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CHURCH REVITALIZATION AND THE ROLE OF PASTORAL
LEADERSHIP: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY

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CHURCH REVITALIZATION AND THE ROLE OF PASTORAL
LEADERSHIP: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY

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To Jodi,
my best friend, precious bride, and partner in ministry;
and to the church, the bride of Christ,
both of whom bring meaning and purpose to my life

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PREFACE

No one truly becomes who he or she was created to be in Christ apart from the influences of many others. Throughout this project, the Lord has taught me to experience and express gratitude. While space will not allow me to mention each person and tell every story, this project is the culmination of the influence of many who have deeply impacted my life, people for whom I am grateful to the Lord.

I am grateful for my pastor and friend, Dr. Michael Cloer. No pastor has taught me more about shepherding God's people. I am forever grateful for his example, counsel, and encouragement. Thank you for challenging me to prepare well for the calling.

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Finally, I am so very grateful to the Lord, who blessed me by calling me to Himself and placing me into service.

Chris Aiken

Rocky Mount, North Carolina

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CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH CONCERN

The North American church is in decline.¹ Students of church health and practitioners of church leadership assert that 80-85 percent of churches in North America are plateaued or in a measurable decline in the areas of membership, conversions, and church health.² Mark Clifton, senior director of replanting and revitalization for the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), stated that only about

¹ Harry L. Reeder III, *From Embers to a Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004), 7-8. Reeder cites numerous sources for his conclusion, including experts in church growth such as Lyle Schaller and Kirk Hadaway, who consulted for the SBC. Reeder's assessment, though published in 2004, is consistent with more recent assessments by experts in the field. In an e-book circa 2014, Thom Rainer wrote, "Nine out of ten churches in America are either declining or growing at a pace more slowly than their communities. Stated simply, 90 percent of churches are losing ground in their communities." Thom S. Rainer, *114 Things You Need to Know about Revitalizing Churches*, chap. 2, accessed November 29, 2017, <http://mittensynod.server303.com/114-things-you-need-to-know-about-revitalizing-churches/>.

² Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame*, 7; Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 245. See also Rainer, *114 Things You Need to Know*, chap. 2. Thom Rainer, President of Lifeway, recently (July 2017) revised his position based on a new study by his team at Lifeway that asserted that only 65 percent of churches are in a state of plateau or decline. A distinct feature of this study is the shift from measuring membership to worship attendance. In an interview on a moderated forum hosted at churchanswers.com, Rainer stated that the criteria utilized to measure growth was any numerical growth, however minimal, over a three-year period, as reported on the Annual Church Profile, which is a statistical report submitted by Southern Baptist Churches for the twelve months ending on August 31 of each year. According to Rainer, while the number of declining churches is still significant, his research demonstrates a basis for more optimism in revitalization work in the church. While a request has been made to review the study, the information has not been made available. In an article entitled "Five Sobering Realities about Evangelism in our Churches," July 10, 2017, accessed November 29, 2017, <https://thomrainer.com/2017/07/five-sobering-realities-evangelism-churches/>, Rainer referred to the aforementioned study, observing that the majority of growth experienced by the growing churches could be attributed to transfer growth. Rainer observed that only 6.5 to 7 percent of churches were "evangelistically effective," defined as having an attendance/baptism ratio of 50 percent of the average churches in the study. Based on the ambiguity of some of the specific metrics of the study, some questions exist regarding interpretation of the study in light of the prevailing body of literature. The results of Rainer's study are discussed in his article, "Dispelling the 80 Percent Myth of Declining Churches," June 28, 2017, accessed November 29, 2017, <http://thomrainer.com/2017/06/dispelling-80-percent-myth-declining-churches/>.

15 percent of SBC churches are “healthy, growing, and multiplying churches.”³ Kevin Ezell, President of the North American Mission Board (NAMB) of the SBC asserted that 1,000 SBC churches disappear annually.⁴ Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson noted that 70 to 80 percent of churches in North America are plateaued or declining, resulting in upward of 4,000 churches in the United States closing their doors annually.⁵ Ezell further observed that when measuring attendance as opposed to membership, only 6.8 percent of Southern Baptist (SBC) churches in America are healthy and growing.⁶ No matter how one might desire to interpret these statistics, the current health of most North American churches is in significant trouble.⁷

Given the numbers of declining churches in America, SBC seminaries annually produce graduates by the thousands who will step into the role of revitalizer in established and declining church.⁸ Steve Hudson observed, “Equipping pastors to serve in the current

³ Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 5-6. In his role as director of revitalization, Clifton makes an impassioned plea for the North American church to focus with intentionality on revitalizing plateaued and declining congregations. Clifton believes that many churches can be redeemed through revitalization efforts, specifically through the replanting process.

⁴ Kevin Ezell, “Breathing Life into Dying Churches,” in *A Guide to Church Revitalization: Guide Book*, ed. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2015), 13.

⁵ Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B & H, 2007), 19. The authors conducted a qualitative study of 324 revitalized evangelical churches in the US to determine the characteristics that were shared between them.

⁶ Ezell, “Breathing Life into Dying Churches,” 15. Rainer affirmed the practice of measuring attendance over membership. He notes that measuring membership is ineffective when tracking church growth. He cited the rationale that many churches have bloated membership rolls, while other churches do not track membership. In Rainer’s estimation, worship attendance is the most natural metric to use in measuring growth. Thom Rainer, “Five Surprising Discoveries about Growing Churches, July 5, 2017, accessed November 27, 2017, <http://thomrainer.com/2017/07/five-surprising-discoveries-growing-churches/>.

⁷ Lifeway Christian Resources stated in their analysis of Annual Church Profile (ACP) reports for 2016 that while the number of SBC churches had increased 1 percent over 2015, membership had decreased by .51 percent, baptisms decreased by 4.89 percent, and weekly worship attendance decreased by 6.75 percent. Carol Pipes, “ACP: Churches Up in 2016; Baptism, Membership Decline,” *Baptist Press*, June 8, 2017, accessed November 29, 2017, <http://www.bpnews.net/49005/acp--churches-up-in-2016-baptisms-membership-decline>.

⁸ The six SBC seminaries, according to an article by David Roach, have approximately 43.5 percent of graduate students enrolled in an M.Div. program of study, which is the flagship degree for pastoral

North American context means equipping them to serve in plateaued and declining churches.”⁹ The ongoing decline of churches prompts the question, “Do seminaries understand how to equip pastors and leaders to succeed in the work of revitalization?”

A cursory survey of Scripture reveals an apparent inconsistency between the noted statistical realities and Christ’s authoritative proclamation regarding the church. Jesus stated, “I will build My church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Matt 16:18).”¹⁰ This prophetic promise declares that no power, including the power of hell, can resist the saving purpose of God through His agent, the church. The decline of the North American church and the victorious power declared of the church present an obvious incongruity, causing some to surmise that the era of the church has faded. A 2015 Lifeway Research study revealed that 55 percent of Americans believe the church is declining and 42 percent believe that the church is dying.¹¹ Andrew Davis noted that the work of revitalization is essential to, among other things, “restore Christ’s reputation in a community.”¹² This argument echoes that of Moses in praying that God would not forsake His people by turning from His promise to deliver them lest the nations conclude that God was unable to give the people the land of their inheritance (Deut 9:28). God’s glory

training. In 2015, that accounted for 5,062 students. With females comprising approximately 10 percent of M.Div. students, more than 4,000 students will likely graduate and enter the pastorate. Allowing for church plants and missionary assignments, it is a conservative estimate that more than 3,000 pastors will step into revitalization situations each year from the seminary rolls. Many of these pastors do so ill-prepared for the challenges they will face. David Roach, “SBC Seminaries Healthy, Face M.Div. Challenge,” *Baptist Press*, August 30, 2016, accessed November 29, 2017, <http://www.bpnews.net/47467/sbc-seminaries-healthy-face-mdiv-challenge>.

⁹ Joseph Stephen Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Churches: A Mixed Methods Study” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 1.

¹⁰ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible.

¹¹ Lisa Green, “Americans Believe Church Is Good but Dying,” *Lifeway Newsroom*, March 30, 2015, accessed November 26, 2017, <http://blog.lifeway.com/newsroom/2015/03/30/new-research-americans-believe-church-is-good-but-dying/>. Based on a Lifeway Research study of 1,000 Americans by telephone interview.

¹² Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 34.

among the nations rests, in some way, on the health of the church and its ability to be revitalized.

All, however, is not lost. Standing in contrast against the backdrop of statistical decline are numerous stories of churches that have experienced measurable and sustained growth. If the era of the church is over, how might one explain the health exhibited by these beacons of hope? What factors contribute to the success of some churches while the clear majority are seemingly trapped in a perpetual downward spiral?

Any honest assessment of influential factors regarding church health must include leadership. The maxim that “everything rises and falls on leadership” is as true in church health as it is in every other organizational reality. Bernard Bass defines leadership as “the ability to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute to the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members.”¹³ Joseph Rost defines leadership in more transformational terms: “Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes.”¹⁴ These definitions embody the role of leaders in the local New Testament church. If a church is to effectively “make disciples” and experience growth, it must be influenced to do so, and this requires leadership.¹⁵ Discipleship programs, evangelistic strategies, and church growth initiatives are important but cannot be effectively employed apart from effective and capable leadership. Leadership, humanly speaking, is the *sine qua non* of church revitalization.

Much of the literature addressing revitalization has focused on anecdotal observations of church revitalizations. Unfortunately, in observing the elements that were

¹³ Bernard M. Bass, *The Bass Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications*, 4th ed. (New York: Free Press, 2008), 23.

¹⁴ Joseph C. Rost, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1991), 102.

¹⁵ In Matt 28:19, Jesus directed His disciples to make disciples. No one drifts toward following Christ; rather, a person must be led to such a relationship. Growth as a disciple and growth in the church requires leadership.

present in the turnaround, a significant amount of attention has been given to “what was done” rather than to the leadership culture, the leadership structure, and the leader’s competencies. A need exists to move beyond relying on methodology and to study the leaders that implemented the methods. Hudson argues for the need to understand pastoral competencies: “That research has repeatedly shown that pastoral leadership is the most important factor for church revitalization.”¹⁶ A void exists in the study of church revitalization as it relates to broadly analyzing the pastoral leader and his role in leading declining churches to change so that they may experience health again. To provide a substantive tool in the work of revitalization, studies must turn in earnest to identifying the leadership context, the leadership culture, and the leader’s competencies, particularly those competencies that can be developed. The leader’s competencies extend beyond characteristics to the practices that leaders competently employ skills in a particular context and culture to affect change leading to revitalization.

Research Description

The premise of this thesis is that effective, biblical leadership is essential and catalytic in church revitalizations, and that leadership competencies, culture, and structure cannot be effectively evaluated apart from how they interrelate. While the majority of North American churches are declining, 85 percent of those that experienced revitalization also experienced a change in leadership either through the internal development of the leader, or through a transition to new leadership.¹⁷ In each case, church revitalization required change and change requires leadership. While many researchers have engaged in

¹⁶ Hudson, “Competency Model,” 61.

¹⁷ Rainer, *Breakout Churches*, 21-22. The study by Stetzer and Dodson revealed that a change in leadership was common among revitalized churches. Rainer’s conviction was that the essential influence of leadership was without dispute; however, while most revitalized churches accomplished this leadership change with a change in leaders, Rainer sought to demonstrate that a change in the leader was not required to achieve the turnaround. In the case of 13 churches in his sample, Rainer demonstrated that the leader could remain and lead the revitalization if he was willing and able to grow in his ability.

the study of leadership and church revitalization, a void remains in the study of the interplay of leadership structures, leadership culture, and the leader's competencies, including his emotional intelligence. This research sought to identify the role of these areas and their effect on the work of church revitalization.

First, the study sought to determine the leadership structure of the church and ascertain how it changed, if at all, to allow for more effective decision-making and process implementation within the church. A great seafaring captain is wholly ineffective without a ship to steer. Identifying the best of new programs in discipleship or endeavors to engage the community evangelistically will fail without the ability of the leadership to implement and adjust them. The research endeavored to determine the role of leadership structure to identify commonalities among revitalized churches and principles that facilitate revitalization. Ed Stetzer and Thom Rainer note in *Transformational Church* that a leader must have the ability to implement change in pursuit of revitalization.¹⁸ This change should occur as leaders influence congregants to grow in spiritual vitality resulting in missional expression and effectiveness. Additionally, the research sought to identify and evaluate the role, if any, of shared biblical leadership models such as a plurality of elders.¹⁹

Second, the study sought to identify the emphasis on and role of leadership culture in revitalized churches. Leadership culture, as a term, describes the intentional culture or ethos as the environment where leaders are developed and employed in the organization.²⁰ Stetzer and Rainer observe that effective churches had broken down

¹⁸ Ed Stetzer and Thom Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville: B & H, 2010), 71-98. The study consisted of 7,000 Protestant churches.

¹⁹ Hudson, "Competency Model," 121. Hudson determined that a plurality of elders/elder-led polity scored only a moderate level of consensus among the revitalization churches; however, he did observe that this factor may be related to the fact that only SBC churches were included in the study and that if the same research were conducted among other denominational bodies, that this result might change. *Ibid.*, 167-68.

²⁰ In terms of business, John Kotter describes this as creating culture where executives intentionally place leadership opportunities before employees to develop their leadership skills. Kotter acknowledges that extra work required to operate business in this manner but argues for its value in morale

traditional committee structures and empowered people through shared leadership, resulting in high levels of missional effectiveness.²¹ Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck write in *Designed to Lead* that the leader is responsible for developing and maintaining a culture of ongoing development and that failure to do so inhibits church health, impeding efforts toward revitalization.²²

Third, the study attempted to identify the competencies employed by revitalization leaders that enabled successful turnarounds.²³ Revitalization leaders must possess and progressively develop certain core competencies. This involves organizational and administrative skills, but also encompasses the leader's ability to discern, develop, and communicate vision, effectively articulate and implement strategy, and address both internal and external conflict. Additionally, since the very nature of revitalization involves leading others to change their culture, process, and approach to mission from that which led to decline, the leader's effectiveness is informed by his emotional intelligence.²⁴

Daniel Goleman, a leading voice and authority on emotional intelligence, notes that a key leadership skillset is understanding when to respond to situations with different leadership styles and approaches. Goleman asserts that his research demonstrated that "emotional intelligence is the sine qua non of leadership. Without it, a person can have the best

of the employees and health of the organization. In terms of the church, this process can be seen as stages of discipleship opportunities to serve and lead become training grounds for development and catalysts for new growth. See John P. Kotter, "What Leaders Really Do," in *HBR's 10 Must Reads on Leadership* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2011), 37-55.

²¹ Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 86-90.

²² Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 28-36.

²³ Steven Hudson identified 129 competencies of leaders with 112 of those showing a strong consensus score. In the initial model, Hudson's study ranked 36 expert competencies, 77 core competencies, and 16 supplemental competencies. Hudson's findings are discussed further in chap. 2 of this thesis. See also Hudson, "Competency Model," 132.

²⁴ Daniel Goleman, "What Makes a Leader?," in *HBR's 10 Must Reads on Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2015), 1.

training in the world, and incisive, analytical mind, and an endless supply of smart ideas, but he still won't make a great leader.”²⁵ Goleman defines emotional intelligence as “a group of five skills that enable the best leaders to maximize their own performance.” These skills include (1) self-awareness, (2) self-regulation, (3) motivation, (4) empathy, and (5) social skill; furthermore, according to Goleman, these skills can be developed with proper techniques.²⁶ Mark Clifton states that an effective leader must possess high emotional awareness, be aware of his own emotions, and demonstrate tactical patience; all markers of emotional intelligence.²⁷

With the majority of churches in North America in decline, it is critical to identify the competencies, culture, and structure that facilitate church revitalizations. Thousands of students graduate seminary every year and find themselves working in a declining church context. The calling to shepherd and the weightiness of God's glory demands that if it is possible to identify, understand, and train others to lead declining churches to revitalization, then there can be no hesitancy to try.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to examine select church revitalizations to determine the influence of the leadership structure, the leadership culture, and the leader's competencies on a successful church revitalization.

Delimitations of the Research

First, while recognizing that various factors influencing revitalizations, including discipleship strategies, physical resources, evangelistic approaches, and spiritual

²⁵ Goleman, “What Makes a Leader?,” 1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁷ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 120-35. In addition, Clifton added to his list that a revitalization leader should also possess a strong identity in Christ, have an aptitude to serve in multi-generational contexts, and have a love for the church's context. While the terminology is not exact, the principle features of each of Clifton's described characteristics align with Goleman's identification of the skills of emotional intelligence.

health, this research will limit its scope to a focus on leadership structure, culture, and the core competencies of the pastor as revitalization leader. This is not to imply that leadership is the only valid factor in a turnaround; however, it does imply that other influencing factors will not succeed exclusive of leadership.

Second, it is not possible to describe and examine every potential leadership competency in the study of the field. Steve Hudson's research identified 129 unique competencies for revitalization leaders, including 36 expert competencies, 71 core competencies, and 22 core supplemental competencies.²⁸ The study sought to identify those expert competencies that influenced the leader's revitalization efforts and are prevalent among a consensus of revitalization leaders.²⁹

Third, the scope of the research involved in-depth interviews but specifically excluded personality profiles or psychological testing of leaders. To that end, the study provides only those results perceived or determined by the leader or the researcher. Further research related to specific personality traits may prove useful in identifying specific relational skills or personal experiences of the leader as it relates to the leader's success in leading the revitalization.

Fourth, the research sample consists only of SBC churches. This delimiting factor, particularly as it relates to leadership structures and decision-making, will affect the transferability of any findings from the research.

²⁸ Hudson, "Competency Model," 132. Hudson writes, The study collected qualitative and quantitative data from 27 practitioner-experts about which competencies are related to successfully leading a church to revitalization. The interview phase gathered qualitative data that examined the behavior of church revitalizers in critical situations. The Delphi portion of the study led to the creation of an initial model that rated 129 competencies for their importance to successful pastoral leadership for church revitalization. (Ibid., 132) Each competency and its mean rating are listed in tables 28, 29, 30 in *ibid.*, 125-27.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 124. Hudson defined "expert competencies" as those that "differentiated superior performers from average performers." These are identified as those competencies that resulted in a mean final rating of 5 to 4.5.

Research Questions

To examine the influence of leadership structures, leadership culture, a leader's competencies, on successful church revitalization, with this mixed-methods study, I sought to answer the following questions:

1. What percentage of SBC churches are growing, plateaued, or declining, and what percentage of previously declining churches have experienced revitalization?
2. What was the influence of a church's leadership structure and decision-making process on the successful revitalization of a church?
3. What factors contributed to the transformation of the leadership culture of the church?
4. What influence did those factors that contributed to the leadership culture of the church have on the church's revitalization?
5. What leader competencies were most prevalent among successful revitalizers?
6. In what ways did the prevalent leader competencies influence the church's successful revitalization?

Definition of the Research Population

For this study, the research population will be defined as revitalized SBC churches that have been in existence since 2006 and have completed an Annual Church Profile for each of those years, including the 2016 reporting year.

Research Sampling Method

For phase 1 of the study, LifeWay was requested to provide Annual Church Profile (ACP) data on SBC churches that met the following criteria:

1. The church had provided 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.
3. The church experienced at least 10 percent annual growth in primary worship attendance for at least 2 of 5 years between 2011 and 2016.
4. The church has a 20:1 worship attendance to baptism ratio or better.

For phase 2 of the study, a quantitative survey instrument created via surveymonkey.com was sent to each qualifying church via email to the senior pastor. The instrument identified characteristics related to the research questions and obtained the

senior pastor's willingness to participate in phase 3, if selected, consisting of an interview via telephone/video/face-to-face to further examine the details pertaining to leadership and the church's revitalization.

For phase 3 of the study, I selected a purposive sample of twelve churches for a qualitative interview.

Reliability, Validity, and Field-Testing

The quantitative survey instrument in phase 2 was reviewed by an expert panel identified in consultation with my supervisor and approved by the Ethics Committee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) and then field-tested with a select group of pastor/leaders to identify any procedural issues that may arise.

Limitations of Generalization of Research Findings

The SBC comprises the largest protestant denomination in the United States. As such, it is anticipated that the findings of this study regarding leadership influences in revitalized SBC churches will have significant transferability to other church contexts; however, the results cannot be generalized beyond the population of this study.³⁰ The limited focus on revitalization churches in the SBC may also limit its application, since due to structure, polity, and unique competencies of pastors in the SBC, some of the results may not find application in every situation. SBC churches were specifically chosen for two primary reasons: (1) due to the SBC data reporting and collection process, a substantial body of data exists to facilitate research, and (2) the shared congregational polity of SBC churches provides a baseline to examine leadership structure, culture, and leader competencies.

³⁰ John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011), 9. As Creswell and Clark explain, the purpose of this mixed-methods study is to seek through qualitative research to build understanding of the influence of leadership in the role of church revitalization. They note, "Sometimes the results of a study may provide an incomplete understanding of a research problem and there is a need for further explanation. In this case, a mixed-methods study is used with the second database helping to explain the first database." Ibid.

Methodological Design

In consultation with my supervisor, after approval by the Ethics Committee of SBTS, the data was collected as described.

Phase 1: Document Request and Examination

I requested from the SBC, the Annual Church Profile (ACP) records for the churches meeting the aforementioned criteria. Contact information for the qualifying churches was obtained from these records and an email was sent to the senior pastor of each qualify church explaining the nature of the survey and soliciting his participation. A link was included for the quantitative study described as phase 2.

Phase 2: Quantitative Survey

A survey instrument was created using SurveyMonkey.com. Results were compiled for analysis and candidates for phase 3 interviews were identified in consultation with my supervisor.

Phase 3: Qualitative Interviews

I contacted participants via email and telephone contact to schedule interviews via telephone/video-conference/face-to-face. Interviews were conducted with the senior pastors of twelve churches. The method of interview was based on the needs of the participant and researcher. After advising as to the purpose of the phase 3 interviews, necessary permissions were obtained to record the interview and use the gathered data in the final research project. The interviews were transcribed, and general observations and key points that surfaced during the interviews were noted.

Research Competency to Conduct the Study

The nature of this study required my competency in pastoral leadership and the function of the New Testament Church. Additionally, I had to be versed in leadership theory, foundations for leadership structures in the New Testament church, leader

competencies, and the study of emotional intelligence. Further, I had to be competent with appropriate database programs.

Terminology

For this study, the following definitions were used.

Competency. Lyle Spencer and Signe Spencer define competency as “an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion-referenced effective and/or superior performance in a job or situation.”³¹

Emotional intelligence. Daniel Goleman defines emotional intelligence (also EI, or EQ) as “abilities such as being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one’s mood and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; to empathize and to hope.”³²

Leadership. Joseph Rost writes, “Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real change that reflects their mutual purposes.”³³

Leadership structure. Leadership structure refers to the formal and informal lines of influence, accountability, and communication whereby leadership communicates and implements direction and the organization accomplishes assigned tasks.³⁴

Plateaued church. A church whose growth rate is less than the population growth rate of its host community.³⁵

³¹ Lyle M. Spencer and Signe M. Spencer, *Competence at Work: Models for Superior Performance* (New York: Wiley, 1993), 9.

³² Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2005), 34. While not original to him, this area of study, classification, and discipline has become closely identified with Goleman.

³³ Rost, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*, 102.

³⁴ Tupper F. Cawsey, Gene Deszca, and Cynthia Ingols, *Organizational Change: An Action-Oriented Toolkit*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012), 67-68. See discussion regarding formal or designed structures as well as informal organizational relationships. See also Bernard Bass’s discussion on leadership an organization’s internal environment in Bass, *The Bass Handbook of Leadership*, 736-46.

³⁵ Rainer, *Breakout Churches*, 245.

Church revitalization. Steve Hudson explains, “Revitalization is an intentional change of culture and praxis by members of a church community, after a period of plateau or decline, that leads to greater church health and numerical growth.”³⁶

Conclusion

The majority of churches in North America are plateaued or declining. Current pastors and those graduating every year from seminaries around the country find themselves in revitalization situations and are expected to lead. It is necessary to equip those entering the work of the harvest as well as those currently laboring that they may more effectively serve the Lord in shepherding churches toward health and growth. As seminaries seek to train pastors and churches search for answers leading to revitalization, it is essential to discover the role and context of leadership that best facilitates revitalization. The purpose of this research was to identify those leadership structures, cultures, and leader competencies shared by pastors of successful revitalizations.

Chapter 2 examines the current base of literature related to church revitalization, leadership structures, and the culture in which leaders are forged and employed. Further, the competencies of revitalization leaders are explored. Chapter 2 demonstrates that a void in the current literature exists in identifying the interplay between church leadership structures, the leadership culture, and the competencies possessed and exercised by revitalization leaders. Chapter 3 provides a detailed methodology for the proposed research. Chapter 4 reports the findings on the three phases of the research. Chapter 5 discusses implications of the research findings as well as application of those findings and concludes with recommendations for further research.

³⁶ Hudson, Competency Model,” 10.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the relevant precedent literature pertaining to church revitalization and the influential role of leadership, specifically leadership structure, culture and the leader’s competencies, in order to situate the current research thesis within that body of literature. This chapter will demonstrate a void in the literature relating to how pastoral leadership influences the revitalization process in regard to how the structure, culture, and a leader’s competencies relate together to facilitate successful church revitalizations.¹ The chapter begins with an examination of the state of the North American church and seeks to define church revitalization. Second, the chapter examines some considerations regarding leadership before analyzing leadership structures and the leadership culture of the church. Then, the chapter examines current research on competencies exhibited by leaders in successful church revitalizations. Finally, the chapter synthesizes the body of information presented to demonstrate a void in the current research and argues the necessity for research related to the interplay of the three components of leadership mentioned—structure, culture, and competency—to provide a basis for better training directed toward existing and future pastors faced with revitalization situations.

The State of the Church in North America

The North American church is in a general state of decline. The reported rate

¹ Joseph Stephen Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Churches: A Mixed Methods Study” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 40. Hudson observes that numerous writers have examined church revitalization from a variety of angles since revitalization emerged as a popular area of concern. Further, Hudson notes that revitalization writing has “increased steadily since the term was first popularized in the early 1970s. However, much of the literature is anecdotal and based on individual case studies.” Ibid.

of decline varies to some degree on the research and author; however, most opine that 70-90 percent of evangelical churches in North America are plateaued or declining.² Thom Rainer estimates that 80 percent of the estimated 400,000 churches in the United States are declining or have plateaued.³ Harry Reeder observes that more than 80 percent of North American churches are plateaued or declining.⁴ Thom Rainer wrote in 2014 that “nine out of ten churches in America are either declining or growing at a pace more slowly than their communities. Stated simply, 90 percent of churches are losing ground in their communities.”⁵ Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson note in *Comeback Churches* that 70 to 80 percent of churches in North America are plateaued or declining, resulting in upward of 4,000 churches in the United States closing their doors annually.⁶ The statistics among the nation’s largest protestant denomination, the Southern Baptist

² R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “Christ Will Build and Rebuild His Church: The Need for ‘Generation Replant,’” in *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2015), 8. Mohler noted these results among evangelical churches. Kevin Ezell observes that some studies utilizing better metrics, such as attendance rather than membership, reveal that less than 7 percent of SBC churches are healthy. Kevin Ezell, “Breathing New Life into Dying Churches,” in Mohler, *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, 14. The statistical values differ based on studies and metrics; however, the fact that the North American evangelical church and the SBC, which is the subject of this study, is in a precipitous decline and in need of revitalization, is well established.

³ Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 45. Rainer states,
Of the churches for which we have data, 84 percent are declining or experiencing a growth rate below the population growth rate for their communities. The latter is defined as a plateaued church. The number of 400,000 churches is an estimate based on a 2003 sampling of churches by population density and geographic location. We estimate the possible range to be between 375,000 and 450,000 churches. (Ibid., 245)

⁴ Harry L. Reeder III, *From Embers to a Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004), 7-8. Reeder cites numerous sources for his conclusion, including experts in church growth such as Win Arn, Lyle Schaller, and Kirk Hadaway, who consulted for the SBC. Reeder’s assessment, though published in 2004, is consistent with more recent assessments by experts in the field.

⁵ Thom Rainer, *114 Things You Need to Know about Revitalizing Churches*, 2014, eBook, chap. 2, accessed November 29, 2017, <http://mittensynod.server303.com/114-things-you-need-to-know-about-revitalizing-churches/>.

⁶ Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B & H, 2007), 19. The authors conducted a qualitative study of 324 revitalized evangelical churches in the US to determine the characteristics shared between them.

Convention (SBC), are similar. Mark Clifton, the senior director of replanting and revitalization for NAMB, indicates that only about 15 percent of SBC churches are healthy and growing, and between 900-1000 SBC churches cease operation annually.⁷ Clifton further noted that 90 percent of these losses occur in cities across America, indicating that the issue is not declining population but the church's declining influence among a growing populace.⁸

Most recently, Rainer stated that, according to his latest research, only 65 percent of churches are in a plateaued or declining state. A factor in the apparent disparity is the decision to measure worship attendance rather than church membership when assessing growth or decline.⁹ However, Rainer wrote in a follow-up article that, of growing churches, only 6.5-7 percent were by conversion, as opposed to transfer growth.¹⁰ Furthermore, a June 2017 report revealed that based on self-reporting in 2016, the number of SBC churches increased by 1 percent over 2015, while membership decreased by .51 percent, baptisms decreased by 4.89 percent, and weekly worship attendance decreased by 6.75 percent.¹¹ The statistics indicate that church health among existing churches is

⁷ Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 3-6. Clifton serves as the Senior Director of Replanting at NAMB. He further observed that current studies of SBC churches reveal that 70 percent of SBC Churches are either plateaued or declining and that other studies of SBC churches indicate that only 15 percent of SBC churches would be considered healthy and growing. See also Ezell, "Breathing New Life into Dying Churches," 13.

⁸ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 3.

⁹ Thom S. Rainer, "Dispelling the 80 Percent Myth of Declining Churches," June 28, 2017, accessed November 20, 2017, <http://thomrainer.com/2017/06/dispelling-80-percent-myth-declining-churches/>.

¹⁰ Thom S. Rainer, "Five Sobering Realities about Evangelism in our Churches," July 10, 2017, accessed November 20, 2017, <https://thomrainer.com/2017/07/five-sobering-realities-evangelism-churches/>. Rainer notes from his above referenced study that is the foundation of the article, "Dispelling the 80 Percent Myth of Declining Churches," that the majority of growth experienced by the growing churches could be attributed to transfer growth. Rainer observes that only 6.5 percent to 7 percent of churches were "evangelistically effective," defined as having an attendance/baptism ratio of 50 percent of the average churches in the study. Ibid.

¹¹ Carol Pipes, "ACP: Churches Up in 2016; Baptism, Membership Decline," *Baptist Press*, June 8, 2017, accessed November 29, 2017, <http://www.bpnews.net/49005/acp--churches-up-in-2016->

not good and new church starts have not been able to compensate for reductions across the rest of the SBC.

While numerical decline is important, the great tragedy of declining churches extends to the fruitless existence of churches in their communities and the resulting dishonor toward God. Clifton notes, “A dying church robs God of glory. Nothing matters more than his glory. Whether a church dies in Kansas City, Boston, or in rural Texas, we must care about what the church’s death means in respect to the glory of God.”¹² Brian Croft explains that churches in need of revitalization are often known in their communities more for the absence of spiritual life and the presence of hostile division, than for the glory of God and the value of church in a community.¹³ These negative identifiers stand in stark contrast to Jesus’ words that His followers would be known for their “love for one another” (John 13:35). The unspiritual reputation of a declining church limits its access to spiritual power and diminishes the likelihood of experiencing revitalization. Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby state, “Nothing about a struggling, divided, dying church glorifies God.”¹⁴ A declining church is a missional liability rather than an asset for kingdom advance. Andrew Davis notes the necessity and spiritual significance of revitalization work as, in part, restoring the honor due to Christ’s name in a given community.”¹⁵

Declining churches appear to have lost a sense of clarity on their mission. They fail to grasp that the source of their decline rests not in the external culture but in their

[baptisms-membership-decline.](#)

¹² Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 12.

¹³ Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying & Divided Churches* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), 30.

¹⁴ Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Flickering Lamps: Christ & His Church* (Jonesboro, GA: Blackaby Ministries International, 2015), 14.

¹⁵ Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 34.

internal calling.¹⁶ A declining church often finds someone to blame for its condition. Rarely is the source of decline correctly identified as the church's loss of a healthy, forward, missional focus. Mark Clifton and Robert Stuart indicate that the true cause for decline is not found in community dynamics, financial woes, or reduced attendance but in a lack of effective leadership resulting in a lack of effective discipleship.¹⁷

Characteristics of Declining Churches

Clifton observes that many declining churches share eight common characteristics:

(1) they value the process of decision more than the outcome of decision . . . (2) they value their own preferences over the needs of the unreached . . . (3) they have an inability to pass leadership to the next generation . . . (4) they cease, often gradually, to be part of the fabric of their community . . . (5) they grow dependent upon programs or personalities for growth or stability . . . (6) they 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) they anesthetize the pain of death with an overabundance of activity and maintaining less fruitful governance structure . . . (8) they confuse caring for the building with caring for the church and the community.¹⁸

Rainer adds to the list that dying churches often experienced a slow erosion of attendance, inward versus outward-focused budgets, a gradual cessation of evangelistic activity, and a lack of corporate prayer.¹⁹

¹⁶ Thom S. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit? Leading Change in the Church* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 17-24. Rainer is the President of Lifeway Resources and is one of the premier church health consultants of the present era. In this book, Rainer observes that one of the characteristics of church members who are unwilling to change is their desire to blame others for their decline. In addition, he notes denial of facts about the decline, an entitlement mentality, critical attitudes and actions, and those with misplaced priorities and values.

¹⁷ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 7. Robert Stuart placed much of the blame for dead and dying churches on leadership. He notes that the problem of decline is magnified by the leader's inability to recognize or unwillingness to admit the decline. Robert D. Stuart, *Church Revitalization from the Inside Out* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2016), 26.

¹⁸ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 22-29.

¹⁹ Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 13, 33, 42, 68.

Declining and plateaued churches are such because they have become unhealthy. Mark Dever describes unhealthy churches, adding to the list of characteristics that an unhealthy church is “compromised by cultural accommodation, lacks influence in the wider culture, and reflects the culture more than changes it.”²⁰ Mac Brunson and Ergun Caner also add to the list of destructive characteristics of unhealthy churches: discord fueled by gossip, lack of vision for the future, and biblical ignorance.²¹

While listing characteristics of unhealthy or declining churches could continue ad nauseum, some commonalities arise among those noted, thus allowing them to be grouped into five categories: biblical issues, interpersonal conduct, self-interest, distractions and mission.

Table 1. Characteristics of declining/dying churches

Group	Characteristics of unhealthy/declining churches
Biblical	Cultural accommodation (doctrine reflects culture)
	Biblical ignorance
Distraction	Decision-making process
	Program-dependent
	Excessive unproductive activity
	Focus on facilities
Interpersonal	Gossip, discord
Mission	Withdrawal from community
	Cessation of evangelistic activity
	Accepting a slow erosion of attendance
	Lacks cultural influence
	Lacks vision for future (values present over future potential)
Self-Interest	Preferences
	Issues of control
	Shifting of blame toward others
	Inward-focused budgets

²⁰ Mark Dever, *Twelve Challenges Churches Face* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 172.

²¹ Mac Brunson and Ergun Caner, *Why Churches Die: Diagnosing Lethal Poisons in the Body of Christ* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 53, 76, 178.

These categories broadly generalize areas of concern that lead to the decline and death of churches. A loss of biblical fidelity hinders revitalization since healthy churches are biblically faithful. Daniel Akin and Thom Rainer state this point more strongly, noting that an organization cannot be a church apart from “the Word rightly preached,” and “the Sacraments properly administered.”²² Destructive interpersonal practices, such as gossip, are rebuked in Scripture and call for repentance (Prov 20:19; Rom 1:29; 2 Cor 12:20; 1 Tim 3:11; 1 Tim 5:13; 2 Tim 3:3; Titus 2:3). The call to follow Christ itself repudiates a focus on self-interested pursuits (Luke 9:23). Distraction from the most important pursuits by things of lesser importance has consistently restricted church effectiveness. In *Simple Church*, Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger make the case that churches must eliminate distractions related to excessive programming and activities: “People in your church only have a certain amount of discretionary time . . . if they are constantly invited and challenged to attend these nonessential programs, they miss the essential ones.”²³ Finally, the loss of a “sense of mission” inhibits a church’s efforts toward revitalization. Reeder states that for a church to experience revitalization “there must be a clearly defined mission and vision, or the ministry will continue to flounder and decline.”²⁴ In *Comeback Churches*, Stetzer notes, “Churches are called to the mission of propagating the gospel.”²⁵ Revitalization becomes necessary when churches, through intention or apathy, stray from focus on mission. Helping a church identify and turn from these

²² Thom S. Rainer and Daniel L. Akin, *Vibrant Church: Becoming a Healthy Church for the 21st Century* (Nashville: Lifeway, 2008), 39. Rainer and Akin note that there was general consensus among Reformers Calvin, Zwingli, and Luther on the essentials of these two factors. Stetzer notes that six criteria existed in all biblical churches: scriptural authority, biblical leadership, preaching and teaching, ordinances, covenant community, mission. Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 3.

²³ Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God’s Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 204-8.

²⁴ Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame*, 145-46.

²⁵ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 3.

characteristic attitudes and behaviors is essential to help a church return to health so it can experience revitalization.²⁶ Leading a church through the difficult but rewarding journey of revitalization requires leadership.²⁷

Defining Church Revitalization

Steve Hudson observes that phrases such as revival, replanting, and renewal are often used synonymously for revitalization.²⁸ Other popular terms such as “comeback churches” and “turnaround churches” also refer to church revitalizations.²⁹ For the purpose of this study, Hudson’s definition is helpful and will be used throughout. Hudson defines 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.”³⁰

Characteristics of Revitalized Churches

While most North American churches are in decline, many churches have experienced turnaround and certain qualities characterize these revitalized churches. Dodson and Stetzer observe five consistent qualities of revitalized churches: (1) leadership, (2) vibrant faith, (3) laypeople involvement in meaningful ministry, (4) more intentional

²⁶ Hudson, “Competency Model for Church Revitalization,” 20-21. Hudson draws a connection between church health and church revitalization, noting that church revitalization is an outworking of the emphasis on church health that occurred in the 1990s and beyond. Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame*, 46. Reeder states that the goal should be to pursue church health rather than growth, since church growth proceeds church health.

²⁷ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 14.

²⁸ Hudson, “Competency Model for Church Revitalization,” 22-23.

²⁹ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*; George Barna, *Turn-around Churches: How to Overcome Barriers to Growth and Bring New Life to an Established Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993).

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

evangelistic efforts, and (5) celebrative and orderly worship environments.³¹ Many of these characteristics are shared by other revitalizers in their own research and experiences.

Vibrant Faith

Stetzer and Dodson assert that three “faith factors” are always true of churches that experience revitalization. The first and most significant is “a renewed belief in Jesus Christ and the mission of the church.”³² This belief reflects a positive outlook on the power of God and His work in the world. Revitalized churches saw themselves as instruments of God’s missional impetus in the world. They exhibited hope in Christ’s power and their part in the advancement of the kingdom.³³ Rainer speaks of this hopefulness as a byproduct of aligning the community’s needs with congregational gifting and the leader’s passions.³⁴ As a congregation came to understand its own gifting and how that aligned with the leader’s vision/passion and the community’s needs, a sense of hopefulness arose. The congregation could see how it might be used as an instrument of God’s redemptive plan in a community. For a church to experience revitalization, there must be a sense that God is at work and that He can and will use the church as an instrument of His labor.

Congregational Engagement

One of the most certain factors of revitalization is that while leadership is essential, the leader’s primary role is to lead the congregation to engage in the mission of

³¹ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 210-12. In addition to these factors, the authors indicate that the most reported obstacles to overcome in the comebacks were attitude, finances, and facility challenges. These obstacles required leadership and vision to address as part of the revitalization, *Ibid.*, 203-8.

³² *Ibid.*, 54-58.

³³ *Ibid.*, 57. Stetzer and Dodson include a list of responses to their survey of the revitalized churches. The responses included, among others, a belief that God desired to increase the size of the church, a renewed vision of the person and work of Christ, an increased desire to participate in the mission of God, and an acceptance of personal responsibility for encouraging the lost to visit their church.

³⁴ Rainer, *Breakout Churches*, 113-23.

God as responsible, accountable, and willing ministers. Stetzer and Dodson observe that an engaged congregation reflects both an attitude and action of servanthood.³⁵ One of the common observations of declining churches is that there is a consumer-oriented ethos whereby the church, consisting of leaders and workers, provides a service to those within the community of faith. Congregants see themselves as the consumer of those services. Most ministry programs are performed by professional ministers who visit the sick, conduct the weekly worship event, and spread the gospel through evangelism. The congregation registers its approval through voiced opinions as well as attendance and giving.³⁶ A much different attitude exists among revitalized churches. Among those experiencing renewal, there was a renewed emphasis on Christ-like servanthood that became part of the ethos of the church.³⁷ In the revitalized churches, an expectation arose that every member was a minister. This characteristic is one of the strongest indicators of church health. The service of the congregation was not limited only to campus-based internal serving; rather, in many cases, the focus turned to the community beyond the church. Notably, this attitude upended the congregation's sense of entitlement and preferences as it permeated the church's culture. The congregation came to place the preferences of others ahead of their own.³⁸ As attitudes shifted toward servanthood, the congregations engaged in serving their community according to the example that Christ modeled.

³⁵ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 63-68.

³⁶ Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, reports on studies of fourteen churches that had closed their doors. The observations of those "autopsies" are summarized and presented in this volume. Among the prevailing factors leading to the churches' demise are an obsession with preferences, which are indicative of the lack of servant mentality that Stetzer and Dodson note.

³⁷ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 63.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

Evangelistic Activity

Among the activities deemed most significant to revitalized churches in their journey toward renewal, prayer was primary, followed closely by intentional evangelistic activity.³⁹ While almost too obvious to mention, there is no revitalization without evangelism. Healthy churches make disciples. Clifton observes that discipleship, beginning with evangelism, is both theologically and practically essential.⁴⁰ Churches can facilitate this activity to some degree through providing events or opportunities that give members a “reason” to invite others, but the heart of evangelism resides in the member.⁴¹ Revitalized churches were intentional about receiving guests into their church events. Ultimately, revitalized churches pursued a culture of evangelistic expectation through prayer, invitation, and proclamation.⁴²

Celebrative Worship

A fourth factor in church revitalization was the mood and quality of the worship event.⁴³ The change of worship to a contextually appropriate, celebrative, and excellent event was common as a factor of revitalization. In some cases, the musical style was an issue but in every case the mood, tone, and quality were significant factors. The worship event was designed as an excellent and essential venue for believers to be edified through

³⁹ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 105.

⁴⁰ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 72. Clifton further stated, “The replanting church needs to lead new people to Christ, help them grow in their faith, and to eventually reproduce themselves.” Ibid.

⁴¹ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 111-12.

⁴² Ibid., 107-9.

⁴³ Ibid., 76-84. Stetzer and Dodson refer to the worship service and then draw a distinction with the preaching portion of that worship service. I have chosen to use the term *worship event* to speak of the entire process, which would include all components of a worship service, including worship through music, worship through biblical preaching, and the observance of the ordinances. I recognize that the reference to an *event* may raise an eyebrow; however, my objective is clarity rather than controversy. This is not a statement about productions or staging, etc. It is simply an acknowledgment that *worship* as a term can be construed to include only the musical portion of a service.

community, celebration, and biblical instruction.⁴⁴ Excellence communicates a message about God. This message may be intended or unintended, but it is transmitted in either case. Excellence is a reasonable expectation of those seeking to connect with a church family. One expects cleanliness when visiting Disney World as well as cheerful service and a pleasant response of “my pleasure” when a “thank you” is offered at Chick-fil-a. In like manner, every person entering a church has an expectation. If expectations are not met due a substandard experience, the message is transmitted that either God Himself lacks excellence or that the church is not a fair representation of God’s nature. Even if the underlying attitude of the worshipper were wrong, the practical reality of the statement still stands. People expect excellence from a healthy church.

Leadership

A fifth factor common to revitalized churches is leadership. This factor is discussed last, but Stetzer and Dodson note that it is the single most significant factor in revitalization.⁴⁵ Stetzer and Dodson note in their study of 324 churches that 63.6 percent of the churches experienced a turnaround that coincided with the change in the role of the lead or senior pastor⁴⁶: “Every movement needs a leader, and we discovered that God led comeback churches to call a new pastor, or God renewed the pastors who were currently leading the church. We believed that all the pastors were new pastors, just not all of them changed jobs.”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Rainer, *Breakout Churches*, 131-32. Rainer discovered in his study that the unrelenting pursuit of excellence in every component of ministry was essential in revitalized churches.

⁴⁵ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 35-36. While one could easily argue that the biggest factor in turnarounds is spiritual, the authors are careful to note that the leader is the instrument that helps the church to see its spiritual condition. In each case, nothing works apart from leadership.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 177. The change in pastors, whether through transition or personal renewal, resulted in a shift in thinking from “maintenance to mission.”

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Leadership competencies will be discussed in greater detail in the remainder of this chapter; however, it is sufficient to note at this point that the overwhelming body of literature acknowledges the essential role of leadership in revitalization. Some differences may exist as to the nature of that leadership, the style of the leader, and the decision-making process of the churches themselves, but leadership is essential. As such, the following section explores several aspects of leadership structure and philosophies as they relate to revitalization.

The Role of Leadership

The study of leadership is an ever-evolving field.⁴⁸ A singular, precise definition of leadership is elusive.⁴⁹ Much of the difficulty in defining leadership relates to the fact that there are no established criteria to evaluate leadership definitions.⁵⁰ Leadership is often easier to recognize than to define. Robert Greenleaf articulates the essence of leadership as “going out ahead to show the way.”⁵¹ The initiative of the leader and the sense of confidence that initiative evokes in the follower is why leadership appears to be essential for churches to experience revitalization. Aubrey Malphurs states, “As leadership goes, so goes the organizational culture. Good leadership is essential to any

⁴⁸ Bernard Bass states,

In the 18 years since the publication of the third edition, the study, application, and practice of leadership have burgeoned. Business, government and nonprofit agencies, plus community, education, military, and health organizations have increasingly made leadership a core concept in meeting the challenges of the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the new millennium. There was a 100% increase in leadership research and applications in the United States and a 300% increase in management consultants during this period. (Bernard M. Bass, *The Bass Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications*, 4th ed. [New York: Free Press, 2008], xvii)

⁴⁹ Joseph C. Rost, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1991), 44. Rost notes that in research for his book, he reviewed 221 different definitions of leadership in 587 sources.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵¹ Robert Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power & Greatness* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2002), 28.

successful Christian ministry . . . good leaders influence people.”⁵² Clifton observes that the nature of revitalization required change and stated about the leader, “As the visionary shepherd, you are the primary change agent for the congregation. You will have to learn to manage change in a way that continues to lead your people toward our Lord’s vision for his church.”⁵³ Revitalization leaders exercise influence.

Leadership Defined

Bernard Bass defines leadership as “the ability to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute to the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members.”⁵⁴ Bass’s definition depends, to some degree, on the outcome of leadership efforts. Relying on the imagery of a shepherd, Timothy Laniak also attributes some degree of responsibility for the spiritual condition of people in the church to the leader as shepherd: “The condition and growth of a flock depends greatly on the care, attentiveness and skill of the shepherd.”⁵⁵ These positions do not necessitate that followers develop a desire mirroring that of the leader, even if it would be preferred. Joseph Rost defines leadership in more transformational terms: “Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes.”⁵⁶ For Rost, leadership requires both leaders and followers to embrace a shared purpose. Don Howell offers a more nuanced definition for the church and defined *biblical leadership* as “taking the initiative to influence people to grow in holiness and to passionately promote

⁵² Aubrey Malphurs, *Look before You Lead: How to Discern & Shape Your Church Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 37.

⁵³ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 120.

⁵⁴ Bass, *Bass Handbook of Leadership*, 23.

⁵⁵ Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 53.

⁵⁶ Rost, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*, 102.

the extension of God’s kingdom in the world.⁵⁷ Christopher Beeley concurs and states, “Among the many demands that leaders face, the main purpose of pastoral ministry is to guide people toward God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁸ For the purpose of this thesis, Rost’s definition will be employed with the qualifiers that the “mutual purpose” for leader and follower must include movement toward a growth in holiness and affection for God resulting in the extension of God’s kingdom in the world.

The Task of Leaders

At its core, leadership is bringing about change resulting in a desired outcome. Burke observes that leadership can be defined as “the act of making something happen that would not otherwise occur.”⁵⁹ This definition is distinct from power, which is “the capacity to influence other,” in that it is the *exercise* of that capacity.⁶⁰ Furthermore, leadership differs from management in that leadership defines, builds, or transforms systems, whereas management facilitates the process of making the systems work.⁶¹ Bass observes that leadership, in distinct contrast to management, was more effective on some

⁵⁷ Don N. Howell, Jr., *Servants of the Servant: A Biblical Theology of Leadership* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 3. Bass would affirm the more nuanced definition as he advised that leadership is, in some way, defined by its purpose: “There are many possible ways to define leadership. However, the definition of leadership should depend on the purpose served.” Bass, *Bass Handbook of Leadership*, 25.

⁵⁸ Christopher A. Beeley, *Leading God’s People: Wisdom from the Early Church for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 54.

⁵⁹ W. Warren Burke, *Organizational Change: Theory & Practice*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018), loc. 5253, Kindle.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ John Kotter notes different aspects of each role to provide clarity: Management is a set of processes that can keep a complicated system of people and technology running smoothly. The most important aspects of management include planning, budgeting, organizing, staffing, controlling, and problem solving. Leadership is a set of processes that creates organizations in the first place or adapts them to significantly changing circumstances. Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite obstacles.” (John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* [Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2102], 28)

organizational outcomes than others.⁶² Clarity on this distinction is essential as Kotter posits, “Successful transformation is 70 to 90 percent leadership and only 10 to 30 percent management.”⁶³ Edward Shelton echoes this distinction between management and leadership in his book on transformational leadership. He states that management “deals more with complexities and the process of planning, organizing, directing, controlling and coordinating resources that lead to achieving organizational goals.”⁶⁴ Management differed from leadership: “Leadership is directing change, its active, its interpersonal—true leaders inspire, have vision, set directions, enable people to extend their capabilities and ultimately inspire loyalty and command respect.”⁶⁵ Distinguishing between management and leadership is a core consideration when examining declining churches. Lavern Brown, Gordon Penfold, and Gary Westra identify this in noting that American churches desire “management” of the status quo and therefore seek pastors who are managers rather than leaders.⁶⁶ Churches must be led. The church’s nature is one of advance rather than maintenance. Advance implies change. Change requires leadership.

⁶² Bass cites a 1972 study by Lieberman and O’Conner that examined the effects of top management on the success of 167 firms over a twenty-year period: “They found that these effects depended on which outcomes were considered. Senior managers had the greatest effect on profit margins but the least effect on sales.” Bass, *Bass Handbook of Leadership*, 11-12. Bass’ observation implies that senior leadership provided the greatest effect on major policy or vision issues and were least effective on matters dealing with day-to-day operations. Bass affirmed the necessity of both leaders and managers for organizational success. As Shelton observes, senior leaders “influence people through policymaking and systems integration. Edward J. Shelton, *Transformational Leadership* (Bloomington, IN: Trafford, 2012), 31.

⁶³ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 28.

⁶⁴ Shelton, *Transformational Leadership*, 29.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Lavern E. Brown, Gordon E. Penfold, and Gary J. Westra, *Pastor Unique: Becoming a Turnaround Leader* (Bloomington, IL: WestBow, 2016), loc. 1848, Kindle. The authors assert that, by nature, churches do not want to change, but they desire for the status quo to maintain its effectiveness: It is our conviction that these two issues—leadership and change—are at the heart of the crisis in the American Church. They aren’t the only factors, and they may not even be the causal facts. But they are the two factors that, humanly speaking, are in our control and have the potential for guiding us out of the crisis before us. (Ibid., loc. 1856)

If pastors fully accomplished all other responsibilities but failed to exercise effective leadership, then churches would fail to “move off their plateau or reverse their decline.”⁶⁷

Church Polity

Factors beyond a leader’s capacity to lead can influence the outcome of his efforts. At times, the polity and structure of a church may accelerate or inhibit its opportunity to grow. Rightly organized and functioning according to biblical design, a church will be fully able to carry out its assigned task. Jesus stated that He would build His church (Matt 16:18), and part of that task of building involved the gift of leadership (Eph 4:11-13). While these two points are clear, the practical manifestation of that biblical structure is somewhat more ambiguous.⁶⁸ Often, conversations regarding plurality of elders arise as part of the revitalization process.⁶⁹

While the Bible does not prescribe a specific number of elders required for a church, the term *elder* most often appears in the plural and a compelling argument can be made that a plurality of elders was normative in the early church.⁷⁰ Daniel Akin notes that it was easier to support a view of a plurality of elders than it was to defend a biblical requirement for a single-elder model of church leadership.⁷¹ Akin asserts that the biblical

⁶⁷ Brown, Penfold, and Westra, *Pastor Unique*, loc. 1861.

⁶⁸ The research population for this study consisted of SBC churches which were, by confession and conviction, congregationally ruled; therefore, the focus of this section relates to the issues and concerns that may occur among such a population. Evaluating the legitimacy of other forms of church governance was beyond the scope of this study.

⁶⁹ Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame*, 114-15. Reeder exhorts churches to have deacons and ruling elders fulfill their ministry, so that the pastor can dedicate sufficient time to a faithful ministry of the Word. While Reeder stops short of requiring ruling and teaching elders, he indicates a perceived value in having a plurality of elders and deacons attend to the leadership of the church.

⁷⁰ Bruce A. Ware, “Putting It All Together: A Theology of Church Leadership,” 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), 294-95.

⁷¹ Daniel Akin, “The Single-Elder Led Church: The Bible’s Witness to a Congregational/Single-Elder-Led Polity,” in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 63-64. Akin serves as the President

emphasis on eldership related more to the qualifications and calling of the elder than on the specific number. He does note that the requirement for a certain number of elders was an area of flexibility in the Scriptures and that modern theologians should not place more restrictions on the doctrine than the Scripture does.⁷²

Phil Newton advocates for the normalcy of a plurality of qualified biblical elders leading a church that is congregationally ruled.⁷³ Newton argues that a plurality of elders is normative and practical for leadership in the local church. From these two representative positions it is clear that a church should have one or more qualified elders that lead the congregation to fulfill the specific mission of the church.⁷⁴ Furthermore, the existence of a plurality of elders acknowledges that different leaders possess different gifting and that shared leadership, a plurality of pastors, may facilitate greater leadership by allowing multiple leaders to function well within their own unique gifting.⁷⁵

of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and writes as a convictional advocate for congregational government. Akin explains and provides a biblical, theological, and practical defense for the single-elder led, congregationally-ruled church. Akin interacts with the other essay writers in the book in a point/counterpoint style, dealing with the structure of the church. Finding no demand for a particular government structure apart from congregational rule, Akin argued that the qualifications of the man/men who lead is of greater concern than the number of men who lead. He disavowed the false distinction between teaching elders and ruling elders noting that Scripture only recognizes elders who both teach and rule.

⁷² Akin, "The Single-Elder Led Church, 64-73.

⁷³ Phil A. Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 47-62. Newton offers a thoughtful, biblical, and practical treatment on the subject of a plurality of elders. Noting the fallen nature of man as well as the biblical reality of spiritual gifting, Newton argues for a plurality of elders within a congregational rule setting as a protection for the teaching pastor and for the health of the congregation. Citing the expected textual references, Newton also interacts with Cowen's analysis and provides balance to his calling for a single-elder or senior elder model. In an acknowledgment of the fact that a church may not have a plurality of qualified elders, Newton consigns that, in such a case, a single elder may lead until additional qualified men are identified and installed into office.

⁷⁴ R. Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 119. Norman states that the words *pastor*, *elder*, and *overseer* are used interchangeably in the New testament in reference to the same office. While there is no required number of elders in the local church, there is also no distinction between pastors and elders, as if the two existed as distinct entities.

⁷⁵ Ware, "Putting It All Together," 295.

Church Structure

Related to revitalization, organizational structures and decision-making culture are an important consideration. A leader must have the ability to implement change in pursuit of revitalization. This is not a plea for an autocratic structure; rather, it is an acknowledgment that the structure of the church must support a leader's ability to implement change resulting in revitalization. Stetzer and Rainer express this observation in their study on transformational churches.⁷⁶ While structure is important, the purpose of leadership in transformational churches, defined as "congregations[s] that join God's mission of sharing the gospel and making disciples," is the mobilization of the church toward mission.⁷⁷ As people are empowered and leadership is shared, the church experiences health, growth, and missional effectiveness. Six trends were observed among transformational churches in relation to leadership structure: (1) traditional committees gave way to affinity-based teams, (2) membership is encouraged to discover strengths, spiritual gifts, and talents, (3) churches had less structure as opposed to more structure, (4) structures reflect confidence in their pastor and positional leaders, (5) congregation members did not vote on every issue, but were consulted on major issues, and (6) small advisory teams and accountability groups worked alongside the pastor and staff.⁷⁸ These trends point to a confidence in positional leadership while embracing a shared responsibility in pursuit of mission.

⁷⁶ Ed Stetzer and Thom Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville: B & H, 2010), 71-98. The study consisted of 7,000 Protestant churches in the initial sample. See pp. 27-30 for information on the research sample and methodology.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 42. While the definition of a *transformational church* implies evangelistic and missional activity, the goal of such activity is that the church would be shaped to better reflect Christ while engaging in the missional activity. See also Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009) 14-16, for a more expansive perspective on shifting a church focus from internal considerations to missional focus and effort with the goal of incarnational ministry among believers in the church.

⁷⁸ Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 86-90.

Separating church structure from a church's culture is not an easy task. Structures influence culture and culture influences structure.⁷⁹ The objective of this study was not to create a strict division between structure, culture, and a leader's competencies; rather, it was to demonstrate an interdependence among them.

Leadership Culture

In Stetzer and Rainer's study for *Transformational Church*, a pattern of transformed leadership culture emerged. Edgar Schein defines *culture* as

a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.⁸⁰

Culture embodies the ethos of the organization as it adapts to and integrates the ebb and flow of life. Much of this ethos is influenced by the leader's actions. Stetzer and Rainer note that the best churches in their study had vibrant leadership where the leaders showed "passion for God, His mission, and its transforming power on people."⁸¹ Essentially, the leaders influenced the culture through their examples and values that came to be reflected in the churches themselves. Malphurs defines *church congregational culture* as "its unique expression of its shared values and beliefs."⁸² Andrew Hebert observes that every organization has an embedded culture nearly indistinguishable from its identity and that if one was to transform the identity or essence of the organization, the change must be addressed on the level of culture.⁸³

⁷⁹ Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 3. Schein argues for an interdependence between culture, structure, and leadership.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸¹ Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 35.

⁸² Malphurs, *Look before You Lead*, 20.

⁸³ Andrew Clayton Hebert, "Shaping Church Culture: Table Fellowship and Teaching in Luke-Acts" (Ed.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 19.

Shared Leadership

As culture affects leadership, change cannot occur by simply shifting authority from one level to another. A comprehensive change in the church's culture is required. This cultural shift was observed in Stetzer and Rainer's study. The successful churches in their study had "flattened" the organization's decision-making process and empowered leaders at all levels to lead in their respective areas of responsibility:

Churches must transition from a segmented and tepid missions program to a missional church with vibrant leadership that leads the whole church to engage in the mission of God, locally and globally. . . . Transformational leaders seek to empower and multiply [leaders].⁸⁴

Rainer, a proponent of shared leadership culture, notes that transformational leaders think in terms of *team* rather than relying on a *superman* role for the senior leader.⁸⁵ The responsibility for establishing a team leadership culture belongs to the leader. Schein posits,

Culture is ultimately created, embedded, evolved, and ultimately manipulated by leaders. At the same time, with group maturity, culture comes to constrain, stabilize, and provide structure and meaning to the group members even to the point of ultimately specifying what kind of leadership will be acceptable in the future.⁸⁶

The culture of shared leadership involves leaders and followers coming to share a common vision and being empowered as unequal leaders with the authority and ability to carry out their own specific responsibilities.⁸⁷ Rainer states,

Leadership is the stewardship to help others exercise their gifts, not just an opportunity for me to exercise my gifts. . . . The transformational leader thinks team. Everybody has a purpose. No one person's personal purpose is more important than the biblical purpose of the team. The pastor is the coach of the team. . . . [Transformational Churches] have found a way to "win" by engaging every believer into the work God has assigned to them.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 78.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 78-80.

⁸⁶ Schein, *Organizational Culture*, 3.

⁸⁷ Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 79.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

Transformational Leadership

Leadership experts speak of this style of leadership in terms of *transformational leadership*.⁸⁹ Burns states that 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. . . . Their purposes, which might have started out as separate but related, as in the case of transactional leadership, become fused.⁹⁰

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. It connotes a sense of ownership and responsibility in a vision.⁹¹ In *Leading Congregational Change*, Jim Herrington, Mike Bonum, and James Furr write, “The transformational leader helps followers embrace a vision of a preferred future. . . . Because transformational leaders are trusted and respected, followers tend to internalize the spirit and goals of the organization.”⁹² The presence of passion, motivation, and a sense of ownership from among the people does not negate the need for strong leadership; rather, these qualities are the product of transformational leaders’ work in leading. The leader inspires, motivates, and guides followers into a deep sense of responsibility for the vision.

In church cultures that have been built around hierarchies of structure and power, change is difficult; moving from theoretical to practical often proves challenging.

⁸⁹ Bass, *Bass Handbook of Leadership*, 41. The term *transformational leadership* is somewhat ubiquitous today, but the theory is often first attributed to James Macgregor Burns.

⁹⁰ James Macgregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2010), 20.

⁹¹ 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.

⁹² Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 96. The authors write out of their leadership and consulting backgrounds in the Union Baptist Association of Houston, TX, and beyond. They propose a comprehensive transformation model called “The Congregational Transformation Model” (12ff.), which depends heavily on the leader’s ability to implement change processes as part of revitalization.

Institutions develop a memory that becomes ingrained in their culture. Change requires arresting the desire of those in the organization to maintain the status quo and creating a new paradigm.⁹³ The larger, more complex, or more intransigent the organization, the more difficult it is to shift to a transformational leadership model.

Perhaps no greater change-resistant organization exists than the United States military. With hundreds of years of institutional memory on structure, leadership systems, and entrenched values, the prospect of fundamentally changing the way organizational leaders operate seems elusive. However, the way wars are fought and won has changed and is changing at an increasing rate in modern times, thus precipitating a need to change the organizational culture. In *Team of Teams*, General Stanley McChrystal details much of the process of dismantling a “top-down,” hierarchal, organization and replacing it with a flattened, responsive, decentralized organism.⁹⁴ Principles of accessibility through open communication, decentralized decision-making, and a culture of teamwork emerge as critical factors. Ultimately, McChrystal succeeded in unifying teams into a cohesive “team of teams” that could successfully prosecute a military objective, and he did so by upending the conventional, centralization model of leadership characteristic of the military.

⁹³ Kurt Lewin’s Model of Change serves foundationally in many of the prevalent theories of change management. The threefold process of unfreeze, change, and refreeze, provides an excellent framework for implementing change. While this model is explored later, recognizing that an organization must (1) realize the need to change (unfreeze), followed by (2) learning and implementing new behaviors (change) and (3) reinforce as part of the norms of the new culture (refreeze), are sequential and essential steps to transformation. Where other practitioners and scholars have sought to modify Lewin to varying degrees, these three steps persist as essential. See further on Lewin’s model in Kurt Lewin, *The Complete Social Scientist: A Kurt Lewin Reader*, ed. Martin Gold (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1999), 282; and Tupper F. Cawsey, Gene Deszca, and Cynthia Ingols, *Organizational Change: An Action-Oriented Toolkit*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012), 56-58.

⁹⁴ Stanley McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* (New York: Penguin, 2015), 214-22, Kindle. McChrystal et al. detail the case study of how the Joint Special Operations Task Force (Task Force) was transformed in the midst of an active military operation/war. In the study, McChrystal explains how institutional intransigence, silos, lack of trust, and hierarchal leadership were impeding the war effort and how the strategy was established and enacted to make the organization more responsive through removing barriers, dissolving silo mentality within the bureaucracy, and empowering subordinates to execute their mission brought success in the warfighting efforts of the Task Force.

Captain Michael Abrashoff details similar principles in the case study on the ship he commanded, the USS Benfold. During his twenty-month command, the ship went from dismal to stellar performance ratings while improving retention and morale against incredible obstacles.⁹⁵ Critical to the successful transformation of the USS Benfold was the implementation of transformational principles including frequent and open communication by and with senior leadership, individual ownership of both personal and team responsibilities, and a focus on developing team cohesion. Standards were not reduced, but as the crew accepted ownership for the responsibility of the ship's performance expectations, they began to perform at extreme levels of proficiency. This resulted in a ship with one of the lowest retention rates in the Pacific Fleet (28 percent) reversing a decline and retaining 100 percent of its personnel in the two most critical job fields.⁹⁶ In commenting on the ship's successful transformation, Abraschoff states, "As I saw it, my job was to create the climate that enabled people to unleash their potential. Given the right environment, there are few limits to what people can achieve."⁹⁷

While churches are not military commands, the imagery is not foreign to biblical analogy (Matt 8:8-9; 1 Cor 9:7; Phil 2:25; 2 Tim 2:3-4). Furthermore, the reality of entrenched culture contributing to decline in the church is well-established.⁹⁸ The two examples represent some of the most extreme cases imaginable, but their successful

⁹⁵ Michael D. Abraschoff, *It's Your Ship: Management Techniques from the Best Damn Ship in the Navy*, rev. ed. (New York: Grand Central, 2012) 1-10. On a warship, the Captain enjoys nearly absolute autonomy over an organization; however, to be successful in fulfilling his mission, the leader must develop a culture that maximizes senior and mid-level manager performance, otherwise the crew will fail to achieve the mission entrusted to them by their leaders, and ultimately, the American people. Abraschoff wrote of many processes he implemented to move the sense of ownership of the Benfold's mission from Captain to crew.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁹⁸ Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 18-22; Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 22-24; Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 105-12; Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 49.

transformations also provide hope. Military units are people intensive, just like the church. They produce no products or services, but mobilize people to prosecute, under orders, a defined objective, just like the church. Change in these units rest on the vision and action of a leader willing to pay the price of transformation, just like the church.

Developing New Leaders

A related component of leadership culture relates to the process of developing and empowering new leaders.⁹⁹ Clifton observes that one of the inhibitors to church revitalization lies in the fact that dying churches have no process to raise up and empower young leaders.¹⁰⁰ This fact indicates a systemic problem for dying churches of lacking a culture of leadership. Eric Geiger studied the discipleship process of growing and healthy churches, defined as those with a 5 percent annual growth for three consecutive years.¹⁰¹ Geiger's research determined, "There is a highly significant relationship between a simple church design and the growth and vitality of a local church."¹⁰² The study suggested a strong relationship between healthy, growing churches, and a clear and intentional discipleship process within the healthy church.

Leadership Development as Discipleship

Scripture instructs church leaders to equip disciples for the work of ministry

⁹⁹ It could also be argued that developing and employing new leaders is a function of discipleship and, therefore, this section might be better considered in the context of a leader's core competencies. As with other areas and consistent with the premise of this study, an interplay of leadership structure, culture, and leader competencies has not been sufficiently addressed in previous research. As such, the categorization does not lend itself to clear delineations between the parts; rather, there is significant overlap.

¹⁰⁰ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 24. Clifton went further with the observation noting that dying churches prevent leaders from leading, thus causing young leaders to actually abandon the church in order to find opportunities for meaningful leadership.

¹⁰¹ Geiger noted that fewer than 2 percent of the churches in America consistently achieve 5 percent annual growth over 3 consecutive years. Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 65.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 67.

(Eph 4:11-13), which necessarily includes developing leaders for ministry. Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck argue for a cause and effect relationship between discipling others, what they refer to as equipping leaders, and church health.¹⁰³ In unhealthy churches, discipling is anemic or non-existent, resulting in an exaggeration of poor health. The unhealthy cycle is both demoralizing and self-defeating. Unfortunately, this precipitates another tragedy of declining churches in their influence on successive generations of disciples. Churches, by their very nature, reproduce after their own kind. The role of shaping culture as well as creating a revitalization culture begins with the leader. The church is the body of Christ (Eph 4:4, 12; 1 Cor 12:12-13, 27). The mission of the church is to make disciples (Matt 28:19). In light of these truths, the role of a pastor is to equip believers for their ministry work until they achieve maturity in the faith (Eph 4:11-13). Unlike businesses, where success is measured in profitability, the commodity of the church is a maturing disciple of Christ.

Geiger and Peck assert that a fundamental function of the local church discipleship process is leader development.¹⁰⁴ They state, “Biblical leadership development is to ‘find the faithful who will be able. Not the able who will be faithful.’”¹⁰⁵ The leader is responsible for developing constructs to facilitate development. “Without constructs, without systems, chaos and confusion abound.”¹⁰⁶ Geiger and Peck note that fewer than 25 percent of churches have a plan (construct) to develop and train people for ministry.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 34-36. Geiger and Peck observed that two problems plague many struggling churches: churches are not healthy and churches struggle to equip people for ministry. They suggest that equipping people for ministry will result in church health. Furthermore, as will be discussed in greater detail later, they find the responsibility for equipping leaders to rest primarily on pastors (Eph 4:11-13).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

In the language of Malphurs, these churches possess a belief in the need for development, but they do not value it.¹⁰⁸ Geiger and Peck draw a causal relationship between failing to intentionally develop people and the lack of health in the church: “We are not merely suggesting that equipping people is important. We are not merely suggesting that there is a relationship between equipping and health. We are declaring that equipping causes health. Equipping in the work of leadership.”¹⁰⁹

Finally, Geiger and Peck assert, “Leadership development apart from discipleship becomes overly skill-based.”¹¹⁰ This observation refers to the fact that heart transformation must be a concern in the development process; otherwise, the product (people) will be more skilled and less sanctified, thus violating the objective of discipleship. They continue, “Leadership development apart from being a disciple of Jesus always results in skills apart from character, in performance apart from transformation.”¹¹¹ Malphurs suggests that if the culture of developing disciples who become leaders is to change, it must be intentional and begin with the leader.¹¹²

For leaders to lead in revitalization, the leadership structure must support change. The structure is supported, in part, by an effective leadership culture that the literature suggests, is flattened and decentralized among multiple leaders. Particularly in revitalizations, the availability of leaders to fulfill those responsibilities is limited; therefore, a component of the leadership culture relates to the discipleship of new leaders. It is in the discipleship process where a leader’s competencies, an essential factor in revitalization, are developed.

¹⁰⁸ Malphurs, *Look before You Lead*, 36.

¹⁰⁹ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 36.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 160-61.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹¹² Malphurs, *Look before You Lead*, 37.

Leader Competencies

A pressing consideration relates to the question of what a leader can do (his competencies) and must do well (his critical tasks) to succeed in revitalization work.¹¹³ Further, can identified competencies for revitalization leaders be taught, shaped, or corrected in the event of failure? Steve Hudson's recent research on developing a leadership competency model identified 129 specific competencies among revitalization leaders, of which 36 competencies were designated *expert* competencies, meaning they differentiated superior from average performers.¹¹⁴ Hudson grouped the competencies into five categories: motives, traits, self-concepts, knowledge, and skills.¹¹⁵ Within the expert competency rating, the breakdown of competencies from each group appeared as motive (11), trait (9), self-concepts (9), knowledge (1), and skills (6).¹¹⁶ The purpose of Hudson's research was to "develop a competency model for pastors who are revitalizing churches in the Southern Baptist Convention that are plateaued or declining."¹¹⁷ He hypothesized that certain competencies would serve as good predictors of success in

¹¹³ Studies to identify competencies for senior pastors and church staff members have been undertaken using various methodologies with the goal of identifying general competencies for pastors as well as position specific competencies related to leadership and administration. David Charles Barnett, "A Comparative Analysis of Critical Competencies of the Assessment of Ministry Effectiveness" (Ed.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003); Brian Anthony Flahardy, "Essential Leadership Competencies of Professional Ministerial Staff as Identified by Senior Pastors, Staff Members, and Church Lay Leaders" (Ed.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007); Timothy Rowland Woodruff, "Executive Pastors' Perception of Leadership and Management Competencies Needed for Local Church Administration" (Ed.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004).

¹¹⁴ Hudson, "Competency Model for Church Revitalization," 124. The expert competencies possessed a strong level of consensus from the experts participating in the research and had a mean final rating of 5 to 4.5. In addition, there were 71 core competencies identified for revitalization pastors. These had a mean final rating of 4.4 to 3.5. Also 22 supplemental competencies were identified with a mean final rating of 3.4 to 1.5. For further reading, see tables 28-30 located on pp. 125-27.

¹¹⁵ Hudson, "Competency Model for Church Revitalization," 103.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 125. Hudson's research findings suggest that both superior and average performing revitalizers share adequate knowledge (see table 15 on p. 108 for further definition on the knowledge competencies) on matters such as doctrine and missional practice. The greatest differentiation occurred in the motive category, followed by self-concepts (convictions) and personal traits.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

revitalization and that these competencies could be effectively identified by experts who observed superior performing revitalizers.¹¹⁸ However, as Hudson notes, “129 distinct competencies have limited use in a model for selection or training.”¹¹⁹ Based on BEI protocol, Hudson concluded,

[Six] competencies were identified to have high frequency in the reported behavior of church revitalizers. These 6 competencies represent the 3 highest frequency competencies for the competency dictionary and the 3 highest frequency unique competencies. The 3 most frequent competencies from the dictionary, organizational awareness, team leadership, and initiative are among the most common competencies that differentiate an “outstanding performer” from a “typical performer” in competency studies.¹²⁰

Hudson observed that the display of organizational awareness was one of the most significant developments of his research. Organizational awareness as defined by Spencer and Spencer refers to

the individual’s ability to understand the power relationships in his or her organization or in other organizations (customers, suppliers, etc.), and at the highest levels, the position of the organization in the larger world. This includes the ability to identify who are the real decision makers and the individuals who can influence them, and to predict how new events or situations will affect individuals and groups within the organization.¹²¹

Hudson notes that all of the revitalizers in his study displayed strong organizational awareness, and that despite its ubiquitous display among revitalizers’ behavior, the explicit discussion of this competency was “largely absent from the current

¹¹⁸ Hudson, “Competency Model for Church Revitalization,” 7.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 142.

¹²⁰ Ibid. The behavioral event interview (BEI) is defined by Hudson: “This structured interview technique seeks to catalog a thorough description of how a performer does his or her job through the interviewee recounting detailed stories about specific situations at work.” Hudson, “Competency Model for Church Revitalization,” 8. See also Lyle M. Spencer and Signe M. Spencer, *Competence at Work: Models for Superior Performance* (New York: Wiley, 1993), 118-20, for an explanation of procedures and the advantages of BEI over other interview techniques.

¹²¹ Spencer and Spencer, *Competence at Work*, 48. The authors also include a helpful discussion on the relationship between organizational awareness and other competencies such as impact and influence, interpersonal understanding, and initiative.

literature regarding church revitalization leadership.¹²² In addition, Hudson observed that the competencies of team leadership and initiative, both of which relate to a preference to lead and take action, were significantly observed among the revitalizers.¹²³

Hudson went on to note three unique competencies that surfaced relating to revitalizers, which accounted for 50 percent of the frequency of all unique competencies: missional focus, gospel orientation, and willingness to confront and/or exercise church discipline.¹²⁴

The biblical account of leadership qualifications identifies several competencies as well, though not unique to the church revitalizer. These begin with character concerns, which found many related competencies in Hudson's category of traits.¹²⁵ Character is the primary noted concern for competencies in Scripture. The apostle Paul instructed his protégé Timothy on the characteristics of a qualified overseer:¹²⁶

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will

¹²² Hudson, "Competency Model for Church Revitalization," 142. The specific application of this competency is related to the noted competencies discussed later in this chapter as cultural exegesis, facilitating organizational change, and interpersonal skills.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 145-49. Hudson provides a helpful explanation of these two competencies in his discussion.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 118. A detailed list of traits are listed in table 23.

¹²⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 234. Schreiner observes that the term *elder* and *bishop/overseer* should be understood synonymously in the New Testament. He states that the use of *overseer* and *elder* refer to the same office, observing this as the "most plausible way of reading the New Testament evidence. In Acts 20:17, Paul summoned the elders (*presbyteroi*) of the Ephesian church, but in v. 28 they are identified as *overseers* (*episkopoi*), demonstrating that two different terms are used for one office. Paul charged Titus to appoint *elders* in Titus 1:5, but in v. 7 he shifts to *overseer*. The "since" (*gar*) connecting vv. 6-7 suggests that a new office is not in view, and hence one should understand the singular *overseer* as generic here. The same conclusion should be drawn from 1 Timothy. The singular *overseer* of 1 Tim 3:2 is another way of describing the elders mentioned in 5:17 (cf. 1 Tim 3:1)."

he take care of the church of God?), and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (1 Tim 3:1-7).

These qualifications are primarily character based. As for activity, only the ability to teach, and managing well of one's own household emerge. One qualification relates to longevity, as a new convert is precluded from serving as an overseer since his novelty inhibits sufficient observation of his Christian character.

Beyond the question of character, Rainer identifies eight specific qualities that were evident among the pastors leading revitalizations in his *Breakout Churches* study: (1) a passionate commitment to live out biblical faith, (2) long tenure at the church they served, (3) a confident humility, (4) a willingness to accept responsibility, (5) an unconditional love of the people, (6) persistence, (7) a vision that was consistently outward focused, and (8) a desire for a lasting legacy.¹²⁷ These qualities were not evenly distributed among all the leaders, but they do represent a compilation of their prevalent qualities.

Effective biblical leadership requires a leader to possess and exhibit character. Character is an essential qualification for service. Good character is, in itself, not always sufficient for effective leadership, particularly as leading others requires one to establish culture and affect change. These tasks, among others, appear to benefit from certain practical skills that enable the changes required in church revitalizations. Among these skills are the ability to understand cultural context, identify and communicate vision, facilitate change, shape culture, and work with people.

Cultural Exegesis

Malphurs speaks of cultural exegesis as “reading the church.”¹²⁸ Researching the culture serves the purpose of analyzing the current circumstances of the church as well as discerning the leader's ability to affect change. Further, observing the culture informs

¹²⁷ Rainer, *Breakout Churches*, 54-67.

¹²⁸ Malphurs, *Look before You Lead*, 83.

the church of their strengths and shortcomings as they follow Christ. As Malphurs describes the exegetical process, it involved observation, interpretation, and application. The stage of observation involved what one can see, hear, or sense. These are the behaviors of the church's culture.¹²⁹ Schein speaks of this level as cultural artifacts.¹³⁰ At the interpretation stage, one looks beyond the behaviors to the values of the church culture. Values are the beliefs on which the church acts. In reviewing certain behaviors, one can interpret what the church values. In the interpretation stage, one also begins to examine the church's beliefs to identify those that comprise the church's assumptions.¹³¹ The third stage of exegesis is application. This stage examines the core of the church's beliefs seeking clarity on beliefs and assumptions and seeking discernment on how the leader may be equipped to lead this unique church. At this level, one draws applications.¹³² Clifton speaks of this process as well in examining declining churches to determine if there is a "phase" of decline or if the church is dying.¹³³ A failure to conduct effective exegesis prevents the leader from understanding what to address in the process of establishing a strategy to revitalize.

Identify the Preferred Future

There is no shortage of critics who can identify when something is amiss. The leader for revitalization must be able to identify the shortfall of current reality while also formulating a strategy for a preferred future.¹³⁴ Doing so involves both defining vision as

¹²⁹ Malphurs, *Look before You Lead*, 83-84.

¹³⁰ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 23.

¹³¹ Malphurs, *Look before You Lead*, 86-87.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 91-94.

¹³³ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 21-34.

¹³⁴ Reeder, *From Embers to Flame*, 152.

well as developing a pathway to achieve it. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr describe this stage as determining mission, vision, and visionpath.¹³⁵ In their description, mission refers to the general description of God’s purpose for the church. The vision is a “clear, shared, compelling picture of the preferred future to which God is calling the church.”¹³⁶ The visionpath relates to the specific steps to be taken to achieve the vision. Stetzer and Dodson speak of defining the vision as a leader’s competency and state that it is essential in pursuit of revitalization.¹³⁷ The strategy to fulfill the vision is contextually applied. Elmer Towns, Peter Wagner, and Thom Rainer assert that the task of discerning and communicating vision, as well as the leadership to pursue it, rests solely with the leader; these two tasks cannot be delegated if a church is to experience growth.¹³⁸ From a business perspective, Chris McChesney, Sean Covey, and Jim Huling note that a leader could only control two things in pursuit of his goal (vision): strategy and the ability to execute his plan. Much attention is often devoted to the formulation of the vision/goal/strategy, but far less emphasis is given to execution.¹³⁹ Both aspects must be engaged if the leader is to successfully lead the organization to change and grow. David

¹³⁵ Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 49-55.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹³⁷ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 45-49.

¹³⁸ Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner, and Thom S. Rainer, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth: How Any Plateaued Church Can Grow* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 47. While the focus of this book relates primarily to church growth and overcoming growth barriers, the principles of vision casting and leading the church to strategically undertake steps to achieve the vision are applicable.

¹³⁹ Chris McChesney, Sean Covey, and Jim Huling, *The 4 Disciplines of Execution: Achieving Your Wildly Important Goals* (New York: Free Press, 2012), xxiii. This book details what the authors refer to as an *operating system* for execution in a business environment. The disciplines are focus on the wildly important, act on lead (vs. lag) measures, keep a compelling scoreboard, and create a cadence of accountability. As indicated, the system relates to execution because the bulk of emphasis in business leadership is on vision/goal-setting. The “4DX” (four disciplines for execution) system emphasizes practical methods to facilitate the implementation of strategy. In their system, the responsibility for execution rests on the leader but the system works in a manner that motivates accountability and celebration from within the ranks of the followers in an organization.

Rumley notes that a transformational leader must not only communicate a clear and focused vision but must also motivate others to take specific steps in pursuit of that vision.¹⁴⁰ The ability to discern vision, develop strategy, and lead others to embrace them to a preferred end is a critical skill competency for leadership.

Facilitate Organizational Change

Revitalization requires change and change requires leadership. Steve Hudson states,

Church revitalization requires the church to change its culture and practice. While the mission and the message of the church are unchanging, the current North American context has high levels of external change. Revitalization pastors must be leaders who can successfully lead their churches through the difficult process of change.¹⁴¹

In addition to cultural exegesis and identification of a preferred future, one of the skill competencies of revitalization leaders is the ability to facilitate change in the organization. The competency to facilitate change differs from a competency to adapt to random changes to an organization. Organizational change in this respect is intentional, strategic, and designed to improve the organization.¹⁴² Ultimately, the leader is responsible for initiating change processes, for insuring that change is progressing toward a preferred vision, and that implemented changes are structured into the organizational ethos.

Organizational change differs from change management in many respects. Cawsey, Deszca, and Ingols state,

Change management is based in a broad set of underlying disciplines (from the social sciences to information technology), tends to be strategy driven, with

¹⁴⁰ David D. Rumley, *Transformational Ministry: Leadership, Church Growth, and the Senior Pastor's Effectiveness* (Danville, IL: Rumley, 2011), 80, originally published as "Perceptions of the Senior Pastors' Transformational Leadership Style and its Relationship to the Eight Markers of Natural Church Development" (Ed.D. diss., Indiana Wesleyan University, 2011).

¹⁴¹ Hudson, "Competency Model for Church Revitalization," 38.

¹⁴² Cawsey, Deszca, and Ingols, *Organizational Change*, 4. The authors draw a distinction between planned change with a goal of improving organizational effectiveness and random change or change that is planned but is not intentionally designed for organizational effectiveness.

attention directed to whatever factors are assessed as necessary to the successful design and implementation of change.¹⁴³

Several prevalent change models have been used to facilitate change. Kurt Lewin provides a model for change that has influenced numerous other models.¹⁴⁴ Gerald Biberman notes that Lewin's change process theory is often cited as a mainstay of business education in the study of group and organizational dynamics.¹⁴⁵ Lewin's influence is tied to the fact that he approached his work with a desire for practical application rather than mere theoretical consideration.¹⁴⁶ Lewin argues that change involves a three-step process, including unfreezing, moving to a new and higher level, and then refreezing at that higher level.¹⁴⁷

Schein heavily relies on Lewin, though he refines and expands the model throughout his writings.¹⁴⁸ Schein's three stage model includes several sub-points as essential parts of the model:

Stage 1 Unfreezing: Creating the Motivation to Change

1. Disconfirmation
2. Creation of survival anxiety or guilt
3. Creation of psychological safety to overcome learning anxiety

¹⁴³ Cawsey, Deszca, and Ingols, *Organizational Change*, 27.

¹⁴⁴ James A. Schellenberg, *Masters of Social Psychology: Freud, Mead, Lewin, and Skinner* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 6.

¹⁴⁵ 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 (New York: Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, 1986), 122.

¹⁴⁶ Schellenberg, *Masters of Social Psychology*, 64-65. Schellenberg explained that empirical research by Lewin during World War II provoked his curiosity in the area of social engineering, leading to Lewin's theoretical work where he noted that affecting change in groups was best engineered in an orderly and systematic way.

¹⁴⁷ Kurt Lewin, *The Complete Social Scientist: A Kurt Lewin Reader*, ed. Martin Gold (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1999), 282.

¹⁴⁸ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 299-300. Schein's expansion serves to clarify sub-processes in each of the three phases that Lewin identifies.

Stage 2 Learning New Concepts, New Meaning for Old Concepts, and New Standards for Judgment

1. Imitation of and identification with role models
2. Scanning for solutions and trial-and-error learning

Stage 3 Internalizing New Concepts, Meanings, and Standards

1. Incorporation into self-concept and identity
2. Incorporation into ongoing relationships¹⁴⁹

To identify the relationship between the major components and the sub-points, Schein argues that while there were three distinct processes for unfreezing, if any single process were missing, the motivation to change would be found sufficiently lacking. The first relates to disconfirmation, where he posits that there must be sufficient disconfirming data to upset the organization's equilibrium. In addition, a connection must appear in the organizational awareness of disconfirmation and failure to meet prescribed values, goals, or ideals. The connection between the failure to meet prescribed goals and the ensuing disconfirmation should give rise to a level of angst or anxiety. Finally, there must be sufficient "psychological safety" to pursue a solution to the problem. If the solution appears too risky or too difficult to achieve, the motivation to change will dissipate.¹⁵⁰ Disconfirmation itself could be as simple as data demonstrating that the organization will miss or has missed key objectives or goals. If this new information becomes a source of anxiety or guilt for the organization and if a solution seems possible to implement and solve the problem, the requisite steps are in place to create the disconfirmation or unfreezing that Lewin and Schein describe. Schein goes on to identify eight simultaneous activities that must occur to create the required psychological safety.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 300. The list is a modified representation of exhibit 17.1.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 300-301.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 305-7. Schein notes that these activities must be carried on almost simultaneously as part of creating the psychological safety required to gather change motivation: a compelling positive vision, necessary formal training, learner involvement in informal training process, informal training as groups,

The second phase of Lewin's process involves learning new concepts and behaviors. Schein proposes that there are only two legitimate means by which to accomplish this phase: imitation of a role model and experimentation—what he refers to as “trial-and-error.” Both situations are action oriented and supersede a merely intellectual conclusion. It is possible to merely coerce conduct at this point but doing so limits the effectiveness of sustained change.

The third and final phase involves refreezing, which requires an assessment of new results by the actor. The disconfirmation created a problem in the actor's mind and for the action undertaken to become the new norm, the outcome must be understood as successful.

Herrington, Bonem, and Furr note an eight-step sequential process that entails (1) making personal preparation, (2) creating urgency, (3) establishing the vision community, (4) discerning the vision and determining the “visionpath,” (5) communicating the vision, (6) empowering change leaders, (7) implementing the vision, and (8) reinforcing momentum through alignment.¹⁵² Their model mirrors Lewin's theory but, in the example of Schein, expands the process to reflect their understanding of change in church revitalizations. The model is intentional and is provided to “give structure and sequence to the process” of moving from present reality to a preferred future.¹⁵³

Kotter also posits an eight step-process of change model: (1) establishing a sense of urgency, (2) creating the guiding coalition, (3) developing a vision and strategy, (4) communicating the change vision, (5) empowering a broad base of people to take

necessary practice resources and coaching feedback, modeled behavior, support groups, and systems and structures consistent with the new way of thinking and working. It is curious to note that many of these activities are present in models offered by others like Kotter and Herrington, et al. The activities often appear to some degree but they are not always in agreement with sequencing.

¹⁵² Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 12-13.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 12.

action, (6) generating short-term wins, (7) consolidating gains and producing even more change, and (8) institutionalizing new approaches in the culture.¹⁵⁴ Though developed with business organizations in mind, Kotter’s model has influenced church consultation as well. Rainer, for instance, mirrors most of Kotter’s model in *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, with two notable exceptions. Rainer challenges leaders to “stop and pray” before undertaking any change.¹⁵⁵ This step allows the leader to search personal motives, discern the Lord’s will, and to seek wisdom, courage, and strength for the task of change. Second, Rainer includes a step of “dealing with people issues,” which acknowledges a unique feature of church organization where membership is voluntary.¹⁵⁶

Whatever model a leader chooses to employ, the leader must realize and accept that change is non-negotiable in leadership and successful navigation of the change process benefits from a system-informed and strategic approach. The lack of a singular “biblical” model suggests the necessity for a leader to exercise wisdom in implementing change. Part of that approach may involve employing wisdom gained by others in participating in and observing the change process.

Shaping Culture

Leaders are responsible for shaping a leadership culture that enables revitalization. The literature suggests that this most often occurs as organizational leadership structures and decision-making are flattened and the leader assumes a more transformational leadership style.¹⁵⁷ Shaping leadership culture, however, is not the

¹⁵⁴ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 22.

¹⁵⁵ Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 31-42.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 77-88.

¹⁵⁷ Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 78-80; Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 186-87; Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 70-71.

extent of the leader's concern. As a core function, he must also influence the overall organizational culture.

The task of shaping culture is one primarily reserved for leaders. As leaders engage in activities to revitalize churches, they are simultaneously struggling against, modifying, and establishing church cultural identity. Rainer speaks of the influence of culture on revitalization. One of the common identifiers of "breakout churches" in his study was a culture of excellence.¹⁵⁸ The culture of excellence was manifested in a desire to "glorify God, to please the Savior, or to do their best in his power for his sake."¹⁵⁹ The drive for excellence helped to define the *what* and *how* of ministries. Activities such as evangelism and ministry, for instance, were embraced and energized by a drive for excellence.¹⁶⁰ The culture of excellence was exhibited in service within the churches. Since "excellence" was the drive, volunteers were given significant flexibility on how to pursue their ministries with excellence. As a result, Rainer noted that a "freedom/expectation paradox" manifested, where the culture energized and restrained the freedom enjoyed by the volunteers; furthermore, the culture was attractive to other volunteers who joyfully served in the high expectation culture of freedom in pursuit of excellence.¹⁶¹ The culture of excellence also served as a filter on each church's unique mission since it precluded participation in new endeavors that could not be completed with excellence and it identified for pruning those ministries that were drawing resources away from excellence in the best areas.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Rainer, *Breakout Churches*, 131.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 132-33.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 137-38. Perhaps most significant in the freedom/expectation paradox was that the quality was present among all of the breakout churches and universally absent among the non-revitalized comparison churches. See *ibid.*, 138-40 for further explanation and illustration of this observation.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 142-43.

Stetzer and Rainer speak of the power of culture in their study in *Transformational Church*. Culture is reinforced by what is measured and celebrated and the “old scorecard of the church valued the external measures of the three Bs: bodies, budget, and buildings.”¹⁶³ The scorecard, the standard by which success in the church is measured, drove emphasis on programs, inward ministry, and the brick-and-mortar mentality that church was someplace one attends rather than an organism in which one is a part.¹⁶⁴ Transformational churches, however, adopted and focused on a different scorecard—one that emphasized conversions and life in community.¹⁶⁵ By shifting the definition of success and celebrating movement toward success, the cultures of the churches shifted from apathy to passion, from lethargy to movement, and from death to life.¹⁶⁶

In the study of culture of *Comeback Churches*, the most prominent characteristics were attitudes and activities of faith. The top three factors in the comeback churches were “a renewed belief in Jesus Christ and the mission of the church, a renewed attitude for servanthood, and a more strategic prayer effort.”¹⁶⁷ While spiritual results are beyond the leader’s control, developing a spiritually-active and spiritually-attuned culture is of paramount importance.¹⁶⁸ Also significant in the comeback churches was a culture

¹⁶³ Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 26.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 27-32. In the study, seven elements emerged as common among transformational churches: missionary mentality, vibrant leadership, relational intentionality, prayerful dependence, worship, community, and mission. These seven elements fit under three categories that comprise the “transformational loop.” See pp. 32-43 for a more detailed description of the elements of the loop.

¹⁶⁷ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 55.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

of celebration in worship and a commitment to biblical preaching.¹⁶⁹ Additionally, an evangelistic intentionality was a cultural value in revitalized churches in the study.¹⁷⁰ Each of these cultural markers were evident among revitalized churches and were embedded as part of the culture rather than being a programmatic emphasis of the organization. Creating, defining, developing, and shaping that culture is the responsibility of leadership. Effectiveness at this critical task involves more than operational competency; the leader must exhibit characteristics that enhance his effectiveness in shaping culture to revitalize churches.

Interpersonal Skills

Whether the leader is casting vision, implementing change, addressing and shaping culture, or confronting others in loving discipline, he has to work with and win people. Lacking in the present literature is information on the development of a leader's emotional intelligence. A leader can be an accomplished Bible expositor and a skilled vision-caster, and he can possess a strong sense of calling, but if he cannot understand the context within which he is working, and persuade people to follow him toward revitalization, then he will not succeed. Regarding emotional intelligence, Albert Mohler states,

As it turns out, the ability to lead people depends on the leader's capacity to develop and deploy what Goleman identified as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill. . . . If the leader lacks these elements of emotional intelligence, it really might not matter how otherwise intelligent he is.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 78-95. Some commonalities were observed with worship styles (contemporary over traditional, etc.) but the study did not identify a singular formulaic approach to catalyzing a revitalization; rather, the churches emphasized a contextually appropriate, biblically-centered approach to worship that included biblically faithful preaching and a culturally relevant worship experience that was celebrative, expressive, and less formal, while maintaining a strong emphasis on connecting with God.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁷¹ Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2012), 30-31.

A leader is assisted in the work of revitalization if he understands who he is, how he is wired, how to master his own personality, can function empathetically toward others, and possesses the social skills to influence others. Emotional intelligence is a latent but powerful influence in every leader. It informs his ability to communicate, drives his motivation, invigorates his charisma, and endears others to the leader.

Clifton identifies emotional intelligence as a necessity for potential church replanters/revitalizers:

[The replanter] must have a high emotional awareness. In order to replant a dying church, you must be aware of your own emotions and feelings. You must have a strong and solid sense of who you are in Christ. Because you are working in constantly changing situations and with diverse populations of people, you will need to be self-aware and get your identity through the gospel and not through your performance or the “positive” feedback you receive from those you lead.¹⁷²

Geiger and Peck cite Goleman and note,

Maturing Christ-followers make better leaders. Even authors not writing from a distinctly Christian worldview articulate this truth without realizing it. For example, in his popular books *Emotional Intelligence* and *Primal Leadership*, researcher and author Daniel Goleman builds the case that the most effective leaders are *emotionally intelligent*. More than IQ (intelligence quotient), great leaders have a high EQ (emotional quotient) and are able to create environments and cultures that are highly effective.¹⁷³

Goleman asserts that emotional intelligence “abilities rather than IQ or technical skills emerge as the ‘discriminating’ competency that best predicts who among a group of very smart people will lead most ably.”¹⁷⁴ He also states,

My research, along with the research of other recent studies, 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.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 134, emphasis original.

¹⁷³ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 160-61.

¹⁷⁴ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ*, 10th anniversary ed. (New York: Bantam Dell, 2005), xv.

¹⁷⁵ Daniel Goleman, “What Makes a Great Leader,” in *HBR’s 10 Must Reads on Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2015), 1.

Goleman classifies five components of emotional intelligence:

Self-awareness: The ability to recognize and understand your moods, emotions, and drives, as well as their effect on others.

Self-Regulation: The ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods. The propensity to suspend judgment—to think before acting.

Motivation: A passion to work for reasons that go beyond money or status. A propensity to pursue goals with energy and persistence.

Empathy: The ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people. Skill in treating people according to their emotional reactions.

Social skill: Proficiency in managing relationships and building networks. An ability to find common ground and build rapport.¹⁷⁶

As important as it is to know the five components of emotional intelligence, merely recognizing them yields limited value compared to the ability to shape and develop identifiable weaknesses in these areas. The current science suggests that development is possible.¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, as Vanessa Urch Druskat and Steven B. Wolff indicate, emotional intelligence can be developed not only individually, but also as a group.¹⁷⁸ Because emotional intelligence is proven to be influential to a leader's effectiveness and since it is possible for a leader to grow in effectiveness regarding emotional intelligence, then research into identifying, understanding, and developing emotional intelligence among revitalization leaders seems warranted.

Furthermore, a key product of a healthy emotional intelligence in a leader is his effectiveness in leading others who are also emotionally susceptible. Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee suggest that leadership is emotional at its core:

¹⁷⁶ Goleman, "What Makes a Great Leader," 6.

¹⁷⁷ Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, "Primal Leadership: The Hidden Driver of Great Performance," in *HBR's 10 Must Reads on Emotional Intelligence*, 34-42.

¹⁷⁸ Vanessa Urch Druskat and Steven B. Wolff, "Building the Emotional Intelligence of Groups," in *HBR's 10 Must Reads on Emotional Intelligence*, 71-75. The authors observe that a group has a unique emotional intelligence that is distinct from the individual parts. Through being aware of and constructive regulation of the emotions of individual team members, the whole group, and other key groups with whom the team interacts, the group emotional intelligence performance can be improved.

No matter what leader sets 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.¹⁷⁹

Hudson observes,

Change is difficult for members of any organization. When organizations go through transitions, stakeholders naturally go through a distressing psychological process. Participants in the organization typically feel mistrust toward the leaders and resistant to change.¹⁸⁰

Mood and tone are communicated by a leader and these have influence.

Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee assert,

Understanding the powerful role of emotions in the workplace sets the best leaders apart from the rest—not just in tangibles such as better business results and the retention of talent, but also in the all-important intangibles, such as higher morale, motivation, and commitment.¹⁸¹

They further suggest that while a leader’s emotions may have a significant impact on an organization,

emotions are often seen as too personal or unquantifiable to talk about in a meaningful way. But research in the field of emotion has yielded keen insights into not only how to measure the impact of a leader’s emotions but also how the best leaders have found effective ways to understand and improve the way they handle their own and other people’s emotions.¹⁸²

A leader serves as an organization’s emotional guide, exemplifying and even assuring others how to process circumstances appropriately. A leader then, who can identify, control, and utilize emotional intelligence is better equipped to lead effectively.¹⁸³

Such an observation accounts for Hudson’s findings that optimism was one of the top ten

¹⁷⁹ Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2013), loc. 205, Kindle, emphasis original.

¹⁸⁰ Hudson, “Competency Model for Church Revitalization,” 39.

¹⁸¹ Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership*, loc. 227.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, loc. 220.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, loc. 233.

emerging competencies for revitalization leaders.¹⁸⁴ An optimistic leader can influence the church to emulate his optimism in pursuit of revitalization.

By nature, churches benefit from leaders with strong emotional intelligence. The organization has no product to produce or services to provide. The church exists for the development of people so that they may effectively fulfill the mission of God (Eph 4:11-13). A leader must be aware of his emotions and able to control them effectively to lead the church to fulfill its task. Such an important competency already exists among effective revitalizers, but its development is left to intuition and happenstance. Research could be beneficial to determining the state of emotional intelligence among effective revitalizing leaders and to determine the role, if any, that emotional intelligence played in the revitalization.

Conclusion

The majority of churches in North America are in decline.¹⁸⁵ An increasing number of pastors and recent seminary graduates find themselves engaged in the work of church revitalization. The church has leaders entrusted to it to shepherd the people of God to maturity and new life (Eph 4:11-13). The overwhelming body of literature suggests that leadership is essential for revitalization to occur.

The premise of this thesis is that effective, biblical leadership is essential and catalytic in church revitalizations, and that leadership competencies, culture, and structure cannot be effectively evaluated apart from how they interrelate. Leadership is a relationship of influence. Joseph Rost defines leadership as “an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Hudson, “Competency Model for Church Revitalization,” 97.

¹⁸⁵ Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame*, 7-8.

¹⁸⁶ Rost, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*, 102.

The definition acknowledges the relationship between leaders and followers as one of influence and desire informed by mutual purposes. Leaders influence others to change.

Other factors influence a leader's success in leading a church to revitalization. One of those factors relates to the leadership structure. Previous studies on revitalizations revealed that successful revitalizations experienced a flattening of structure, reduction in bureaucracy, and empowerment of membership, while increasing accountability for pastors.¹⁸⁷ Structure both rises out of and informs culture.¹⁸⁸

A church's leadership culture reflects values and also sets the template for raising up and empowering new leaders. In revitalization situations, the lack of raising up new leaders is often an inhibitor to success.¹⁸⁹ Responsibility to influence change in this vital area of consideration rests with the leader.¹⁹⁰ Churches must become places of discipling and empowering leaders to meet the challenge of revitalization.

In addition to structure and culture, a leader benefits from certain skills and competencies to effectively lead toward revitalization. Hudson was able to identify organizational awareness, team leadership, initiative, missional focus, gospel orientation, and a willingness to confront and/or exercise discipline as those areas with the highest occurrence of frequency among revitalizers.¹⁹¹ Additionally, the literature suggests that a leader's ability to exegete his cultural context, cast vision, and lead through change are essential competencies.

Finally, the literature suggests that effective revitalization leaders are aided by enhanced interpersonal communication skills. Mohler observed that a leader's success

¹⁸⁷ Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 86-90.

¹⁸⁸ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 3.

¹⁸⁹ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 24.

¹⁹⁰ Malphurs, *Look before You Lead*, 37.

¹⁹¹ Hudson, "Competency Model for Church Revitalization," 142.

was dependent on his capacity to develop in the five areas of emotional intelligence as articulated by Goleman.¹⁹² Goleman and others have asserted that development of emotional intelligence is possible and influences leadership success more than any other intelligence.¹⁹³ If emotional intelligence is as influential as suggested and if development is possible, then research is needed to better understand its impact on successful revitalizations.

While many studies have been conducted on different facets of church revitalization, a void exists in the current literature in demonstrating the relationship between leadership culture, structure, and a leader's competencies in leading the church to revitalization. Chapter 3 explains the methodology and rationale for this mixed-methods study that sought to contribute to the body of literature in examining this void. Chapter 4 details the findings of the three phases of the research. Chapter 5 discusses implications of the research findings as well as application of those finding and concludes with recommendations for further research.

¹⁹² Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 30-31.

¹⁹³ Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, xv; Druskat and Wolff, "Building the Emotional Intelligence," 71-75.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

Due to the decline of the North American church, church revitalization has been identified as a great need. Research has demonstrated that leadership is an essential factor in successful revitalization. However, the precedent literature fails to address the interplay between leadership structure, leadership culture, and a leader's competencies and his relationship to church revitalization.

This chapter describes the methodological approach used for this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study. The study was designed to identify the role of leadership structure, leadership culture, and a leader's competencies in church revitalization among Southern Baptist Churches. The process involved a three-phase study including a document examination to determine a survey sample, a quantitative survey to identify pastors meeting selection criteria, and qualitative interviews of selected revitalization leaders.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study was to examine select church revitalizations to determine the relationship of leadership structures, the leadership culture, and the leader's competencies to successful church revitalization.

Research Questions Synopsis

To examine the influence of leadership structures, leadership culture, and a leader's competencies, on successful church revitalizations, with this mixed-methods study I sought to answer the following questions:

1. What percentage of SBC churches are growing, plateaued, or declining, and what percentage of previously declining churches have experienced revitalization?

2. What was the influence of a church's leadership structure and decision-making process on the successful revitalization of a church?
3. What factors contributed to the transformation of the leadership culture of the church?
4. What influence did those factors that contributed to the leadership culture of the church have on the church's revitalization?
5. What leader competencies were most prevalent among successful revitalizers?
6. In what ways did the prevalent leader competencies influence the church's successful revitalization?

Design Overview

The research design for this study was an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design.¹ Phase 1 of the research consisted of a document request and review of selected Annual Church Profile (ACP) records, submitted by Southern Baptist Churches to Lifeway. Contact information for the qualifying churches was obtained from these records and an email was sent to the senior pastor of each qualifying church explaining the nature of the survey and soliciting his participation. A link was included for the quantitative study described as phase 2.

In phase 2, a quantitative survey instrument was created using SurveyMonkey.com, and was sent to the churches in the sample. The results were compiled for analysis and scored using a Likert-type scale.² Twelve candidates for phase 3 interviews were purposefully identified in consultation with my supervisor based on ministry context, congregational size, geographical considerations, and coding of responses in the survey.

In phase 3, participants were contacted via email and telephone to schedule interviews via telephone/video-conference/in person. Interviews were conducted with the

¹ John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2010), 69-71. The design occurs in two distinct phases and is intended to use the second qualitative phase to explain information revealed in the quantitative phase. In this design, "the researcher interprets how the qualitative results help to explain the initial quantitative results." Ibid., 71.

² Ibid., 236.

pastors of twelve churches. After advising as to the purpose of the phase 3 interviews, necessary permissions were obtained to record the interview and use the gathered data in the final research project. The interviews were transcribed, and general observations as well as key points were noted. The data was analyzed and common themes were identified.

Research Population

For this study, the research population was revitalized SBC churches that have been in existence since 2006 and have completed an Annual Church Profile for each of those years, including the 2016 reporting year.

Sample and Delimitations

In order to participate in this study, participants had to meet the following criteria: (1) serve as a senior pastor at a church that was plateaued or declined, followed by a period of revitalization, (2) the church reported at least a 10 percent decline in primary worship attendance over five years followed by a revitalization period as demonstrated by a primary worship attendance increase of at least 10 percent annually for two out of five years following the turnaround, and (3) the church maintained a minimum attendance to baptism ratio of 20:1.³

Limitations of Generalization

The Southern Baptist Convention comprises the largest protestant denomination in the United States. As such, it is anticipated that the findings of this study of revitalized

³ These criteria closely resemble that used in Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B & H, 2007), xiii. One notable exception is the use of attendance to baptism ratio rather than the membership to baptism ratio used by Stetzer and Dodson. Thom Rainer identified 20:1 attendance to baptism ratio as a criterion for an evangelistically effective church. Thom Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches: Successful Churches Reveal What Works and What Doesn't* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 35. Since the purpose of this study was to identify revitalized churches and not merely churches experiencing numerical growth, this criterion recognized by Rainer was employed. According to the SBC, based on 47,272 cooperating churches in 2016, the average weekly attendance was 5,200,773 with annual baptisms of 280,773. This yields an attendance to baptism ratio of 18.52:1. Southern Baptist Convention, "Fast Facts about the Southern Baptist Convention," accessed December 22, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/BecomingSouthernBaptist/pdf/FastFacts2017.pdf>.

SBC churches will have significant transferability to other church leadership contexts. Still, the limited focus on revitalization pastors in the SBC may limit the application of the study. Due to structure, polity, and unique competencies of pastors in the SBC, some of the results may not find application in every situation. Revitalization pastors in the SBC were specifically chosen for two primary reasons: (1) due to the SBC data reporting and collection process, a substantial body of data exists to facilitate research, and (2) the revitalization leaders, though leading autonomous congregations, share a common element of congregational polity, thus providing a baseline to examine leadership structure, culture, and leader competencies.

Research Instrumentation

Phase 2 of the explanatory sequential mixed-methods study involved a quantitative survey instrument consisting of questions pertaining to leadership structure, leadership culture, and the leader's competencies. Each question was analyzed and, when appropriate, rated on a Likert-type scale of 1-6.⁴ The quantitative instrument was reviewed by an expert panel and field-tested with a select group of pastors to identify any procedural issues, as well as approved by the Ethics Committee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) prior to implementation.

Phase 3 qualitative interview questions were determined following the completion of the quantitative instrument. The purpose of this methodological approach was so that the qualitative phase could clarify and explain information surfaced in the quantitative phase.⁵

⁴ Creswell and Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 236.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

Research Procedures

Permission was sought from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee to conduct the research before the study was undertaken.

In phase 1, LifeWay was contacted to obtain the Annual Church Profile information to determine the research sample and collect contact information for senior pastors of qualifying churches.⁶ In phase 2, the research sample was emailed a request to complete the quantitative instrument via SurveyMonkey.com, and given a seven-day window of availability to complete the survey. A follow-up email was sent after three days encouraging the pastors to complete the survey if they have not already. A second follow-up email was sent following day 7. Additional contact was made with the churches on several occasions by telephone and email to encourage participation for those who had failed to complete the survey. Upon receipt of the completed instruments, the responses were scored and coded to identify suitable candidates for phase 3.

The phase 3 qualitative interview questions were finalized and participants were contacted to schedule and conduct twelve interviews. The interviews consisted of obtaining basic demographic and church information, followed by a series of open-ended, exploratory questions related to leadership structure, culture, and the leader's competencies. Prior to interview, permission was obtained to record the interviews, use the pastor's and church's information in the final research report (if permitted) and to obtain necessary implied consent.

Upon completion of phase 3, each interview transcribed. All data was compiled, analyzed, and reported in chapter 4.

⁶ The phase 1 and phase 2 portions of the study involve the combined efforts of a research team consisting of seven doctoral students under the supervision of Dr. Michael Wilder. The personal pronouns should not be understood to indicate that these actions were always personally completed by me, but may be the efforts of different members of the research team as assigned. At all times I was engaged in the planning, discussion, and decision to implement various actions by the research team; therefore, for stylistic reasons, references to completing the actions are in the first person.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study was to examine select church revitalizations to determine the influence of leadership structures, the leadership culture, and the leader's competencies in successful church revitalization. This chapter provides detailed description of the research protocol, the demographics of the research participants, and the results of both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the research.

Compilation Protocol

The research design of this study was an explanatory mixed-methods study that examined SBC churches in three phases.¹ Data collection began by contacting LifeWay Research to obtain Annual Church Profile (ACP) data on select SBC churches. All churches selected for the second phase met the following selection 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 attendance to baptism ratio in the same years.² There were 716 churches selected

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

² Thom Rainer identified a 20:1 attendance to baptism ratio criterion for an evangelistically effective church. Thom Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches: Successful Churches Reveal What Works and What Doesn't* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 35. Maintaining a requirement for a 20:1 ratio helped distinguish between growth by transfer and growth by new conversions.

and invited to participate in a survey for phase 2, which was administered electronically and consisted of 24 questions pertaining to church revitalization and 8 demographic questions, including 2 questions pertaining to willingness to participate in phase 3, if selected. Phase 3 participants were purposefully selected and invited to participate in an interview pertaining to leadership considerations. Selection criteria for phase 3 interviews included that (1) the leader indicated that leadership was important or highly important to the revitalization, (2) the leader indicated a change in leadership structure or leader development initiatives as contributory to the revitalization process, and (3) the leader's selection contributed to the diversity of congregational sizes and ministry contexts included in phase 3. Recorded interviews with selected churches were conducted by telephone or video conference and the interviews were transcribed and appropriately coded.³ Interviews were analyzed to identify principles and trends among the revitalized churches and leaders.

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. In that year, 28,046 churches existed that had sufficient data to calculate five-year worship attendance trends during the period between 2011-2016. Among these churches, 25.6 percent were growing churches, 25.71 percent were plateaued, and 48.69 percent were declining. All churches with incomplete data required for the study were then eliminated and 3,364 churches remained. Narrowing of the sample

³ Each phase 3 interview participant was asked to provide candid responses to specific questions about his church and its revitalization. At times, those responses related to personal leadership failures, leadership challenges such as financial impropriety, malfeasance, moral failures among staff, and other leadership crises. The probative value of the participant's candor regarding these potentially embarrassing or painful incidents required a commitment of confidentiality to the participant that would not identify a pastor or his church with any particular answer. Many hours of audio recordings were collected, transcribed, and coded; however, due to the sensitive nature of the information shared regarding actual events in the local churches and the need to protect the privacy of the parties involved, the transcriptions were not made part of this thesis.

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 further narrowed by eliminating congregations that (1) had less than 10 percent annual growth for 2 of the last 5 years, or (2) had less than 2 of the last 5 years with a minimum of a 20:1 worship attendance to baptism ratio. The sample was narrowed further by requiring that the sample churches experienced both 2 years of at least 10 percent increase in primary worship attendance and a 20:1 worship attendance to baptism ratio. These actions resulted in the identification of 716 churches, representing 5.21 percent of the previously declining population.⁴

Phase 2

The sample, consisting of 716 churches, was divided among the research team to identify or verify contact information. The pastors of the churches in the sample were emailed an invitation to participate in a survey on church revitalization, along with a link to the survey instrument (see appendix 1). 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 those churches that had not responded and contacted them to solicit their assistance. Some follow-up calls revealed that several churches did not have access to email; therefore, hardcopies of the survey instrument were provided to facilitate participation among these churches. The efforts resulted in responses from 129 churches as

⁴ Of the 28,046 churches with sufficient data related to 2011 to 2016 worship attendance trends, 44.47 percent (13,743) 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 5.21 percent of the declining church population (13,743).

of September 13, 2018, resulting in a confidence interval of 7.82.⁵ The survey instrument consisted of 8 demographic related questions and 24 questions related to aspects of revitalization, including discipleship, evangelism, leadership, missions, prayer, and the primary worship gathering. The questions required various responses from the participants, including multiple-choice, rating according to a Likert-type scale, prioritization of items, and open-ended responses (see appendix 4). Questions were provided to an expert panel of pastors and denominational leaders with expertise in church revitalization for review and consultation.⁶

Phase 3

Twelve interview candidates were purposefully selected from survey respondents indicating a willingness to participate in an in-depth interview. Additional selection criteria for phase 3 interviews included that (1) the leader indicated that leadership was important or highly important to the revitalization, (2) the leader indicated a change in leadership structure or leader development initiatives as contributory to the revitalization process, and (3) the leaders represented a diversity of congregational sizes and ministry contexts. Pastors from twelve churches were purposefully selected for interviews and represented diverse experience levels, education, and generational influences (see appendix 5).⁷

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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).

⁷ Participant 7 was in his fourth month of service at the church, which might bring into question

The interviewees represented an average of 22 years of ministry experience and 8 years tenure in the revitalized church. Several pastors had served in multiple revitalization churches. In addition, the interviewees ranged in age from 32 to 67 years old (see table 2).

Table 2. Phase 3 pastor’s age and experiences

	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Mean	Median
Years of Ministry Experience	6	42	36	22.55	20
Tenure in the Church	0.25	28	27.75	8.02	6
Pastor's Age	32	67	35	48.36	46

Note. All numbers are in years.

Education levels among interviewees selected for phase 3 varied between minimal college to one pastor with a doctorate who is in the process of earning a second doctoral degree (see table 3). More than two-thirds of the participants possessed a seminary education and had earned a Master of Divinity degree or higher.

Table 3. Phase 3 pastor education level

Education Level	Count	Percent (%)
Some College	3	25
Bachelors	1	8.3
Masters	5	41.7
Doctorate	3	25

the probative value of his insights and experience pertaining to this church’s revitalization. The decision to include the results of the interview, even though the participant’s tenure was short, was based on the following rationale: (1) the participant was an experienced revitalizer with service as a lead pastor or staff member in two other revitalization contexts, (2) the former pastor, who had overseen the turnaround, was still an active member of the church and a member of the participant’s accountability and counsel team; therefore, the participant had significant information, perspective, and insight about the church’s history prior to and during the revitalization, and (3) no protocol required a minimum tenure for participation. The only insights included in the analysis were those where the participant had specific knowledge through observation or from the former pastor. The former pastor had accepted a call to a position in denominational service; therefore, he continued as a positive influence in the ongoing revitalization work of the church.

The leaders 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 4).⁸ Church representation by US Census division include West South Central-5, South Atlantic-4, East South Central-2, Pacific-1.

Table 4. Phase 3 church participation profile

Church Ministry Context	Single Campus or Multisite	State	Region by US Census Division	ACP reported Worship Attendance (2016)
Rural	S	WV	South Atlantic	48
Suburban	S	TN	East South Central	76
Rural	S	TX	West South Central	89
Suburban	S	HI	Pacific	125
Rural	S	LA	West South Central	177
Suburban	S	SC	South Atlantic	157
Urban	S	TX	West South Central	301
Suburban	S	MS	South	165
Rural	S	OK	West South Central	360
Suburban	S	TX	West South Central	417
Suburban	S	SC	South Atlantic	510
Suburban	S	GA	South Atlantic	1145

Upon scheduling an interview appointment, each interviewee received an email containing the implied consent statement (see appendix 3), as well as the interview outline (see appendix 2). Providing the questions in advance enabled the interviewees to be more thoughtful in providing responses to the questions. Ten interviews were conducted

⁸ The decision to note the geographical dispersion of churches by “Census Division” rather than merely by “Census Region” was due to the fact that eleven of the churches are located in the “South” region and one in the “West” region. The diversity of ministry contexts cannot be adequately represented by dividing the nation into four regions; therefore, the geographical dispersion is noted by using one of the Census Bureau’s nine divisions as noted on their regional map. US Census Bureau, “Census Regions and Divisions of the United States,” accessed September 28, 2018, https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/maps-data/maps/reference/us_regdiv.pdf.

via telephone and two by FaceTime video conferencing. Each interview was recorded and transcribed.⁹

Findings

The findings from phase 2 and 3 of the study are presented below. Phase 2 consisted of quantitative data collected through use of the survey instrument. While the instrument measured six areas of emphasis of church revitalization—discipleship, evangelism, leadership, missions, prayer, and primary worship gathering—the analysis of findings in this research project focuses on leadership concerns.¹⁰

Phase 2

More than 95 percent of the surveys were completed by pastors (see table 5). 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 5. Phase 2 survey respondents

	Number of responses	Percentage (%)
Pastor/Elder	123	95.35
Deacon	1	0.78
Staff	3	2.33
Volunteer	2	1.55

⁹ Many hours of audio recordings were collected, transcribed and coded; however, due to the sensitive nature of the information shared at times, the transcriptions were not made part of this thesis. Each phase 3 interview participant was asked to provide candid responses to specific questions about his church and its revitalization. At times, those responses related to personal leadership failures, leadership challenges such as financial impropriety, malfeasance, moral failures among staff, and other leadership crises. The probative value of the participant's candor regarding these 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.

¹⁰ The findings from the other areas of this research project were reported by other members of the research team.

In question 2 of the survey, respondents were asked about their role prior to the revitalization. Approximately one-half of the respondents (49.61 percent) indicated that they served in the role of pastor prior to the period of revitalization and more than 9 out of 10 (92.19 percent) served as the pastor during the revitalization (see table 6).

Table 6. Phase 2 respondent role prior to and during the revitalization process

	Role prior to revitalization (%)	Role during revitalization (%)
Pastor/Elder	49.61	92.19
Deacon	0.79	0.78
Staff	5.51	3.13
Volunteer	1.57	0.78
Not at the church	42.52	3.13

Note: Responses indicate role at the current church

In question 4, respondents were asked to classify their ministry context as rural, suburban, or urban. More than 6 out of 10 respondents (60.94 percent) identified as serving in a rural context; whereas only 1 in 10 identified as serving in an urban context (see table 7).

Table 7. Phase 2 respondent's ministry context

	Number of Respondents	Respondent's ministry context (%)
Rural	78	60.94
Suburban	37	28.91
Urban	13	10.16

Respondents were asked to rate each of six ministry emphases as to the importance it played in the revitalization process (see Table 8). Of the respondents, 86.67 percent rated leadership as important or highly important to the revitalization efforts. Only two categories—primary worship gathering (91.73 percent) and prayer (89.16 percent)—were given a higher priority than leadership. Based on the functional leadership role of the pastor in the primary worship gathering, the survey demonstrated that leadership and the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in prayer are viewed as critical to revitalization

efforts. Among the “highly important” responses, leadership was selected by 57.5 percent of the respondents, higher than any emphasis other than prayer (65.83 percent).

The survey also revealed that, according to respondents, missions was the least important emphasis in revitalization with 12.4 percent of pastors rating it as either slightly unimportant, unimportant, or highly unimportant. The second and third highest rating of unimportance were an emphasis on personal evangelism (7.5 percent) and discipleship (7.44 percent) respectively.

Table 8. Importance of ministry emphasis

	Highly Un-important	Un-important	Slightly Un-important	Slightly Important	Important (I)	Highly Important (HI)	Total HI and I
Primary Worship Gathering	1.65	0.83	1.65	4.13	36.36	55.37	91.73
Prayer	3.33	0	0.83	6.67	23.33	65.83	89.16
Leadership	4.17	0	0.83	8.33	29.17	57.5	86.67
Discipleship	4.13	0.83	2.48	9.92	33.88	48.76	82.64
Evangelism	5	0.83	1.67	10	40.83	41.67	82.5
Missions	2.48	4.96	4.96	16.53	36.36	34.71	71.07

Note: All numbers are stated as a percentage

Two additional questions regarding change initiatives were used to identify where pastors encountered the greatest acceptance and resistance to efforts to change practices in the church. Among the initiatives that received the greatest acceptance were the emphasis on missions (21.85 percent) and changes in worship (21.85 percent). Discipleship (17.75 percent) ranked third (see table 9).

Table 9. Acceptability of change initiatives

	Indicating greatest acceptance (%)
Missions	21.85
Worship	21.85
Discipleship	17.65
Leadership	16.81
Prayer	11.76
Evangelism	10.08

Changes in worship also elicited a similar amount of resistance (19.66 percent), exceeded only by discipleship (22.22 percent) and personal evangelism at 27.35 percent (see table 10).

Table 10. Resistance to change initiatives

	Indicating Greatest Resistance (%)
Evangelism	27.35
Discipleship	22.22
Worship	19.66
Leadership	17.95
Missions	7.69
Prayer	5.13

One question in the phase 2 survey sought to rank leadership practices/competencies by importance during the revitalization effort. Sixteen practices/competencies were identified for the participants and they were asked to rank them on a Likert-type scale from highly important to highly unimportant (see table 11).¹¹

Three areas received greater than a 90 percent rating of important or highly important: getting members engaged (93.21 percent), teamwork and cooperation (91.17 percent), and relationship building (90.3 percent). Emerging from the top three responses is the fact that mobilizing the membership to engage in the process of revitalization is

¹¹ The 16 practices, also referred to as either coded or emerging competencies by Hudson, were taken from behavioral event interviews of revitalization leaders and experts in his work to identify the essential competencies of successful church revitalization leaders. See Hudson, "A Competency Model," 97. Hudson conducted qualitative behavioral event interviews with eight experts. From those interviews, the 8 most frequently appearing competencies as found in the competency dictionary produced by Spencer and Spencer were teamwork and cooperation, relationship building, developing others, initiative, interpersonal understanding, conceptual thinking, organizational awareness, and information seeking. Spencer and Spencer give a detailed discussion of the competency dictionary. Lyle M. Spencer and Signe M. Spencer, *Competence at Work: Models for Superior Performance* (New York: Wiley, 1993), 17-90. In addition, the 8 most frequently appearing themes or emerging competencies are listed: getting members engaged, gospel orientation, transparency, building momentum, missional focus, contextual awareness, individual and corporate repentance, and willingness to confront/church discipline. Hudson, "A Competency Model," 97. The combined competencies were then provided without distinction to the phase 2 participants in this study to rate for importance.

essential. The leader’s ability to relationally build a team that engages in the necessary tasks is of preeminent importance.

Table 11. Phase 2 leadership practices/competencies

Leader Competency/Practice	Phase 2 Highly Important (HI)	Phase 2 Important (I)	Phase 2 HI or I	Mean Rating
Getting Members Engaged	64.08	29.13	93.21	5.52
Teamwork and Cooperation	61.76	29.41	91.17	5.48
Relationship Building	62.14	28.16	90.30	5.46
Gospel Orientation	58.25	31.07	89.32	5.44
Developing Others	54.46	34.65	89.11	5.38
Transparency	54.46	34.65	89.11	5.38
Building Momentum	47.52	36.63	84.15	5.22
Missional Focus	42.42	34.34	76.76	5.11
Initiative	39.00	40.00	79.00	5.10
Contextual Awareness and Planning	34.65	41.58	76.23	5.00
Interpersonal Understanding	31.37	41.18	72.55	4.94
Individual and Corporate Repentance	39.22	28.43	67.65	4.94
Conceptual Thinking	29.41	38.24	67.65	4.85
Willingness to Confront/Church Discipline	37.25	26.47	63.72	4.75
Organizational Awareness	24.51	33.33	57.84	4.63
Information Seeking	16.67	36.27	52.94	4.55

Note: All phase 2 responses reflect selection frequency percentages. Mean rating reflects the average of all responses according to a Likert-type scale of highly unimportant (1), unimportant (2), slightly unimportant (3), slightly important (4), important (5), highly important (6)

Participants were also asked to evaluate the leadership development processes before and after the revitalization. When given the opportunity to evaluate and respond to statements, 76.7 percent disagreed with the statement that an effective leadership development process existed in the church prior to revitalization (see table 12). Further, as table 11 demonstrates, almost 9 out of 10 respondents (89.21 percent) agreed that leader development contributed in significant ways to the church’s revitalization.

Table 12. Leadership development role in revitalization

	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.	36.89	29.13	10.68	13.59	6.8	2.91
Leadership development played a significant role in the revitalization process.	4.9	3.92	1.96	18.63	35.29	35.29

When given the opportunity to elaborate on the changes to the church’s leadership development process, the pastors offered varying approaches. One pastor in a transitional community noted that, prior to the turnaround, his church had traditionally depended on transfer growth to find leaders. The pastor implemented a new approach, noting that he intentionally placed current church members that were unengaged or overlooked into roles of responsibility and began to coach them on how to function effectively in the role. Another pastor related that he hired additional bi-vocational staff and trained them with the expectation that they would train others. One pastor turned his attention to a holistic discipleship relationship and met regularly with each leader. His emphasis was on developing disciples rather than focusing on specific skills for serving. Most pastors expressed some level of dissatisfaction with the current process of developing leaders and all articulated some need to continue developing leaders. One pastor summarized the motivation both as biblical obedience and practical wisdom, observing that without multiplying leaders the church would cease to grow.

Respondents were also given an opportunity to comment on the primary changes to the church’s leadership structure that they perceived to have contributed to the revitalization process. The question called for an open-ended text response. More than 100 respondents provided responses which were coded to identify emerging themes (see table 13).

Table 13. Leadership structure changes

Theme	Frequency
Change in senior leader	21
Flatten organization/ empower others	16
Transitioned to pastor/staff-led	15
Transitioned to elder-led	7
Senior leader from part-time to full-time	3
To church council/leadership team	3
Reduce pastoral staff	2
Worship leadership change	1
Add pastoral staff	1
Transitioned to congregational	1
<i>Total-leadership structure changes</i>	70

Three primary themes emerged as most common, representing 74 percent of the change responses.¹² The most common response involved a change in the senior leader (30 percent). Several respondents indicated a replacement of a long-tenured pastor with a younger pastor. Other responses withheld assessments of previous leadership, simply noting that a change occurred. The second most frequently occurring theme related to a flattening of the organization and empowerment of members (23 percent). An exemplary response of this theme is offered by one respondent who wrote:

I focus on developing leaders who have not only a title but the authority to do their calling and passion. We seek to help them discover what they are passionate about and release them. We developed bi-monthly meetings for our top tier and second tier leadership. We discuss what is going on, calendar, and we learn together through book studies and discussion.

Twenty-one percent of the respondents noted that they moved from some other structure to a pastor/staff-led structure. One pastor noted, “Our leadership structure has moved from a deacon-led church to a staff-led church. Our deacons understand the

¹² Of the 129 responses included in phase 2 of this research project, 27 respondents did not answer question 21. Thirty-two responses indicated no change occurred in the leadership structure or the responses were non-descriptive of the specific changes. Seventy responses indicated some form of change in the leadership structure and are indicated, by theme, in table 13. Responses such as adding pastoral staff (1), reducing staff (2), change in worship leadership (1), and changing the pastor’s employment classification for bi-vocational to vocational (3), indicate a change within the church’s leadership structure rather than a change to the structure itself; however, the respondents believed the change to be significant so they are delineated and included here. It is further noted that responses such as moving to a pastor/staff-led church may also involve the change in a senior leader, but for the purpose of this analysis, the distinction is maintained.

importance of supporting the pastor and working alongside him in ministry. We have also trained and entrusted volunteers to do and lead much of the ministry.” Another respondent wrote,

The prior pastor had a chaplain mentality. He loved the flock he inherited. The deacons ruled the church with a business mentality. The new pastor is focused on equipping the saints for the work of the ministry and believes that if the church is not reproducing, then it isn’t healthy. The deacons now view themselves as servants. Leadership is stronger and more assertive.

It is also significant to note that only 10 percent of the churches indicated a move to an elder-led structure.¹³ One respondent wrote, “We started with a team approach with men and women acting as decision-makers. After three years, we have re-written the by-laws and have an elder-led model.” Another respondent stated that they were “in the midst of transitioning from deacon-led to a plurality of elders led” model.

Phase 3

Twelve pastors were contacted for phase 3 interviews. Each interviewee was encouraged to provide candid responses and assured that neither he nor his church would be identified with the responses. The interviews were designed to clarify and illuminate themes that surfaced in 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 of leadership in that work. As previously indicated in table 3, the pastors averaged 22 years of ministry experience and 8 years of tenure in the revitalized church.

Leadership structure. The pastors were asked to describe the leadership structure in place prior to the turnaround of the revitalization. With only one exception, the declining churches were being led by a deacon body, and typically by a dominant personality within the deacon body (see table 14).

¹³ No definition for “elder-led” was provided to the respondents for this description; therefore, it is possible that varying understandings may be intended by the respondents in their responses (i.e., lay-elder board, a pastor with staff elders, or a plurality of elders/pastors).

Table 14. Leadership structure

	Prior to Revitalization	After Revitalization	Intended Leadership Structure
Single Pastor		3	1
Pastor with Staff	1	9	10
Plurality of Elders (board of elders)			1
Deacon led	11		
Church Council			
Congregation led			

Several pastors described the dominant personality as a person with leadership skills or social status in the community. In one community, the chairman of deacons was also a mid-level manager in a local business that employed much of the city and several church members. The chairman's social status and financial means gave him the position of greatest influence in the church. Another pastor indicated that the chairman of deacons in his church was also a prominent leader in the community, and that while he was a good leader and a help to the pastor, the chairman's leadership reflected more of his non-church experiences rather than the fruit of the spirit. A rural church pastor identified his two dominant leaders as a retired school administrator and a retired business owner, both well-known in the community.

Three churches drifted into a deacon-led structure due to an absence of leadership or a former pastor's ineffective leadership. For two of these churches, the former pastors were described as weak leaders. Regarding an absence of leadership, one pastor explained how the church had experienced a seven-year interim period, during which the deacon body stepped into the void.

In three other churches, the dominant personality, often the chairman of deacons, worked with advocates loyal to him. While decisions in these churches appeared to be the product of the entire deacon body or a church council, in reality a single voice directed the course of action through advocates. One church operated with a church council as the locus of decision-making; however, the prominent deacon, his advocates, and his family

members served on the church council effectively securing the decision-making process tightly with the prominent deacon.

One church pastor stated that the leadership structure involved deacon leadership, but that there was also an informal influence of a long-tenured staff member. The staff member had persisted through multiple pastor transitions and possessed strong relational ties within the church. The pastor described the situation as well-known throughout the community. According to the pastor, the staff member was so embedded in the fabric of the church that removal seemed impossible, even though the staff member's influence in the church was toxic. The staff member remained on the staff for several years and actively employed subversive tactics to derail the senior pastor's initiatives. When asked about regrets, the pastor stated,

Everywhere I had been, God honored the way I led with numerical and spiritual growth with people. I wish I had done things a little differently, but I don't know if I could have; because, I keep thinking back— he's untouchable, he's untouchable, he's untouchable. So, with this church, instead of me going in after a year and deciding that we need to make a change, I waited, and waited, and waited, and prayed. God eventually moved him on and now we are getting healthier. It has been good ever since.

Finally, one church reported being led by a pastor and staff prior to the revitalization and continued with the same structure following the transition of leadership. The pastor observed that the issue precipitating their decline was not related to the leadership structure but to the competency of the former pastor himself who had stayed too long at the church. In this case, the respondent was first hired in a co-pastor type role. The respondent built on the existing structure and continued to lead, though more relationally, through the revitalization. In his estimation, the revitalization could not have occurred if the church was structured in any other way. Changes needed to be made and that required decisive action. In this case, the pastor worked through five respected men in the congregation to implement change early. This approach was only possible because the church had been structured to be led by a pastor and his staff. When asked if there were any regrets, the pastor relayed that he had no regrets related to the structure; rather,

he chose to come to the church, in part, because the structure embraced strong pastoral leadership. The structure itself enabled the pastor to make necessary changes leading to revitalization.

Each pastor of formerly deacon-led churches spoke of the importance of establishing more biblically-based leadership structures. They described the need to move deacons back to a serving role rather than one of directing the activities and ministries of the church. When pressed on how this was accomplished, several approaches emerged. First, among several of the leaders, an intentional focus on biblical teaching was undertaken. The pastors used the pulpit to orient the congregation toward biblical leadership models and a proper view of deacon ministry. Second, three of the pastors appealed to their church's by-laws. Each set of by-laws required a different structure than what was in practice; therefore, these pastors moved toward bringing practice in line with the governing documents. One pastor described his approach as a reorganization of the church council to expand the base of decision makers and thereby dilute the influence of the dominant deacon leader. The pastor stated, "I would rather take my chances with fifteen on a church council or with the entire congregation than 'butt up' against one or two deacons." In each of these scenarios, the pastors emphasized the need to operate according to the by-laws of the church that expressly vested the leadership authority in a church council. These pastors then spoke of how they began to lead through the church councils. As the pastors cast vision and gained agreement among the broader body of the church council, the council became the implementation arm of the pastor's ministry strategy.

No pastor spoke of the deacon-led structure in positive terms, a theme made evident in that every church in phase 3 moved to a pastor-led structure. Some pastors went further in articulating significant challenges caused by the deacon-led structure, and most prominently from the dominating deacon influence. One pastor spoke of the weight of the situation being unbearable and having to choose between leaving the church or praying for God to remove the dominant influence from the church. He went on to speak of how

the conflict drove him to depression and overwhelming feelings of inadequacy. He stated, “Everywhere I have been, the Lord has blessed. The church has always gotten healthy and grown. Here, I couldn’t do anything. All I got was pain.” The only bright spot of those dark days, he shared, was that his personal prayer life improved dramatically and God used the experience to grow him in humility.

Another pastor described his situation, noting that the dominant deacon leader was a prominent management figure in the community. He stated,

This was a “board of deacons” church and everything ran through the deacons and I had not been part of a church like that. I had always been in churches where deacons were servant leaders, not a board of directors. And so, when I moved here it was pretty frustrating because again, the plant mentality, most of the board of deacons were in management out at our plant and so they ran the church like they ran the plant, and that was automatically dysfunctional because it is two different entities. And so, I languished under that for a while and then finally decided ‘okay, if I can’t change them then there may be other ways to accomplish what we need to do.’

The pastor’s solution was to carry matters directly to the congregation. He discovered upon doing so that the congregation was very interested in the decisions before them and engaged in carrying out the direction determined in the congregational meeting. This course of action ultimately circumvented the authority of the deacons long enough to restructure.

Another pastor spoke of making sweeping changes soon after coming to the church, a decision he came to understand as unwise, stating that he would have exercised more patience if given the same opportunity again. The pastor’s actions resulted in lethargy settling in among the deacons and unnecessary conflict in the church. Two pastors spoke of taking a more relational approach with the existing deacon body and congregation, developing goodwill through transparency and access. Furthermore, one pastor used his pulpit skills to develop and win the hearts of the congregation and used that congregational influence as a workaround until he could unseat the deacon leadership structure.

In every interview, the pastors expressed some form of change in the leadership structure. Several pastors spoke of developing a coalition of advocates to champion the

pastor's agenda. For each of these pastors, relationship-building and people skills were prominent competencies.

The one respondent that came to a pastor-led church explained how he relationally endeared himself to the informal congregational influencers. According to this pastor, these men had served the previous pastor well and were unquestionably loyal to the office of pastor. The pastor relayed that he simply inherited a structure where the man in the office of pastor was followed. "Once trust was established in me personally," he indicated, "these influencers rallied the congregation and we moved forward."

Each interviewee was asked if he could start again and modify his approach to restructuring the leadership, and 67 percent would have done something differently with the benefit of hindsight. The changes indicated by the respondents were minor and did not relate to structure. One pastor spoke of slowing the pace of change down to prevent unnecessary disunity in the church. Another pastor spoke of praying more. Still another pastor spoke of pulling back on the deacons' authority and how it actually left the deacons exhibiting apathetic tendencies. He noted,

I have some regrets in that way, probably because I was reacting to the situation when I came in. They are almost lackadaisical at this point, but I am trying now to figure out how do I reestablish them to have some ownership now, you know, again. To do it over, I might try to find a way to leave some empowerment or buy-in for the deacons.

In each of these exemplar cases, the changes were minor adjustments only. Four of the pastors stated that they would not have changed anything.

Regarding the subject of single elder or a plurality of elders, only two pastors used terminology reflective of a structural plurality of elders. In both cases, moving to a plurality of elders was aspirational. One pastor stated that he saw the current pastor-led structure in his church as an incremental step and was theologically convicted to move to a plurality of elders. When asked to define that further, he described a lay board that met the qualifications of elder where the pastor was one of many elders. Another pastor spoke of developing qualified men as future elders but did not articulate an intention to modify the pastor-led structure presently in his church.

Leadership development. The interviewees were asked several questions about leadership development in their churches.¹⁴ This subject seemed to evoke the most discomfort of the different areas of focus. Each pastor stated a belief that developing leaders was a genuine need. When asked to describe the development process prior to the revitalization, nine pastors stated that the process was non-existent or incidental/accidental. Two pastors articulated a reliance on Sunday school/group ministry (see table 15).

During the revitalization process, several pastors described the situation as one of prioritization. When asked about establishing an intentional leadership development culture, one pastor stated that the committee structure inhibited it. “[The pastor and deacons] would nominate ministry team leaders that the administrative council has to approve,” the pastor stated. “Then those leaders would recruit their own teams.” This pastor’s developmental intentions required restructuring and retraining teams and committees to think differently about developing new leaders. Several pastors related stories about dealing with more pressing issues, even though developing leaders was important, many churches find themselves in defensive mode. One pastor articulated this sentiment noting that he expends so much energy to maintain what he has, there is no time to develop others, even though he recognizes that if he does not begin to develop additional leaders, he will never be able to delegate responsibilities and free up room for growth. Another pastor pointed out pressing pastoral issues that prevented him from engaging in intentional leader development.

¹⁴ Data in this section does not reflect every question asked in the interviews; rather, the data reflects a synthesis of responses and lists specific responses when exemplary and appropriate. In some cases the respondents simply restated the general characteristics of previous responses. In other cases, the responses to follow-through questions failed to provide significant new understanding or the questions did not seem to apply closely enough to the respondent’s situation to prompt a response.

Table 15. Leadership development process

	None	Incidental/ accidental	Mentoring group	Small group ministry	One-on-one mentoring	Open/men's group
Leadership development prior to revitalization	8	2		2		
Leadership development following revitalization	1		3		7	1

Leadership crises were other matters that consumed the leaders' time. Issues such as staff terminations, financial impropriety, and conflict created a large black hole in the ministry, consuming every bit of daylight. Even when the crisis is addressed and settled, the leadership "clean up" often persists long after the issue is resolved. One pastor described a need to address an issue of financial impropriety that resulted in removing a staff member. Every available moment was consumed for months to minister to affected members and rebuild relational bridges. No time and energy remained to develop others.

Among the development processes implemented during the revitalization process, one-on-one discipleship was the most prominent approach. The majority (81.8 percent) have engaged in some form of one-to-one or one-to-three model of discipleship. A rural church pastor described his approach as meeting people where they were and walking alongside them as they grow. A suburban church pastor focuses on men through weekly Bible teaching in an open group format. From this type of discipleship, he observes leaders rise up and places them in positions of service. Another pastor is engaged in fifteen to twenty one-on-one discipling meetings per month and demands similar activity from his staff. This pastor, serving in a more densely populated area, disciples others with the expectation that within two or three years, his mentees will launch a church in his city. When pressed to explain how that works, the pastor explained that he has launched three church plants in his city in a decade and each launch involves around one hundred church members being sent out to lead in the new context.

Another leader stated that he has engaged annually in identifying several couples to disciple and develop personally since the revitalization. He implements a curriculum or book study with the men and his wife discipled the other wives. The goal is life-on-life mentoring and development. When asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the approach, the pastor observed that the results have varied but they identified several leaders through the process. He intended to continue the process for the foreseeable future.

Leader competencies. In phase 2, participants were given an opportunity to rate the importance of sixteen competencies on the revitalization process. In phase 3, the twelve interviewees were asked to choose from among the sixteen competencies and identify only two or three as most important and to give a reason why. Some leaders gave less than three responses, but no leader provided more than three (see table 16).

Table 16. Most frequently referenced leader competencies

Leader Competency/ Practice	Phase 2 Highly Important (HI)	Phase 2 Important (I)	Phase 2- HI or I	Phase 3- Top 3
Willingness to confront/church Discipline	37.25%	26.47%	63.72%	4
Relationship Building	62.14%	28.16%	90.30%	3
Gospel Orientation	58.25%	31.07%	89.32%	3
Missional Focus	42.42%	34.34%	76.76%	3
Contextual Awareness and Planning	34.65%	41.58%	76.23%	3
Getting Members Engaged	64.08%	29.13%	93.21%	2
Developing Others	54.46%	34.65%	89.11%	2
Building Momentum	47.52%	36.63%	84.15%	2
Initiative	39.00%	40.00%	79.00%	2
Conceptual Thinking	29.41%	38.24%	67.65%	2
Individual and Corporate Repentance	39.22%	28.43%	67.65%	2
Organizational Awareness	24.51%	33.33%	57.84%	2
Transparency	53.47%	34.65%	88.12%	1
Teamwork and Cooperation	61.76%	29.41%	91.17%	0
Interpersonal Understanding	31.37%	41.18%	72.55%	0
Information Seeking	16.67%	36.27%	52.94%	0

Note: All phase 2 responses reflect selection frequency percentages. The phase 3- top 3 column demonstrates the number of times that a competency was mentioned as one of the top three competencies in importance by phase 3 participants, during the qualitative interview.

The most frequently referenced competency was willingness to confront/church discipline. A recurring theme among several of the pastors related to the need to exercise courage, particularly as it related to sin issues. One pastor connected confronting sin with developing others and transparency:

Too many church members cannot even identify sin and wrongfulness in their own lives, much less someone else's. So, as you develop and grow (church members) and you have to act in a disciplinary manner, it's easier for them to see that through the filter of the Word of God. Now everything has to come through the Word of God or you and I don't stand a chance. What you and I have to say and \$2.69 will get you a hot mocha at McDonalds; but, when you're standing on the Word of God, they can stand and argue with me and be justified, but they can't argue with the Word of God and win. So, you know, if you're transparent in your expectations of yourself, I mean, when you blow it, own it. I've blown it and apologized from the pulpit on more than one occasion for something that I got wrong. So, if you expect transparency in the congregation, you better display transparency from the pulpit. They need to see it to develop it in them. You grow them, so when it is time to discipline, to eradicate, to remove, to change something, it's not an uphill battle.

Another pastor related that revitalization is simply returning a church to health. Sin, he explained, is a sickness and has to be dealt with to get the church healthy. He stated, "There's sin in the camp. It is simple as that, and the key is to get sin out of the camp."

Relationship building was referenced three times and also by 90 percent of the phase 2 participants. "Everything is about relationships," related one pastor. He continued, "You can't do anything without people and they won't follow you unless they trust you. And they won't trust you until they know you." None of the pastors spoke of relationship building in any terms other than as it existed between pastor and congregation. One pastor even expressed that the man he followed was very impersonal. "He didn't hang out or get to know the people, so when I came in, I spent time hanging around folks. That's where trust to lead comes from."

Gospel orientation also appeared three times among the most important competencies. Several pastors spoke of the need to get back to basics of a gospel orientation. They intentionally tied their teaching and preaching to the gospel to get people thinking about the right things and in the right way. One pastor said, "We weren't reaching anyone in our community. Everyone in our church drove there. So, I went old school. I

went door-to-door and was taking people with me. We prayed for people, shared the gospel, whatever we can do.” Another pastor spoke of gospel orientation in a more gospel-centric orientation. For him, the gospel needed to inform members of what Christ had done and was doing for them.

Missional focus was another area of importance to those interviewed. The pastors spoke of it as getting the church back to a vision of reaching others. One church saw an increase of excitement and enthusiasm based on this focus. The pastor stated, “We went from talking about missions to going. First three people, then seven, then twenty-one last year. And in our city too. We had over three hundred people involved in serving within our city and they are excited about it.”

Contextual awareness was also referenced three times as one of the most important competencies. Several pastors spoke passionately to this competency. One pastor related that his church had a dying traditional worship service and he could not seem to correct it. After a visioning process, he implemented a country-western service in its place. He explained that a large amount of people in his church drove trucks and listened to country music. Furthermore, a family with ties to the church moved back and began leading worship and were gifted at the genre. While he did not know of another church doing what he had implemented, it fit his people. Another pastor observed that he came to an Anglo church in a Hispanic community. He chose to adjust programming to reflect more of the community around him. As such, he stated that half of their baptisms are adult converts and they have started three plants in the last three years by sending out one hundred people and setting up a new church down the road. When pressed as to why he used this strategic approach, the pastor related that smaller churches grow faster; so, why try to grow his church bigger when he could just start a new one and grow the kingdom faster. Finally, one pastor described the need to “know your people, the ones you have. You also have to know the ones you are trying to meet in the community. You have to know both; or, you cannot succeed.”

Getting members engaged was referenced twice. The description of its importance was closely similar to building momentum. As members got engaged in the mission, an excitement grew which led to more engagement. One pastor said, “Get a win. Then get another. Go big.” He described his ministry approach as one that prioritizes the worship event on Sundays; therefore, many of the wins he referenced were special invite opportunities, or big days. Another pastor saw the momentum build as members were engaged in serving the community.

Initiative was referenced twice by the interviewees, but it was implied by several others as very important throughout the interviews. The pastor had to take initiative in gospel orientation. The pastor had to lead in transparency and in confronting sin. The pastor had to cast vision and build momentum. One pastor specifically described initiative in terms of excitement and creating accountability. He stated, “I have to set the standard. Part of what I do is look out at what I see coming next and get others to see it too.” He further noted, “You have to take the initiative with staff too. I’m the guy when attendance is slipping that tells my staff, ‘Go find them,’ or they will just wait thinking people will just come back around on their own.”

An unexpected result surfaced in the exercise of identifying the most important competencies; several competencies were not mentioned at all. Among the twelve phase 3 participants, none ranked teamwork and cooperation as one of their top three, even though 91.17 percent of the sample rated it as highly important or important. Also, transparency was rated significantly in phase 2 (88.12 percent) yet received only one mention among the phase 3 participants.

The Role of Leadership Crisis

A significant theme emerged during the interviews related to crisis and its influence on the leader’s credibility to lead. One pastor recounted that soon into his role a staff member’s wife had an immoral relationship with a church member. The pastor was forced to lead a congregation through the situation and his leadership credibility was

established sooner than expected. Another pastor came into a situation of a declining church with overwhelming debt. While working through that challenge, he came under significant personal attack with threats to his life. The pastor's leadership through the shared risk of debt and his own suffering accelerated his ability to lead. While everything was not common knowledge to the entire congregation, key leaders knew of the specific situation and the crisis allowed the pastor to accelerate his gaining of leadership credibility. Two additional church pastors spoke of how they were forced to terminate staff members for disqualifying matters. One pastor spoke of a split that occurred early on over performance issues with a staff member resulting in termination. One pastor led the church to move out of his city and relocate to a smaller property. The building he sold was a historic fixture in the community, and a point of pride among his intransigent congregation. A church split followed and the pastor's leading through the crisis gained him credibility among the remaining members. Another pastor led the church to relocate out of a downtown district. A significant group refused to move with the church and a split ensued. The new location allowed the church to grow significantly, allowing the pastor to increase in leadership credibility. Still another pastor in a rural context described the need to change worship service programming and install screens. In his case, if the strategy failed he would lose all credibility. In his words, "We grew after that, and they saw I knew what I was doing. That's when they trusted me." Another pastor spoke of his crisis event and what he gained personally, noting he learned that "if you try to pastor a group of people and you have not had to risk something significant, you really have not become their leader."

Every pastor had a version of a crisis moment. Some of those related to sin issues or vision issues. Other related to strategy or dealing with dominating personalities. In every case the pastor had to choose to risk, and in doing so, he gained credibility to lead and the church advanced. While it would be purely speculative to consider if the revitalization could have been restored without a crisis moment, the fact that each pastor

could recount the moment and see how it contributed to his credibility to lead indicates, at least, that leadership involves risk and those willing to undertake the risk earn the credibility to lead effectively.

Leadership Coaching or Mentoring

One additional observation related to coaching and mentoring relationship was revealed during the study. The pastors were all asked if they were involved in a mentoring relationship with someone who was seeking to assist or develop them either personally or professionally. The question revealed that none of the pastors were presently in an ongoing coaching relationship. One pastor had been involved in several mentoring relationships throughout his ministry as part of select groups. Two pastors indicated being part of online church leadership and coaching communities in the past. Others relied on peer accountability groups and personal relationships with trusted advisors as well as pastors that were contacted when specific advice or information was needed. Two pastors also referred to select conferences that they attended for subjects like preaching, leadership, or other similar information-based meetings. Each pastor indicated a perceived value in a coaching or mentoring relationship but also observed that they did not have access to or specific knowledge of a suitable coaching opportunity for them.

Summary of Research Findings

The objective of this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study was to examine select church revitalizations to determine the influence of leadership structures, the leadership culture, and the leader's competencies on the successful church revitalization. In the first phase of the research, SBC Annual Church Profile data was examined resulting the identification of 716 revitalized churches. Each church in the sample had experienced a period of decline between 2006 and 2011, followed by at least two years of 10 percent or more annual growth in worship attendance between 2011 and 2016, while maintaining a minimum attendance to baptism ratio of 20:1. Attempts were

made to reach each of these churches and to enlist their participation in phase 2 of the project. The research team received survey responses from 129 churches as of September 13, 2018, resulting in a confidence interval of 7.82.¹⁵ From these 129 respondents, twelve churches were purposefully selected to participate in an in-depth interview related to the subject of leadership. Each of these phase 3 interviews were conducted by telephone or video conferencing. During the interviews, participants were asked several questions related to leadership structure, the leadership development process or leadership culture, and leadership competencies to identify those that were most important to the revitalization process. Participants were encouraged to share specific incidents of crisis, challenges, successes, leadership failures, and strategies utilized in leading the church toward revitalization. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded for analysis.

The third phase provided clarity on the importance of certain leadership competencies for church revitalization from the perspective of practitioners leading churches to revitalization. Furthermore, the interviews revealed that eleven of the twelve churches required a change in leadership structure from deacon-led churches to that of a pastor-led or pastor/staff-led churches. The remaining church was already structured as pastor-led. In addition, the study revealed that leadership development processes were non-existent or incidental prior to the revitalization and that the preferred approach of the majority of pastors following revitalization is one-to-one or one-to-three discipleship as the primary development mechanism for those members believed to have leadership potential. Finally, the sixteen competencies of a revitalization leader provided to the pastors in phase 2 were deemed to be important by a majority of people surveyed.

¹⁵ 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.

Research Questions

Research Question 1

Research question 1: What percentage of SBC churches are growing, plateaued, or declining, and what percentage of previously declining churches have experienced revitalization?

Phase 1 research identified among the 28,046 churches that had sufficient data to calculate five-year worship trends during the period between 2011-2016, 25.6 percent were growing, 25.71 percent were plateaued, and 48.69 percent had declined. Among the 13,743 churches designated as having declined, 5.21 percent had experienced revitalization.

Research Question 2

Research question 2: What was the influence of a church's leadership structure and decision-making process on the successful revitalization of a church?

In eleven of the twelve interviews conducted in phase 3, the declining churches were led by a deacon body, and most often by a dominant voice within that body, usually the chairman. While these structures were sometimes intentional and at other times simply came to exist in the absence of other effective leadership, all of the deacon-led churches were in decline. In the remaining church, the structure was pastor-led but competency issues had become evident that contributed to the decline. In every church revitalization, the structure was moved to an effective pastor-led structure as part of the revitalization process.

Research Question 3

Research question 3: What factors contributed to the transformation of the leadership culture of the church?

In most of the churches, no intentional leadership development culture existed prior to the revitalization.¹⁶ Incidental development did occur in limited form in some of the churches, but no defined process or pipeline was present. As Geiger and Peck state,

Clearly most church leaders do not hold the conviction of developing leaders, so they find ways to continue in ministry without it. They have learned to lead churches without developing leaders. They have learned to offer programs, conduct worship services, and manage budgets all without developing leaders.¹⁷

Some churches relied on Sunday school ministry to develop disciples, providing opportunities for others to lead in Sunday school; however, no discernible efforts to shape a broader culture of developing leaders was taking place. Following the revitalization, convictions of the leaders drove a change to the approach. The majority of pastors undertook some form of developing others as disciples with the expectation that leaders would emerge. A second motivating factor presented among several churches was that as the churches grew, the need for more workers and leaders became unavoidable. In these cases, pastors were faced with attempting to add staff members or to equip members for the task.

Research Question 4

Research question 4: What influence did those factors that contributed to the leadership culture of the church have on the church's revitalization?

The research did not identify a specific causal relationship between developing leaders and the church's revitalization; however, one finding was observed from the study related to convictions by the leaders to develop others with leadership potential (see table

¹⁶ The scope of leadership culture is broad. While the initial expectation of the research was that church revitalization leaders were intentionally executing leadership change theory or operating according to specific models, the questions failed to elicit such responses; instead, the participants' responses indicated an effective but practical, even intuitive sense of leadership capabilities that effected change. The participants focused on how their efforts in developing leaders would practically influence the restoration of health in the church leading to revitalization. Further study will be required to probe the underlying leadership theories implemented by the church revitalization pastors and will be discussed in chapter 5 of this thesis.

¹⁷ Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 20.

15). During the period of decline, one-third of the phase 3 churches stated that development occurred through small group ministry or incidentally as potential leaders were identified. Following the revitalization, eleven out of twelve churches stated that there was an intentional effort on the part of the leader to develop leaders. The approach varied based on context, but a conviction in the leader's heart precipitated an intentionality for discipleship.

Research Question 5

Research question 5: What leader competencies were most prevalent among successful revitalizers?

Phase 2 validated that the sixteen leader competencies were important to the majority of leaders (see table 12). The pastors in phase 3 indicated that five competencies were most important: (1) willingness to confront/church discipline, (2) relationship building, (3) gospel orientation, (4) missional focus, and (5) contextual awareness and planning (see table 16). Furthermore, during phase 3 interviews, every pastor demonstrated strong people skills and contextual awareness. Each pastor was acutely aware of his context and recounted events when different approaches were taken to address pressing situations from changing worship programming, to addressing change in leadership structures, to exercising discernment and courage in addressing leadership crises. The referenced competencies indicate interpersonal skills. Whether these skills were the product of innate competencies possessed by the leader or a practical competency based on acquired wisdom, the presence of interpersonal skills was apparent.¹⁸

¹⁸ The research design did not possess an instrument for measuring interpersonal skills or emotional intelligence. While the presence of the competency was obvious, it was not rated as important by the participants. One explanation is that pastors intuitively functioned with good interpersonal skills without actively seeking to employ them. Additional research would be required to identify more on interpersonal competencies among revitalization pastors.

Research Question 6

Research question 6: In what ways did the prevalent leader competencies influence the church's successful revitalization?

While each of the sixteen competencies were evaluated as important by the majority of pastors in phase 2, the phase 3 interviews revealed only five competencies that were referenced three or more times, a number indicating the quality was very important to at least 25 percent of the phase 3 recipients. The competencies influenced the revitalization in three following. (1) Relationship building provided the foundation for trust and catalyst for movement among the people. The participants saw their ability to relate to people as helpful in accomplishing the work. (2) Missional focus, gospel orientation, and contextual awareness provided the direction of movement and the call to action. (3) A willingness to confront church discipline detailed the corrective actions necessary to bring about change. With one-third of the pastors referencing the importance of this final competency, its value must not be overlooked. Declining churches are not functioning according to the Lord's design, and all conduct contrary to the Lord's design calls for repentance. The pastor's willingness to call for repentance is essential to setting the church on a proper trajectory toward health and new life.

Evaluation of Research Design

This study followed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design that collects and analyzes quantitative data in the first phase that is then followed by a second qualitative phase that illuminates and explains data from the quantitative phase.¹⁹ Data collected during the quantitative phase was explained during the in-depth interviews conducted in the qualitative phase. The design was sufficient for the stated research purposes. Furthermore, the data was obtained from a population consisting exclusively of SBC churches. The continuity of doctrine, ecclesiological norms, and meticulous

¹⁹ John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 70-71.

recordkeeping through the annual church profile (ACP) submissions of the church contributed significantly to the quality of data used in the study.

Strengths

The primary strength of this study is that the data comes from successful pastors involved in 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 interviews employed open-ended questions about events, process, and characteristics of leadership structures, leader development culture, and a leader's characteristics. The nature of the interviews promoted information gathering that was more comprehensive than could have been obtained with a more formal structure of inquiry. Additionally, phase 3 participants were purposefully selected to represent a diversity of backgrounds, education levels, geographic regions, and ministry contexts in order to broaden the application of the findings of this study.

Challenges

The study focused on church revitalizations and successful revitalization churches represent an incredibly small segment of SBC churches. The study sought to identify principled practices employed by successful revitalizers, thus requiring stringent criteria for identification. Church health can be masked in various ways and church growth statistics can be skewed through acquisitions or inconsistent criteria in reporting. For these reasons, the study employed criteria to measure conversion growth as well as statistical health over an extended period of time. The criteria reduced the sample to only 716 churches across the SBC.

A second challenge related to the data source. In SBC churches, the pastor rarely completes the annual church profile (ACP) submission. In most cases, the church

clerk or an administrative employee completes the report and provides their personal contact information on the report. Working through the available contact information created a degree of separation that proved challenging as it prevented, in many cases, access directly to the senior leader of the church. Enlistment of the senior leader in phase 2 would prove less difficult if contact with the leader could be made directly.

A third challenge pertained to the instrument itself in phase 2. Pastors are bombarded with requests for assistance, opinion polls, even customer service surveys on dining experiences. The constant barrage of requests for electronic surveys has a negative impact on the pastor's willingness to participate in another survey, regardless of how kingdom-minded he is or how important the study promises to be. While the research team sought to overcome this barrier by personally attempting telephone contact with the pastors to enlist their help, the efforts proved to be only marginally effective. A written letter with a link to a unique domain containing the survey itself may have proven more successful.

Conclusion

The study collected quantitative data from 129 revitalized churches and examined key areas of leadership structure, leader development culture, and leader competencies. The study identified five frequently recurring competencies that were important to the revitalization efforts. In addition, the study revealed that every revitalized church in phase 3 had adopted a pastor-led or pastor/staff-led leadership structure as an essential component of the revitalization effort. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of pastors in phase 3 had adopted a leader development process involving some form of mentoring, preferring a one-on-one or one-to-three type model for investing in disciples with leadership potential.

These findings represent one of the largest studies of church revitalizations in the last decade. The findings will prove helpful in the academic and practical training of potential revitalization pastors and will be influential in encouraging pastors seeking to revitalize their churches by providing practical insights and principled practices that have

been proven successful. Implications of the research and recommendations for further research are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

It is widely reported and accepted that the church in North America is declining in membership, participation, and influence.¹ In fact, Mark Clifton asserts that only 15 percent of SBC churches, the largest protestant denomination in North America, are “healthy, growing, and multiplying churches.”² Thom Rainer, has stated in recent days that the statistics are less bleak than previously thought and only 65 percent of North American churches are plateaued or are in decline.³ Rainer’s conclusion is based, in some respect, on shifting criteria for defining what a plateaued or declining church actually is.⁴

This study concluded, based on statistical analysis of eleven years of ACP data provided to the SBC by its churches, that 3 out of 4 churches (74.4 percent) are losing ground.⁵ While this number is daunting, there is encouragement in the fact that 1 in 4 SBC churches are growing. Furthermore, the necessity and importance of this study which

¹ For example, Harry L. Reeder III, *From Embers to a Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004), 7-8. See also Rainer who stated that “90 percent of churches are losing ground in their communities.” Thom S. Rainer, *114 Things You Need to Know about Revitalizing Churches*, chap. 2, accessed November 29, 2017, <http://mittensynod.server303.com/114-things-you-need-to-know-about-revitalizing-churches/>.

² Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 5-6.

³ Thom S. Rainer, “Dispelling the 80 Percent Myth of Declining Churches,” June 28, 2017, accessed November 29, 2017, <http://thomrainer.com/2017/06/dispelling-80-percent-myth-declining-churches/>.

⁴ Rainer recommends using worship attendance rather than church membership numbers when determining whether the church is plateaued or declining.

⁵ For the purpose of this study, a church was identified as plateaued or declining if it had experienced less than 10 percent growth in primary worship attendance over a five-year period.

sought to identify the influences that contributed to revitalization of formerly declining churches cannot be overstated.

Numerous factors work together to influence church health, and thus, church revitalization. Phase 2 of this study examined six critical areas, including discipleship, evangelism, missions, pastoral leadership, prayer, and the worship gathering.⁶ This thesis sought to identify the influence of leadership structures, leadership culture, and a leader's competencies on the church revitalization, particularly as these three components worked together.

Separating pastoral leadership from the other five areas proved difficult at best. Leadership connotes the action of leading and the areas where pastors lead involve things like discipleship, missions, evangelism, prayer, and the primary worship gathering. Pastoral leadership permeates each of these areas, proving the maxim that "everything rises and falls on leadership." Still, there is a symbiotic relationship between the leadership structure of a church, the leader's competencies, and the culture of leadership development. Identifying these three areas as they emerged in the revitalized churches was the focus of this thesis.

Leadership and Church Revitalization

Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson note in *Comeback Churches* that leadership is the single most influential factor in church revitalization.⁷ While no one would argue that revitalization can occur apart from the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in the church, neither would anyone argue that churches without leaders experience revitalization.

⁶ I was part of a research team of seven doctoral students under the supervision of Dr. Michael Wilder of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Each researcher had an assigned focal area of the project and the other areas are reported in additional theses. This thesis is focused specifically on the role of pastoral leadership and its influence on church revitalization.

⁷ Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B & H, 2007), 35-36.

Leaders bring vision, clarity of mission, and encouragement in the throes of everyday activity, as well as a host of other functional necessities. God has seen fit to use leaders to shepherd His people. Leadership is essential. Stetzer and Dodson note that “leaders help churches see that their real problems are spiritual,” and further observe that leadership was necessary to “create an atmosphere for revitalization in these comeback churches.”⁸ In phase 2 of the study, 86.67 percent of revitalization pastors rated leadership as important to the revitalization.⁹ Furthermore, as previously stated, pastoral leadership was integral to the facilitation of strategic initiatives in the other areas examined in this research project; therefore, the importance of leadership is unassailable.

The Role of Leadership Structure

One key observation from the study was that every phase 3 church operated as a pastor-led or pastor/staff-led church. Most of the declining churches were led by deacons, or typically by a prominent deacon during the period of decline. As part of the revitalization strategy, the pastor shifted this structure to one more conducive to implementing changes that influenced revitalization. The study does not imply that the deacon-led structure caused the decline; however, it does indicate that shifting the structure was essential in the church’s revitalization. Several reasons may explain this implication.

First, the biblical offices of pastor and deacon are distinct and complementary. Pastors, by divine assignment, are called to shepherd the church, an assignment that is multi-faceted but one that includes leading, oversight, and equipping (Jer 23:4, Eph 4:11-12, John 21:15-17, 1 Pet 5:1-4).¹⁰ In fact, one of the core qualities that must be present in

⁸ Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 36.

⁹ See table 8 in chap. 4.

¹⁰ Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 53. See also Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Colorado Springs: Lewis and Roth, 1995). Strauch states, “Elders shepherd the church of God. So to shepherd a local church means, among other things, to lead the church. . . . Elders, then, lead, direct, govern, manage, and

every pastor is influence, as indicated by the fact that he must be “above reproach” and “have a good reputation with those outside the church” (1 Tim 3:2, 7). Deacons are by nature and calling, servants (Acts 6:1-3, 6).¹¹ The distinction is not one of value or worth, but one of role and responsibility. Churches consistently operating in obedience with God’s divine design for leadership are positioned to experience spiritual blessing.

Second, pastors are more consistently present and better trained to lead in revitalization. This observation does not negate that deacons may possess wisdom from age or experience in context; however, in most cases, the pastor is “closer to” the daily activities than a deacon body. Many pastors possess some form of training that increases their exposure to best church leadership practices for leading churches to become healthy discipleship cultures. Bible colleges and seminaries are primary conduits of this training. Among the phase 3 interviews, all of the pastors had attended some college with more than two-thirds earning a Master of Divinity degree or above in Seminary.¹²

Third, pastors typically bring an “outsider’s perspective” to the church, promoting greater objectivity. All of the pastors in phase 3 of the study, with one exception, were new to the churches they led to experience revitalization. In the one case where the revitalization pastor was not new, the pastor grew up in the church but had been away at seminary as well as part of another church staff prior to returning to his home church as the senior pastor. Even though this pastor was not new to the congregation, he did have

care for the flock of God.” Ibid., 25. Also see Benjamin L. Merkle and Thomas R. Schreiner, eds., *Shepherding God’s Flock: Biblical Leadership in the New Testament and Beyond* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014); Benjamin L. Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer: One Office in the Early Church*, Studies in Biblical Literature 57 (New York: Peter Lang, 2003); and Timothy Paul Jones and Michael S. Wilder, *The God Who Goes before You: A Biblical and Theological Vision for Leadership* (Nashville: B & H, 2018).

¹¹ James W. Garrett, *New Testament Church Leadership: An Examination of the New Testament Patterns of Church Leadership and their Application in the Contemporary Church* (Tulsa, OK: Doulos Press, 2013), 175. See also Strauch who notes that the body of deacons were the equivalent of modern day congregational social workers, with the responsibility of collecting funds, ministering to physical and spiritual needs, and relieving suffering as agents of mercy. Alexander Strauch, *The New Testament Deacon: The Church’s Minister of Mercy* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1992), 156.

¹² See table 3 in chap. 4.

perspective gained through exposure to other contexts, which proved valuable in the revitalization vision. Furthermore, when a new pastor comes to a church there is an expectation of new vision and fresh initiative. In these cases, the freshness of leadership often serves as a catalyst for movement. Familiarity can limit vision and it can become a stumbling block to credibility. Jesus said, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own hometown and in his own household” (Matt 13:57).

Pastors with great vision must still have a mechanism to implement it. If the decision-making structure is not conducive to change, then the actions necessary to revitalize cannot be implemented. This statement does not imply that pastors are sole actors; rather, as Rainer and Stetzer point out in *Transformational Church*, a transformational church changes to become a “missional church with vibrant leadership that leads the whole church to engage in the mission of God.”¹³ The leader must lead the people to embrace necessary changes because change itself is non-negotiable. Every aspect from the vision to change, the call to change, the process of change, and the purpose for change requires a leader to effectively execute. Without change and the ability to implement it, declining churches cannot experience revitalization. Structure alone, though, can no more facilitate revitalization than a high-performance sports car can operate without a driver.

The Role of Leadership Culture

In addition to an effective leadership structure, there must be an intentional culture conducive to developing leaders. Developing others is essential, especially in a church organization where people are the raw material, the production mechanism, and the product itself. Developing an effective culture of leadership development is a complex undertaking.

¹³ Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville: B & H, 2010), 78.

Leadership culture is a broad subject to consider. Culture, as Schein defines it, is “both a ‘here and now’ dynamic phenomenon and a coercive background structure that influences us in multiple ways.”¹⁴ Schein continues,

Culture is ultimately created, embedded, evolved, and ultimately manipulated by leaders. At the same time, with group maturity, culture comes to constrain, stabilize, and provide structure and meaning to the group members even to the point of ultimately specifying what kind of leadership will be acceptable in the future.¹⁵

In one sense, the leader establishes the culture. In another sense, the culture provides structure to how the leader influences the organization. Malphurs describes the church’s culture as the “unique expression of its shared values and beliefs.”¹⁶ The sheer importance of culture should make it one of the highest priorities to address in church revitalization

The church’s culture encompasses what it believes about God, about the church, and about its mission, the values assigned to these beliefs, and how the church expresses these beliefs in its behaviors.¹⁷ The leadership culture, as an outworking of beliefs and values, is an expression of how the church is to be led and how that belief is to be prioritized, embedded, and replicated throughout the organization. Hebert argues that organizational health was vitally dependent on a healthy organizational culture.¹⁸ Leadership culture then, as a subset of the church’s overall culture, must be shaped if it is to produce healthy leadership in the church. Hebert posited that Jesus intentionally acted

¹⁴ Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 3.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Aubrey Malphurs, *Look before You Lead: How to Discern & Shape Your Church Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 20.

¹⁷ Ibid., 25.

¹⁸ Andrew Clayton Hebert, “Shaping Church Culture: Table Fellowship and Teaching in Luke-Acts” (Ed.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 110.

to shape culture in the early church, and that this cultural manipulation contributed to the health of the early church.¹⁹

Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck assert in *Designed to Lead* that “the Church needs leaders who build a culture of leadership development from a foundation of precise theological convictions.”²⁰ In other words, the church should correctly understand that, at its core, it is a leader production factory. Whether leaders in the home, in culture, in the community, or wherever the people of God are dispersed, they are called to lead. This study demonstrated that declining churches failed to effectively disciple people to the point of qualified leadership. Sixty-six percent of leaders in phase 2 note that no effective leadership development was taking place prior to the revitalization. Revitalization leaders addressed this deficiency and 70.58 percent believed that leadership development played a significant role in the revitalization.²¹ Among the phase 3 participants, no leadership development, other than through small groups, was occurring prior to revitalization. Eleven of the 12 phase 3 pastors implemented some form of leadership development subsequent to the revitalization. Surprisingly, the revitalization pastors did not see this as particularly distinct from disciple-making in general; rather, the development of leaders was a natural outworking of effective discipleship. The majority had undertaken a one-to-one mentoring approach with people they selectively engaged. Many pastors determined who they would disciple based on opportunity or relational chemistry. Others made the determination based on perceived leadership potential. One pastor described his approach:

Where you reside, I meet with you. At any time during the month I meet with somewhere between fifteen to twenty people on a personal one-on-one meeting. I ask, ‘How are you doing? How are you growing? What are you learning? Have you read this book? Have you looked at this? Have you read this blog?’ You know, that type of thing.

¹⁹ Hebert, “Shaping Church Culture,” 110.

²⁰ Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 103.

²¹ See table 12 in chap 4.

This pastor noted that he also required this type of “in the field” discipleship of his staff, expecting them to spend 30 percent of their time in the field and outside of the church. When asked why he chose this approach, the pastor explained,

When I came to be the pastor, there were ninety-one people on committees and only one of those was an adult or a youth that was led to Christ here. They all had joined from other churches. It is our goal and our intention, and we are intentional, that we lead people to Christ and attach them to people that have the ability to help them become functional in their faith. The people that we baptize, half of them are adults that come from the pagan world. A third of the men that serve as deacons are adults that we led to Christ. Probably fifty-percent of our Sunday School teachers are adults that we led to Christ. If I don’t have time in my schedule to disciple them, then they are attached to a staff member or to a Sunday School teacher that has been growing. Over time, we begin to give them opportunity to share their faith. We also give them an opportunity, if they exhibit the gifts and calling of a teacher or a leader, to begin to lead or teach. This is just what we do.

Most of the pastors indicated similar approaches in the way that they simply disciplined people and looked for leaders and servants to emerge. While these pastors either avoided or bristled at the term “organic” as a descriptor of the process, the process exhibited qualities of an organic outcome. In other words, the leaders simply won people to Christ and disciplined them. This was done in obedience to Christ’s command (Matt 28:18-20); however, the discipling process served to sift the discipleship “crowd” in order to identify those with leadership potential. The approach, whether intentional or incidental, is consistent with the leadership development culture essentials described by Geiger and Peck:

Leadership development apart from discipleship becomes overly skill-based. If leaders are developed apart from Jesus, the emphasis is inevitably on skills and not the heart transformed through Christ. Divorcing leadership development from discipleship can leave people more skilled and less sanctified. And when competency and skill outpace character, leaders are set up for a fall. We don’t serve people well if we teach them how to lead without teaching them how to follow Him. We don’t serve leaders well if we develop their skills without shepherding their character. It is difficult to say this humbly, but maturing Christ-followers make better leaders.²²

One pastor, in a large church context, described his approach to the development process differently. For several years, his approach had been to identify twelve couples to

²² Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 160.

disciple as a group. These men were purposefully chosen because the pastor sensed leadership potential in them. In the one-year process, the pastor would meet monthly with the men as a group for discipleship while his wife did the same with the twelve wives. Ultimately, this process functioned similarly to the one-on-one process described above since it focused on discipleship and served to identify leaders who would take up the responsibility of leading in the church in various areas consistent with their gifting. The different approach mirrored how the pastor had been disciplined. He described being part of three different discipling environments in his ministry that were similar to the one he implemented.

Two surprising insights emerged in the phase 3 interviews pertaining to leadership development. First, every leader articulated a desire for greater effectiveness in leadership development. While none would choose to change their current strategy, many would have modified their approach if given the opportunity. One pastor noted, “I would have started earlier.” Another pastor, recognizing that the church’s growth was currently restricted by a lack of qualified leaders, related that the discussion of developing others was a current and pressing conversation. In his particular case, the staff was assembling a training process for onboarding new leaders while looking for a better means to disciple on a large scale. Still another pastor was preparing to roll out a widespread discipleship initiative within weeks modeled around Bible reading, prayer, and accountable relationships.²³

The second insight related to the intuitive nature of leadership development exhibited by the pastors. I anticipated that revitalization pastors would articulate a philosophical approach to leadership development, identifying particular change theories regarding the culture, developmental models, and other underlying philosophies that

²³ While the pastor did not identify the Robby Gallaty model as his template, he did identify it as an influence. For more information, see Robby Gallaty, *Growing Up: How to Be a Disciple Who Makes Disciples* (Nashville: B & H, 2013).

informed the leader's objectives. What emerged in the study was that the leaders were functioning pragmatically rather than philosophically. As practitioner/pastors, the leaders exhibited an intuitive approach to developing others while keeping an "eye on the horizon" for upcoming needs of the growing church. When asked about leadership culture, the pastors responded by discussing discipleship and development as it existed in their church. For these pastors, leadership was an organic outworking of discipleship. Their focus was practical rather than aspirational. As such, this thesis failed to identify philosophies or strategies that undergirded the shaping of the leadership culture in the church. Though the leaders were influencing the practices of the church and establishing a particular leadership culture within the church, their actions seemed intuitive and incidental.²⁴ One explanation for this may be related to an illustration from rifle marksmanship.

Effective rifle marksmanship requires mastery of several factors: the weapon, ammunition, body position, shooter confidence, breath-control of the shooter, weapon calibration, and proper sight picture to name a few.²⁵ Obtaining a proper sight picture requires that the shooter have a strong and clear vision of the weapon's front sight post. The target, which may be several hundred yards away, appears "fuzzy" in the background, behind the post. As the human eye cannot focus on two objects that are significantly far apart, the shooter must choose to *focus* on one, while *observing* the other. In the case of leadership culture, the pastors focused on discipling believers and providing them with opportunities to serve (front sight post) while keeping the objective of changing the leadership culture in the background (target). In marksmanship, if the two focal points are reversed and the shooter focuses on the target while losing sight of the front post, he is

²⁴ For discussion of culture and a biblical model of shaping culture, see Hebert, "Shaping Church Culture"; and Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 101-50.

²⁵ The illustration of sight picture is dually drawn from military training and personal experience as a Military Police SRT Sharpshooter. I had significant experience and was rated as an "expert" marksman while serving in the US Army. Additionally, I served for several years as an urban sharpshooter as part of a law enforcement Special Reaction Team (SRT).

almost certain to misalign and fail to engage the target. In the cases of the phase 3 churches, the pastors' focus on making disciples and allowing changes to the leadership culture to organically occur was the only effective choice, even if arrived at incidentally or intuitively.

The Role of a Leader's Competencies

In addition to the leadership structure and the leadership culture, a third area of consideration related to the competencies possessed by the pastors of the revitalized churches. Steve Hudson's works sought to identify a competency model for revitalization pastors in the SBC.²⁶ Hudson identified 36 expert competencies, defined as those that differentiate superior from average performers.²⁷ This study took the top 8 competencies from the competency dictionary and from the emerging competency list of Hudson's work and placed them before the revitalization leaders for consideration and to rank by importance.²⁸ In phase 2, participants were asked to rate on a Likert-type scale the 16 competencies. The 3 most frequently selected competencies were getting members engaged, teamwork and cooperation, and relationship building, each with higher than 90 percent selection rate for importance.²⁹ In phase 3, pastors were asked to rank up to 3 competencies from among the 16. Surprisingly, the most important competency among the phase 3 participants was "willingness to confront/church discipline," a competency that ranked 14 of 16 in phase 2.³⁰ Hudson also determined this to be one of the top three

²⁶ Joseph Stephen Hudson, "A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Churches: A Mixed Methods Study" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 133.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 124-25.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

²⁹ See table 11 in chap. 4.

³⁰ See table 16 in chap. 4.

emerging competencies noted in the Behavioral Event Inventory (BEI) of his study.³¹

Hudson observed,

Perhaps the most surprising emerging competency was a willingness to confront. However, the reality of confrontation as a crucial component of church revitalization should come as no surprise. . . . Revitalization situations are particularly likely to have challenging and unhealthy dynamics within the church. The New Testament regularly calls church leaders to be on guard and confront others who are causing division and unhealthy church situations.³²

The phase 3 participant interviews provided insight into this apparent discrepancy as it related to another emerging finding: the role of crisis (which will be discussed below). Each pastor in phase 3 indicated the need to address a leadership crisis event during the revitalization. Each of these events required decisive action on the part of the pastor and the events served as pivotal moments in the leader's journey. Often, these crises involved addressing sin issues. One pastor described an encounter involving deacon leadership and disharmony in the deacon's family. He noted a conflict situation involving bitterness and unrepentant church members. While the specific offenses were within a family structure, the matter was well known in the church and in the community.

The pastor related,

You know, the reality is, there's been people in this church that have been having the same issues in families for twenty-five years. So, we had to deal with it. I'm not saying that we fully confronted everything, but if you don't confront it, I mean it's just gonna fester and affect everybody else, and it's not fun. But, it's an issue of faithfulness to me.

Another pastor spoke of well-known and unresolved sin in the church and associated the need to act with a biblical mandate, pointing to Joshua 7 and the sin of Achan. This pastor explained that it was foolish to expect God to bless the church while there was sin in the camp.

³¹ Hudson, "Competency Model," 151.

³² *Ibid.*, 153.

Mark Clifton provides insight on how entrenched sin, left unaddressed, contributes to a church's decline. The blame in such matters, for Clifton, lay at the feet of those in leadership:

Don't blame the older members for the church's struggles. They are not the reason the church isn't thriving. The truth is someone, a former pastor or many former pastors, failed these people. They are the kind of church members they are because of the men who have led them. They may be contrary. They may criticize and condemn. They may gossip and plot against you. But they do that because previous pastors and leaders failed to model church leadership for them. They were never disciplined for such behavior. In fact, if they 'ran off' a pastor, they felt—in effect—rewarded for that behavior. It reinforced that this behavior is a way to achieve their goals.³³

Reeder addresses the need to confront sin as well:

In the history of a declining or dead church, there are almost always some things that were dead wrong—which means that the church is in need of repentance. This is not as depressing as it sounds, because it presents an opportunity for God to do a new and exciting work in the church when we humble ourselves, repent, and pray (cf. 2 Chron. 7:14). It may be that God has been withholding His blessing because the body has not repented, and when it does, He will open the floodgates and pour out His grace in unprecedented measure.³⁴

The study points to a difficult truth: revitalization, by definition, implies a dying church has been restored to health, but no health can come while the sickness of sin ravages the body of Christ. Confronting sin is daunting because it wars with the spirit of the confronter. Often, leaders abdicate their responsibility, giving in to a spiritualized back-up plan of simply praying for a resolution. Prayer is essential, but one must not overlook the fact that just as with Joshua and Achan, God has called the leader to rise up from prayer and confront the sin (Josh 7:10-12; Matt 18:12-17).³⁵ The difficulty of confronting sin and the relative infrequency of church discipline may provide some rationale as to why

³³ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 57.

³⁴ Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame*, 37-38.

³⁵ For an excellent treatment on the subject of confrontation and church discipline, see Robert K. Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012).

“*willingness to confront sin*” ranked so low in phase 2, but was deemed so vitally important to the phase 3 participants.

The Role of Crisis

A finding emerged in the phase 3 interviews that was not considered earlier in the study. Each leader spoke of the difficult advantage facilitated by a significant crisis in the process of revitalization. Some of the crises mentioned by phase 3 participants included immorality in the church or within the staff, financial impropriety, staff terminations, excessive church debt, and refitting the worship facility with screens and projectors. Each context varied, and apparent in the interviews was that the installation of screens and projectors was as risky as terminating a staff-member, depending on the dynamics of the context. The unanticipated result of these incidents was that the crisis accelerated the pastor’s ability to lead. As the pastor engaged the crisis, he gained credibility to lead. The congregation saw the pastor’s shared sacrifice. The sacrifice resulted in empathy toward the pastor and inspired action where apathy once resided. Regarding moving the church to a new location at the recommendation of a consultant, one pastor explained,

One of the things we found out when we moved was that not everyone wanted to go . . . and we had a big split, not a splinter. About seven percent, 53 members, decided not to go with us. And I was amazed at how much consternation and trouble fifty-three people could create. But, through that struggle, our church became much more of a praying church, much more of a ‘depending on God’ church. Now those people left. And so when they left a lot of our problems were gone. I preached on being a new church leading up to the move. The Sunday we moved, that was fulfilled, it really was fulfilled and I could see it being fulfilled. I said, ‘we now have a new church for a new building.’ I really believe we brought a whole new church to the new location, because all of a sudden, people were so engaged in the mission and in the strategies of the church. It was just incredible.

According to this pastor, the new location had some benefits due to the new location and the newer facility, but the greatest factor was a newfound dependency on prayer and experience of community with one another due to the shared experience of crisis. This pastor fought against the crisis, hoping to lose no one in a church split; however, his resolve to lead the church to relocate in the face of adversity resulted in

leadership credibility. Each participant in phase 3 had a version of a story of how they gained through the crisis experience.

The Role of Interpersonal Understanding

One of my expectations in this study related to the competency of interpersonal understanding, or emotional intelligence. Due to the highly relational work of revitalization and the requisite skills to implement change, I expected a higher value on the importance of interpersonal understanding. This study specifically excluded an instrument to evaluate emotional intelligence; however, it was expected that responses to the phase 2 portion and coded responses in phase 3 would indicate its importance. Regarding emotional intelligence, Albert Mohler states,

As it turns out, the ability to lead people depends on the leader's capacity to develop and deploy what Goleman identified as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill. . . . If the leader lacks these elements of emotional intelligence, it really might not matter how otherwise intelligent he is.³⁶

Mark Clifton writes of the necessity for the pastor to have a high emotional awareness.³⁷ Goleman asserts that emotional intelligence “abilities rather than IQ or technical skills emerge as the ‘discriminating’ competency that best predicts who among a group of very smart people will lead most ably.”³⁸ Hudson observes that organizational awareness, a competency heavily related to interpersonal understanding, was displayed at a high level among his revitalization interviews. He states,

These pastors displayed a keen understanding of the organizational dynamic within their church in almost every critical incident shared. These men were particularly adept at understanding how power dynamics worked within the church anticipating how changes would be received, recognizing where change may produce friction,

³⁶ Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2012), 30-31.

³⁷ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 134.

³⁸ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ*, 10th anniversary ed. (New York: Bantam Dell, 2005), xv.

and showing awareness of how current practice and changes affect their position within the community in which they served.³⁹

The study did not affirm my expectation. Only 31 percent of phase 2 participants rated this competency as highly important.⁴⁰ No phase 3 participants selected interpersonal understanding as one of their top three competencies. No participants directly spoke of interpersonal understanding in the interviews; however, as with Hudson's observation, each participant displayed strong interpersonal skills during the interviews. As with the discussion on leadership culture, perhaps the participants functioned instinctively rather than intentionally. As the proverb goes, "Fish are the last to discover water."⁴¹

There were numerous examples of pastors employing interpersonal understandings. For instance, several pastors spoke of needing to implement changes in the church and finding that the structure was intransigent. In each case, but in unique ways, the pastors sought out more amiable environments to gain acceptance to the changes. Whether that was going directly to the congregation or moving decisions from deacons to a church council, these pastors exhibited an awareness of who was in the room and who would be resistant to his recommendations for change. One pastor spoke of how he read the personality of his predecessor and chose to change his own means of relating to the congregation:

I followed a guy who was impersonal. Very impersonal. And so the thing I did immediately was I made sure I hung out before and after the [Sunday] service, walking through the auditorium. Shook hands, patted on the backs, and I became a people guy and that gave me buy-in immediately.

³⁹ Hudson, "Competency Model," 143-44.

⁴⁰ See table 11 in chap. 4. An additional 41.18 percent rated the competency as important, resulting in a combined rating of 72.55 percent, placing it 11 out of 16 in priority.

⁴¹ One of the conclusions Hudson drew as to why such a prevalent competency as interpersonal awareness/organizational awareness emerged in the BEI protocol was that the nature of the interviews allowed the competency to be revealed, a methodology that was proven to be effective at "generating the most valuable data for validating competency models and discovering new competencies." Hudson, "Competency Model," 138.

The pastor went on to relate that while he thought he would lead by vision from the pulpit, he actually led through lay influencers in the congregation and through those he selected to be on committees. Here, though the pastor did not rate interpersonal awareness highly at all, he modeled a keen understanding of it. Another pastor related how he realigned the leadership structure from being a deacon-led structure to being pastor-led. In the process, he observed how the deacons had lost initiative to act beyond the directives he provided. This pastor spoke of implementing a strategy to increase buy-in from the deacons so their fervency for mission would reignite. Consequently, there were no disagreements or complaints with the deacons and their functioning. The pastor accepted the responsibility for the changes, read the effect in those he led, and was working to change his approach in order to invigorate his deacons. This is another strong example of the typical interpersonal awareness exhibited in the phase 3 interviews.

Emerging Themes on Interplay of Structure, Culture, and Competencies

Another expectation was that a strong interplay would emerge between leadership structure, culture, and a leader's competencies. The study partially supported this expectation. As already discussed, each leader was able to make changes in the leadership structure to influence the church's revitalization. Related to culture, not every church leader set out to modify the culture as part of the revitalization strategy. Culture can be a tool to bring about change; however, culture is also the by-product of change. In this way, while pastors focused on discipling others, there is no clear indication that they sought to modify the culture. As previously noted, culture was the target but the focal point (front sight) was developing others spiritually. In addition, the leader's initiative in the areas of mission, evangelism, prayer, etc., while not discussed in this thesis, likely influenced the culture as well.

The portion of the study on leader's competencies affirmed, in large part, Hudson's findings regarding the development of a competency model for church

revitalizers. What is not clear from the scope of this study is whether the competencies, independent of factors like structure and culture, could still influence revitalization. While plausible that, given enough time, a leader could competently influence changes to structure and culture, there is no indication that a competent leader without an effective leadership structure could influence the church toward revitalization. Similarly, an advantageous structure with an incompetent leader is likely to fail. As for culture, particularly a leadership development culture, it does seem possible for the leader to influence revitalization without an effective culture; however, the likelihood of long-term sustainment of revitalization is bleak since leadership to support growth is necessary.

One pastor spoke directly to the interplay and related that a pastor either needed the competencies or he needed to know how to bring members on his team that were strong where he was weak. The rest, he felt, was possible to change if the leader was good enough and willing to pay the price. Another pastor stated that competencies were critical but structure was necessary as well. He related, “The Lord Himself couldn’t lead some of our churches, and we know He was competent. You can be the greatest leader in the world, but if you have no followers, you’re really not the greatest in the world.” Another pastor provided a perspective that exemplified the interplay:

Competency is important, but we discuss around here whether leaders are born or if they are made. I think it is both. Either way, you have to develop others. If not, you cannot impact more people. So, naturally, I have to get more people to think like I do, whatever that looks like. People that have the same heart and same mindset. So yes, you have to invest in them and develop them, give them the vision. As you grow as a church, though, you have to have structures to support it. Even a church like mine which is highly relational has to have structure. There’s only so many people you can relate to. I hate to institutionalize it, but at some point you have to formalize some of the decision making or you max out your ability to lead.

Areas for Future Research

Given the findings of this study, several areas, if explored further, may contribute to equipping pastors who are engaged in revitalization work.

First, further study is needed in regard to the findings on leadership structure: that all revitalized churches in phase 3 were pastor or pastor/staff-led, and that the structure

appears to be significant in the revitalization effort. Further study of leadership structure contrasting growing churches with those in decline could prove helpful. Empirical evidence of a leadership structure's correlation to a church's health could be a tool to assist revitalizers in "making the case" for change. For many, leadership structure involving a plurality of elder/pastors, a plurality of lay and ordained elders, or a pastor with staff is a matter of biblical conviction. While practical arguments can be made in support of any of the models, the Bible is sufficiently silent, leaving room for honest disagreement among godly people regarding the correct leadership structure. A study of leadership structure among healthy and growing churches, beyond just those that are revitalized could inform the discussions and influence leaders' efforts to modify leadership structure.

Second, additional study could be helpful as it relates to leadership culture. While the pastors in this study implemented discipleship strategies for development, their efforts were more intuitive than intentional. The question remains on the larger scope of culture, and would a better understanding of culture and its influence on change, health, and growth of the church empower pastors to more effectively influence revitalization? Further, knowledge of effective leader development strategies could also contribute in meaningful ways since most pastors believed that developing leaders contributed significantly to revitalization. Finally, a longitudinal study testing discipleship and leadership development over three to five years could also contribute to information used to equip leaders to better equip churches.

Third, the fact that revitalization pastors displayed good interpersonal awareness without directly acknowledging its importance leaves unanswered questions. If experts are correct and interpersonal skills can be developed, and if interpersonal skills are considered more valuable than other competencies in organizations beyond the church, is there value in seeking to understand how to assess and equip pastors in these areas? For instance, could a longitudinal study of seminary graduates who received an emotional intelligence assessment as part of seminary curriculum give insight into better ways to train pastors?

Research Implications

No study of this sort should be undertaken simply to acquire knowledge. Given the importance of revitalization efforts and the state of decline in the majority of SBC churches, it is incumbent upon SBC entities with a vested interest in the academy and the church to consider these findings and how they inform respective efforts.

Implications for Education and Training

Given that thousands of seminary graduates will step off of a campus next year and be immediately engaged in a revitalization context, this study bears implications for the academy. The church, correctly or otherwise, expects that a seminary graduate will be adequately equipped for the task of leading churches. As most of those first assignments will be in a revitalization context, several considerations are warranted. First, seminary training should seek to include a stronger regimen of pastoral leadership focus by experienced practitioners. Long gone, seemingly, are the days when a master craftsman (an experienced pastor) developed an apprentice (a newly minted seminary graduate) as a normal course of action. In far too many churches, when a man surrenders to the call to pastor, he is shipped away to a distant campus where he learns from some of the greatest academic minds evangelical Christianity has to offer. Upon graduation, he seeks employment at a church where he practically functions, often, as an island. Second, this study demonstrated that the revitalization pastors were rarely engaged in a mentoring relationship with a more experienced pastor. Leadership is as much *caught* as it is *taught*. Though the academy should not replace the church in mentoring new pastors, it can provide access to practitioners with expertise that can expose students to the role of crisis as well as best practices for conflict resolution and change management. Implementing this minor adjustment may create a culture of master/apprentice mentorship. This influence could have far-reaching implications as graduates replicated the mentorship they received in the churches they would come to serve, returning the functional responsibility for mentorship to the local church. Further, by replicating environments where leadership

competencies are exposed, developed, and utilized, seminary education can better prepare pastors for the challenge that is well accepted to be ahead in revitalization. Finally, the academy should give due consideration to embracing a holistic preparatory mindset of the student whereby competencies like interpersonal awareness are tested and discussed.

Implications for Denominational Entities

As Baptists, a dogged independence resists denominational actions that could appear as intrusive to the local church. While this is good, still a role can be fulfilled by denominational entities. Given the results of this study, denominational entities would be well-served in prioritizing continuing education opportunities for pastors leading revitalization works. Ongoing seminars or consultation services as part of the services provided to participating churches could prove to be an invaluable resource and worthy investment for state conventions. This type of service was once assigned to the associational missionary or Director of Mission for a region. However, given the intricacies of revitalization work and the changing environment of the modern church association, denominational entities could provide quality supplemental expertise. A pastor in a declining church cannot fathom investing the finances required for good consultation; however, the principle of New Testament teaching provides a framework of churches with resources coming to the aid of those that lack (2 Cor 8:9-15, 1 Tim 5:3-10, Titus 3:13-14). Denominations such as the SBC can stand back and watch declining churches die, or it can bring qualified men to become resources as dedicated consultants, mentors, coaches, and encouragers for churches in decline and their leaders.

Implications for Church Leadership

Church leadership, particularly leadership vested in a pastor, is a difficult task. The calling has not, however, changed. Pastors have been called to lead the people of God, in holiness and submission before the Lord, and to fulfill the unspeakable privilege and calling entrusted to it. The church is a people through whom God manifests His glory.

There is no glory in declining numbers, decaying buildings, and dismal influence. Pastors who lead in these contexts must own the responsibility to become better in their competencies. These pastors must become convicted about shaping the leadership culture to reflect a biblically-faithful and practically-fruitful structure that can be used to influence revitalization. These pastors must grow in their understanding of culture and seek to develop leaders through conversion of the lost and edification of the saved. Only the most courageous, the most determined, and the most teachable can fulfill the mandate. Those saints whom God assigns to a church are committed to the care and trust of a pastor. These are God's precious saints and willingly, joyfully, and responsibly entrusts them to the pastor's care. The matchless worth of our Father and the weightiness of His entrusted responsibility demands of the pastor that he grow and become as he fulfills the call of God on his life. As to the church, it is called of God to become a reflection of His glory as well. It is called to follow godly leadership and to do so in a manner that is not burdensome to the leader (Heb 13:17). The church must change. As with any area of our lives, when we realize that there is room to grow in Christlikeness, there can be no other desire for the follower of Christ.

Conclusion

The church in North America is in decline. This fact is beyond dispute and desperately important. The solution for decline is also a fact. Revitalization requires health. The church is to pursue health and its leaders are to lay down their lives to bring the church to its healthy and glorious purpose, even its prescribed *telos*. Becoming such a reflection of God's revealed glory requires growth and change. Reversing the decline of churches is the outcome that brings God His greatest glory. The church must avoid trite answer to complex questions that lay the blame for decline at the feet of culture. Pastors of declining churches must not conclude that decline is solely a spiritual matter, thus making it solely the Lord's responsibility to change the church. He has already prescribed a course of action and His prescription involves a divinely assigned leader, a shepherd, a pastor to the

people. To that end, the leader must seek to shape and guard a biblical leadership structure through which the church can be called to obey the Lord's command. The pastor must envision and establish a leadership culture that thrives on fulfilling the King's mission and intentionally develops other leaders in the church and beyond. Finally, the pastor must develop, nurture, and utilize every God-given and God-developed competency in service to the King. This must be done with one true and worthy objective in mind: that the Name and fame of the Lord be heralded to the furthest parts of the earth and that His gospel be preached to everyone, everywhere (Matt 28:18-20, Acts 1:8). The task is worthy. The King is willing. The church is wanting. The power is waiting. May God Himself receive all glory, honor, and praise.

APPENDIX 1

SURVEY PARTICIPATION INVITATION

Dear Church Leader,

My name is Chris Aiken and I am a pastor and a researcher writing on behalf of a research team of doctoral students from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, under the supervision of Dr. Michael Wilder. The purpose for my letter to you today is to thank you for your leadership of your church. Based on current Annual Church Profile (ACP) data, **You are in the 3.2% of Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Churches that have been led to revitalization in the last decade!**

In a day of incessant reports of sustained decline in attendance, baptism, and membership across the landscape of SBC churches, you have been part of a small but effective percentage of churches that have experienced a turnaround. As such, we want to...in fact, **we NEED to learn from you.**

We are asking if you would take a few moments to complete the survey located at the link below within the next **SEVEN DAYS**. Of all reporting churches in the SBC, less than one thousand meet the initial criteria to be considered for this research project.

Our research seeks to identify principles that may be transferrable to other churches...to other leaders who desperately desire for God to breathe life into their churches. We pray that God allows us to see His hand at work in your church and to tell part of **His story in your church.**

As a pastor, I **KNOW** the daily pressures of the ministry. There is far more to do than there seems to be time to accomplish it. This is why I am humbly asking you to give me some of your most precious commodity: **TIME**. **We anticipate that it will require approximately 15 minutes to complete this survey.**

A select group of churches will be identified from the results of this survey and approached to commit to a more in-depth interview with one of our research team.

As an incentive, if you complete the survey in the next seven days and indicate a willingness to participate in a 20-30 minute personal interview if requested, you will be

entered into a drawing for a **\$250 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,

Chris Aiken

APPENDIX 2

PHASE 3 INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE AND INFORMED CONSENT

Dear _____ (participant)

May I have your permission to record this interview for research purposes?

Thank you for your willingness to participate as part of the research project on Church Revitalization.

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.

I'd like to read you an informed consent regarding your participation in this study.

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 Chris Aiken, 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.

Do you agree to participate in this study?

General Questions:

1. Describe your ministry context: (State of the community where your ministry takes place).
 - a. How long have you served in your church?
 - b. Prior to the turnaround, how long had you served?
2. How many years of pastoral experience prior to this church?
3. How long have you served in your current role?
4. Please describe your pastoral/ministry training, background and education.
5. Would you share your age?
6. Describe your church: (demographics, socio-economic factors, other influencing factors)

Leadership Structure:

Defined: Leadership structure refers to the formal system by which decisions are made and action is implemented. (This may be manifested through deacons, single elder, plurality of elders, church council, etc.)

1. Describe the type of leadership structure present prior to the turnaround.
2. What types of changes were implemented in the leadership structure to facilitate or further the turnaround?
 - What impact did the decision have?
 - What might you have done differently given the benefit of hindsight?

Leadership Development:

1. Briefly describe the leadership development process prior to and during the turnaround? (How did the church develop leaders- at all levels of the organization? i.e. where did deacons, SS teachers, committee members come from?)
 - a. Was it an intentional process of development? Measured?
 - b. Can you provide a specific example of changes to the process of identifying and raising up leaders?
 - c. What would be an example of something you would change in the development process given the benefit of hindsight? Why?
2. What leadership development processes would you definitely insist on if you were engaged in another revitalization effort? Why?
3. Please describe some key convictions you hold now about leadership development and its role in revitalization.

- a. Please describe the process or model (if any) that was most influential in leadership development.
 - b. How did you, as a leader, personally develop in the process of the revitalization?
4. Did you, as a leader, take advantage of any coaching or mentoring relationships (whether formal or informal) and please describe them.

Leadership Competencies/Practices:

Of the 16 leadership practices listed in the initial survey, you ranked the following as Highly Important:

Please rank them in order of priority as to influence on the revitalization.
Please give a reason for ranking the top 2-3 as you did.

For Information: This is the list of the leadership practices/ competencies provided in the survey.

- Building Momentum
- Conceptual Thinking
- Contextual Awareness and Planning
- Developing Others
- Getting Members Engaged
- Gospel Orientation
- Individual and Corporate Repentance
- Information Seeking
- Initiative
- Interpersonal Understanding
- Missional Focus
- Organizational Awareness
- Relationship Building
- Teamwork and Cooperation
- Transparency
- Willingness to Confront/Church Discipline

Conclusion:

1. Describe the way that your competencies as a leader, your ability to develop other leaders, and the leadership structure (hierarchy and decision-making structure) worked together in the revitalization.
2. What would you like us to know about the role of leadership structure, leadership development and leadership competencies/practices that may not have been asked?
3. Is there any information you would like to add to this research project?
4. Having been made aware that participation is voluntary and identification of either the church or you as a leader is not required, would you be willing to allow inclusion of your name and the church's name as part of the research project documentation?

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 Chris Aiken, one of the doctoral students conducting the research. His area of focus is specifically in the area of pastoral leadership and its role in influence 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 Chris Aiken, 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.

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,

Chris Aiken
Ed.D. Candidate
Leadership and Church Revitalization

APPENDIX 4

CHURCH REVITALIZATION INFLUENCE SURVEY

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** 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 has sought to adapt. [Open-ended text block]

6. Are you willing to participate in a follow-up interview regarding the revitalization process at your church?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

7. Contact information: [Appears only if selected “Yes” in Q.6.]
- Name
 - Church Name
 - Church Address
 - Address 2
 - 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. [Likert-type scale: Highly Unimportant, Unimportant, Slightly Unimportant, Slightly Important, Important, Highly Important]
- discipleship
 - evangelism
 - leadership
 - missions
 - prayer
 - worship
 - other: _____
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
 - personal evangelism
 - leadership
 - missions
 - prayer
 - worship
 - other: _____
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 resistance**.
- [Drop-down menu: select one]
- discipleship
 - personal evangelism
 - leadership
 - missions
 - prayer
 - worship
 - other: _____

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**. [Likert-type scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree]
 - a. The church had a clearly defined discipleship process.
 - b. The majority of active members were able to explain the discipleship process.

13. What 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 the active church members **at the beginning of the revitalization process**.
 - a. **A More Individualistic Mindset** (Members expect to select 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**. [Likert-type scale: 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 engage in gospel conversations for the purpose of 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**. [Likert-type scale: 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**. [Likert-type scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree]
- a. The church has a vibrant missions ministry focused on financially supporting short-term and/or long-term missionaries.
 - b. The church has 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. [Likert-type scale: 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. [Likert-type scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree]
- a. Prior to the revitalization process, a culture of effective leadership development existed within the church.
 - b. 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 statement. [Likert-type scale: Highly Unimportant, Unimportant, Slightly Unimportant, Slightly Important, Important, Highly Important]
- a. The church leadership's dependence upon prayer as a vital means of realizing revitalization in your ministry context.
 - b. The church congregation's dependence upon prayer as a vital means of 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 of 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.
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 5

PHASE 3 PASTOR'S LEADERSHIP PROFILE

Table A1. Phase 3 pastor's leadership profile

Reference Number	Tenure (years)	Education (degree)	Vocational or bi-vocational (V/B)	Previous Experience (Y/N)	Pastor's Age (years)	Overall Pastoral and Staff Experience (years; inclusive)
1	7	M.Mus.	V	Y	56	37
2	2	B.A. M. Div.	V	Y	38	18
3	28	M. Div.	V	Y	67	42
4	16	M.Div. D.Min.	V	Y	55	32
5	7	M.Div.	V	Y	42	22
6	6	B.A. Some Seminary.	V	N	32	6
7	0.25	Some Seminary.	B	Y	38	9
8	4	BA. M.Div. Th.M. D.Min.	V	Y	35	11
9	6	A.S. Some Seminary.	B	Y	66	34
10	6	B.A. M.Div. D.Min. Ph.D. (current)	V	Y	45	22
11	6	M.Div.	V	Y	58	15
12	6	A.Div.	B	Y	47	13

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ABSTRACT

CHURCH REVITALIZATION AND THE ROLE OF PASTORAL LEADERSHIP: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY

Christopher Michael Aiken, Ed.D.
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Chair: Dr. Michael S. Wilder

The church in North America is struggling. Among Southern Baptists, the nation's second largest denomination, approximately 1,000 churches close their doors every year and thousands more drift closer to that point every day. Thousands of students graduate seminary each year and step immediately into leadership of a declining church where they face incomprehensible challenges, and many do it alone. This study examined the condition of Southern Baptist Convention churches over an eleven-year period ending in 2016. Having identified those churches that have been led to revitalization, this study examined the influence of leadership structure, leadership culture, and a leader's competencies, on church revitalization. The study identified leadership structures implemented by successful revitalization pastors to influence change leading to health, as well as explored the leadership development culture within the church prior and subsequent to revitalization. Furthermore, the study identified the leader's competencies deemed most important by successful revitalizers.

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