health.

Keywords: Christian leadership, discipleship, expository preaching, new member assimilation process, organizational behavior, organizational change

VITA

Brian Carl Legg

EDUCATION

B.S., Thomas A. Edison State University, 2003
M.A.T.S., Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012
M.Div., Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013
Ed.S., Liberty University, 2016

MINISTERIAL

Pastor, White Stone Family Bible Church, Round Rock, Texas, 2015-2016

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Lecturer, Naval Nuclear Power Unit, Goose Creek, South Carolina, 1999-2003
Department Chair, Naval Nuclear Power Training Command, Goose Creek,
South Carolina, 2007-2010
Senior Instructor, The Electric Reliability Council of Texas, Taylor, Texas,
2015-2019
Operations Improvement Coordinator, Lower Colorado River Authority,
Austin, Texas, 2019-Present

ORGANIZATIONAL

Evangelical Theological Society
Society of Professors in Christian Education