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CREATING A CHURCH REVITALIZATION RESIDENCY
AT THE GREENVILLE BAPTIST ASSOCIATION
IN GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

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

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

by
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December 2021

APPROVAL SHEET

CREATING A CHURCH REVITALIZATION RESIDENCY
AT THE GREENVILLE BAPTIST ASSOCIATION
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I dedicate this work to my beautiful wife, Emily, and our three precious kids; Elliott,
Sam, and Madeleine. The four of you are my greatest joys.

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PREFACE

My wife, Emily, told me when we were dating that she believed God called her to be a pastor's wife. She was right! I am eternally grateful for her willingness to take on the added pressures of managing our home and raising our children while I completed this process. Accomplishing this goal would have been impossible without her encouragement, support, and constant prayers.

I am grateful to the people at Fountain Inn First Baptist Church and lead pastor Dr. Condy Richardson for allowing me the necessary freedoms to work on the first half of this project while serving there. Additionally, thank you to the people at Monaghan Baptist Church for allowing me to serve as your senior pastor while completing the second half of this research project. You have allowed me to implement much of what is written in this project and I am forever grateful.

I am also grateful to Al Phillips, the Director of Missions at the Greenville Baptist Association, for his passion for church revitalization. His vision for helping struggling churches become vibrant gospel spreading congregations is revolutionary and contagious. Without his support this project may not have been possible. Thank you also to my supervisor, Dr. William Henard, for the countless hours you spent helping me finalize this work. Your wisdom and guidance were appreciated more than you know.

Finally, I would like to thank Brian and Keri Owens for opening their home to me and my family while I attended seminars in Louisville. Your generosity far exceeds the amount of space I have to write this thank you.

Ryan Holtzclaw

Greenville, South Carolina

December 2021

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For years, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has rightfully placed enormous amounts of energy and resources into starting new churches. However, despite these efforts, the trajectory for many SBC churches in America is declining. The SBC's 2018 Annual Church Profile revealed that the number of baptisms and church attendance was down.¹ Despite adding 878 new churches,² the SBC finished 2018 down 88 total churches.³ Unless the SBC begins placing equal amounts of energy and resources into helping plateaued and dying churches live again, the current downward trends will continue. This project intends to set an example for the leadership of the South Carolina Baptist Convention (SCBC) by establishing a church revitalization residency at the Greenville Baptist Association in Greenville, South Carolina.

Context

In recent years, a little less than half of South Carolina's forty-six counties have ranked "in the top 25 percent of the fastest-growing counties in America."⁴ Despite the growth, statistics show that 88 percent of SBC churches in the state are either plateaued

¹ Southern Baptist Convention, "Annual of the 2019 Southern Baptist Convention," accessed September 28, 2019, <http://www.sbcec.org/bor/2019/2019SBCAnnual.pdf>, 136.

² Southern Baptist Convention, "Annual of the 2019 Southern Baptist Convention," 205.

³ Southern Baptist Convention, "Annual of the 2019 Southern Baptist Convention," 136.

⁴ Rudy Gray, "Church Revitalization: SC's Population Growing, but Baptist Churches Aren't," *Baptist Courier*, November 12, 2018, <https://baptistcourier.com/2018/11/church-revitalization-south-carolinas-population-is-growing-but-baptist-churches-are-not/>.

or declining.⁵ Al Phillips, Director of Missions (DOM) for the Greenville Baptist Association (GBA), states that “about 20 [SBC] churches [in South Carolina] close each year and up to 200 are expected to close within five years.”⁶

Much like the SBC, the SCBC has invested much time, energy, and finances in educating healthy established churches about planting new churches and creating church planting residences. On the positive side, these efforts have proven successful in that the 2017 saw 41 SCBC churches sponsor church plants, and 8 future church planters completed residencies.⁷ On the negative side, “South Carolina Baptist Convention Churches as a whole are not growing.”⁸ This is also true in Greenville County.

Manufacturing jobs moving into Greenville County have led to a population explosion in several cities. According to the United States Census Bureau, Greenville is the fifth fastest growing county in the state.⁹ Leading the way within the county are the cities of Fountain Inn, Simpsonville, and Mauldin, which are ranked first, second, and sixth respectively.¹⁰ Despite the growth, 64 percent of the 113 churches in the Greenville Baptist Association are declining or are dead.¹¹

⁵ Rudy Gray, “Challenges for the Church,” *Baptist Courier*, November 12, 2018, <https://baptistcourier.com/2018/11/editors-word-challenges-for-the-church/>.

⁶ Greenville Baptist Association, “2018 Greenville Baptist Association Annual Report,” accessed June 16, 2019, https://s3.wasabisys.com/ssm-clients/gbasc_2bfd5e8917fb3474bd6b525964152e01/2018-ANNUAL.pdf, 23.

⁷ South Carolina Baptist Convention, “2018 Book of Reports to South Carolina Baptist Convention,” accessed June 16, 2019, <http://www.scbaptist.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2018-scbc-book-of-reports.pdf>, R-60.

⁸ Gray, “Church Revitalization.”

⁹ Gabe Cavallaro, “4 Greenville County Cities among the Fastest Growing Places in S.C., per New Census Estimates,” *The Greenville New Online*, June 3, 2019, <https://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/news/local/2019/06/03/greenville-sc-population-growth-census-data-shows-rate-compared-to-state/1269128001/>.

¹⁰ Cavallaro, “4 Greenville County Cities.”

¹¹ Greenville Baptist Association, “2018 Greenville Baptist Association Annual Report,” 23.

The GBA not only values starting new churches but revitalizing declining churches. For example, one-fourth of the GBA mission statement focuses on church revitalization. Furthermore, a recent \$100,000 gift will allow a new Center for Church Revitalization to launch in January 2020. Under the governance of the GBA church revitalization team and Al Phillips, the Center for Church Revitalization will continue assisting in church and community assessments for churches going through the revitalization process, making grant decisions, and housing the Revitalization Residency.

Rationale

In addition to the previously specified contextual factors, there are three more reasons why a church revitalization residency is warranted at the GBA. First, the seven letters to the seven churches in Asia that are dictated to the apostle John by Jesus establish a paradigm for church revitalization (Rev 2–3). In these letters, Jesus calls upon five of the seven churches to repent from the sins they are committing against God and return to what they were doing well prior to their struggles. The five churches are unhealthy, especially Sardis since Jesus says they are dead. Nevertheless, He offers them restoration by calling on them to repent.

Church revitalization is possible because of Jesus' willingness to forgive unhealthy congregations if they are willing to repent. When repentance happens, Jesus will restore the church to health, which is a testimony to the power of the gospel. One aspect of the church revitalization residency will prepare future revitalizing pastors to call upon the declining churches they will serve to repent from the sins that they have allowed to infiltrate the congregation.

Second, church revitalization is an example of the redemptive power of the gospel. Once a person or group of people, such as a church, commit to repenting, God breathes new life into the once dead congregation. An example is seen in Ezekiel 37:1-14. Scripture indicates that God's Spirit takes over the prophet Ezekiel and carries him to a valley full of dry human bones (v. 1, LEB). God shows Ezekiel His power over death

by giving life back to a mass amount of dry, lifeless bones. In that same power God can bring life back to a dying church. The Lord receives the glory whenever His power brings life back to what mortal man believes is dead.

Finally, the church revitalization paradigm that Jesus establishes in these examples includes a leader to carry His message to the failing church. For this reason, the GBA's church revitalization residency will prepare potential revitalizing pastors by giving them access to academic and experiential training. Specifically, revitalization residents will learn the biblical definition and mandates concerning pastoring a church. Next, residents will learn the biblical expectations for shepherding a flock, developing and preaching sermons, and personal and churchwide evangelism by spending time with former and current church leaders. Additionally, residents will develop a biblically focused, multi-year strategy for leading a declining or dead church through the revitalization process. During the residency, special attention will also be given to helping each resident understand the necessity of daily practicing the spiritual disciplines for the reasons of personal growth and family care. Only then will the potential revitalization pastor receive the approval and recommendation of the GBA to begin the work of revitalizing a dying church.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to create a church revitalization residency at the Greenville Baptist Association in Greenville, South Carolina.

Goals

The creation of a church revitalization residency at the GBA was determined by four goals. Each goal was designed to ensure that the residency provided the resident with a biblical and academic foundation along with practical experience in pastoring that equipped them with the fundamental tools for church revitalization.

1. The first goal was for the church revitalization team at the Greenville Baptist Association to utilize assessment tools to effectively evaluate prospective candidates for the revitalization residency.
2. The second goal was to equip the resident with hands on experience in shepherding and leadership development.
3. The third goal was to equip the resident with the proper tools to develop a fifty-two-week preaching plan that incorporates at least four biblical books and displays immediate relevance to church revitalization
4. The fourth goal was to equip the resident with the necessary tools for developing and implementing a biblically focused, five-year strategy for leading a plateaued or dead church through the revitalization process.

The completion of each goal is contingent on a well-defined means of measurement and a benchmark of success. The means of measurement and benchmark of success, along with the means that will be used to measure the success of each goal, are defined in the following section.

Research Methodology

The first goal was for the church revitalization team at the GBA to utilize assessment tools to evaluate prospective candidates for the revitalization residency effectively. The means of measurement include a job description, application, spiritual gifts,¹² personality,¹³ and strengths finding assessment,¹⁴ and a residency syllabus. This goal was considered successfully met when the GBA Revitalization Team successfully evaluated and hired a resident for the program.¹⁵

¹² LifeWay Christian Resources, “Spiritual Gifts Survey,” accessed July 19,2019, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/lifewayblogs/wp-content/uploads/sites/83/2018/03/21175436/DOC-Spiritual-Gifts-Survey.pdf>. All the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

¹³ Discprofile, “Everything DiSC Work of Leaders Profile,” accessed July 19, 2019, <https://www.discprofile.com>.

¹⁴ CliftonStrengths, “Strengths Finder 2.0,” accessed July 19,2019, https://www.gallupstrengthscenter.com/home/enus/strengthsfinder?utm_source=strengthsfinder&utm_campaign=coming_soon&utm_medium=redirect.

¹⁵ All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the

The second goal was to equip the resident with hands-on experience in shepherding and leadership development. This goal was measured by mentoring pastors who used a rubric to evaluate the development of the resident in the areas of pastoral care, administration, and leadership development as they spent time with him weekly. This goal was considered successful when the resident recorded 300 hours of being disciplined by the mentoring pastors, spent 300 hours developing leaders in key ministry areas, and 92 percent of all rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level.

The third goal was to equip the resident with the proper tools to develop a fifty-two-week preaching plan that incorporated at least four biblical books and displayed immediate relevance to church revitalization. The resident preached three original sermons upon which he received feedback from mentoring pastors. This goal was measured by the mentoring pastors who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance to church revitalization of sermons and the preaching plan. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 92 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level.

The fourth goal was to equip the resident with the necessary tools for developing and implementing a biblically focused, five-year strategy for leading a plateaued or dead church through the revitalization process. This goal was measured by the GBA revitalization team who utilized a rubric to evaluate the strategic process the resident used to address the overall unhealthiness of a church, and ways the resident would cultivate fresh vision and health in the church. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 92 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level.

ministry project.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms were used in the ministry project:

Church revitalization. Churches in need of revitalization often have the facilities, money, and people to contend for future viability, but they lack the knowhow on how to get there. In a majority of these cases, the church requires fresh vision from a new pastor to guide them.

ReStart/Replant. A church *restart/replant* takes place in a church that is within five years of closing their doors because they lack the people and operating finances to keep up their facility and fund the ministries of the church. As Mark Hallock defines it, the dying church willingly hands over “their church’s current and future ministry to an outside sending church and its leadership, working together to begin a new church for a new season of gospel ministry in their community.”¹⁶

Sending church. A *sending church* takes on the responsibility of providing financial and physical resources for a dying church until the church is spiritually and financially healthy.

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the effectiveness of the leadership development was limited if the resident was not present at the host church for a minimum of twenty-five hours per week. Failure to meet this requirement did not allow the mentoring pastors to efficiently measure how beneficial the training was. To mitigate this limitation, the expected twenty-five hours per week was scheduled around the resident’s schedule.

Second, it was difficult for the mentoring pastors and the GBA Church Revitalization Team to determine whether the resident is properly equipped to lead a plateaued or dying church through the revitalization process if the resident failed to complete all requirements as detailed in the residency syllabus. To mitigate this limitation,

¹⁶ Mark Hallock, *Replant Roadmap: How Your Church Can Help Dying Churches* (Littleton, CO: Acoma Press, 2017), chap. 1, Kindle.

the residency supervisor went over the residency syllabus in detail, paying special attention to all required assignments and due dates. Furthermore, the residency supervisor was willing to extend grace whenever unforeseen circumstances caused late assignments.

Two delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project was confined to one academic school year beginning the first Tuesday following Labor Day and concluding the first Tuesday in May the following year. This timeline allowed adequate time for the resident to complete all assignments and receive evaluations from the mentoring pastors and the GBA Revitalization Team. Second, the church revitalization residency was limited to males who were beginning or finishing their senior year of college or attending seminary. This met the biblical mandates that define the role of the pastor be filled by a male.¹⁷

Conclusion

Jesus's utilization of the apostle John to deliver His call for repentance to the declining churches in Asia and God's Spirit working through the prophet Ezekiel in restoring life to the dry bones of Israel exemplify His willingness to return life to things man considers dead, including His Church. Chapter 2 will explain how Jesus' letters to the seven churches of Asia show that church revitalization is possible. Chapter 3 will describe the requirements for successfully revitalizing a dying church.

¹⁷ Titus 1:6-7 says, "An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe. . . . Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless" (NIV). Paul tells Timothy the qualifications of a pastor when he writes, "Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife. . . . He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church)" (1 Tim 3:1-5). All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL PARADIGM FOR CHURCH REVITALIZATION: A STUDY OF REVELATION 2 AND 3

The apostle John declares that while he “was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day” (1:10a), a “loud voice like a trumpet” (1:10b) instructs him to record the forthcoming edicts and visions in a book and send it to the seven churches located in western Asia Minor (1:11). Jesus instructs John to address each letter “to the angel of the church” (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). Evidence supports the belief that these angels are metaphors for the messengers of each church. Though five of the seven letters arrive at churches that Jesus depicts as spiritually unhealthy, the purpose of this chapter is to describe the paradigm Jesus establishes for church revitalization, as seen in the letters to Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea. To understand this perspective, several ideas need to be considered initially.

First, one must cognize that, although Jesus addressed the letters to churches that existed in a bygone time, the overall message of each letter surpasses the chasm of time. In other words, the book of Revelation is not only written for the original seven churches, but every church throughout the ages. Alfred Plummer argues, “The repeated formula, ‘He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches,’ proves that the praise and blame distributed among the seven are of universal application.”¹ John MacArthur rationalizes, “While not precisely duplicated, [the seven churches] . . . represent the types of churches that are generally present throughout the entire church

¹ Alfred Plummer, *Revelation of St. John the Divine*, The Pulpit Commentary, vol. 22 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 3.

age.”² G. K. Beale and David Campbell maintain that each letter is “actually addressed to the entire body of Christ, the church in every age.”³ Moreover, scholars, such as Alan F. Johnson, believe these particular seven churches received Jesus’ revelation because their overall spiritual condition was representative of other churches in that day and the ages to come. Johnson writes, “These seven churches contained typical or representative qualities of both obedience and disobedience that are a constant reminder to all churches throughout every age.”⁴ Therefore, Jesus’ message to these original seven churches remain applicable to today’s modern churches.

Second, it is imperative to note the cultural factors that existed within the cities and how they affected the churches. For example, the cities were enamored with imperial worship, infested with false teachers propagating lies concerning Jesus, or both. These cultural influences had either penetrated or were attempting to penetrate the Christian churches. Brian Tabb best portrays the spiritual conditions of the churches by explaining,

Christ highlights serious spiritual problems in five of the seven churches . . . and calls them to “repent.” Ephesus and Laodicea have grown so spiritually complacent that their very identity as Christian churches is in jeopardy. Pergamum and Thyatira have tolerated false teachers, idolatry and immorality in their midst, while Sardis is spiritually “dead” and must “wake up.” Conversely, though Smyrna and Philadelphia are “poor” and have “little power,” Christ commends them for their faithfulness and does not call them to repent.⁵

Therefore, modern church revitalizing pastors can look to the five unhealthy churches addressed in this work to understand their spiritual conditions and Jesus’ remedy for their unhealthiness.

² John MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 55.

³ G. K. Beale and David H. Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 39.

⁴ Alan F. Johnson, *Revelation*, in vol. 13 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 598.

⁵ Brian Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019), chap. 4, Kindle.

Ephesus

Located on the coast of the Aegean Sea at the mouth of the Cayster River was the city of Ephesus. Its location made it not only a center of travel and commerce but also one of the most significant seaports of the ancient world. Mitchell Reddish suggests that while under the control of Rome, Ephesus “thrived, reaching the pinnacle of its greatness during the first and second centuries of the Christian era.”⁶ Records show that Ephesus featured a population of 250,000 people, making it the fourth largest city in Rome. For these reasons, the grand city Ephesus received the honor of being named the capital of the Roman province of Asia under the rule of emperor Hadrian.

Ephesus was home to some of the most beautiful architecture in the ancient world, including an enormous statue dedicated to the emperor Domitian and the Temple of Artemis. Grant Osborne explains that the ultimate display of their reverence toward the pagan goddess is seen in the fact “the temple was four times the size of the Parthenon of Athens,”⁷ making it one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world.⁸ Osborne goes on to explain that Artemis’s worshippers appeased the pagan goddess with enough financial gifts “to make it the pillar of Ephesian wealth.”⁹ Additionally, seeing as Artemis was a fertility goddess, the people worshipped her by participating in sexual acts inside the temple. Robert Thomas asserts that for this reason prostitutes stayed in the temple since they “were viewed as priestesses.”¹⁰

⁶ Mitchell G. Reddish, “Ephesus,” in *Holman Illustrated Biblical Dictionary*, ed. Trent C. Butler (Nashville: Holman Bible, 2003), 494.

⁷ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), chap. 2, Kindle.

⁸ Reddish, “Ephesus,” 494.

⁹ Osborne, *Revelation*, chap. 2.

¹⁰ Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, Wycliff Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 129.

Furthermore, the temple was a gathering place for those looking to commit immoral behaviors making it a cesspool of corrupt individuals. For example, criminals often sought sanctuary there after committing a crime.¹¹ Consequently, in this setting the Ephesian church attempted to persevere and make disciples in the name of Jesus.

The apostle Paul, along with husband and wife missionaries Priscilla and Aquila, made their way to Ephesus during Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-18:22). Despite being Paul's first visit to the vibrant city, he only remained there for a short time (Acts 18:20). Priscilla and Aquila, however, remained in Ephesus and began helping Apollos evangelize in the synagogues (Acts 18:24-26). Luke records that Paul returned to Ephesus (Acts 19:1) and witnessed to a group of disciples concerning their lack of knowledge about the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:2-7), began preaching in the synagogues (Acts 19:8-9), and remained there for two years launching the church (Acts 19:10).

In the beginning, Ephesus was an active and booming church amid a vile and wicked city. Despite this, God used Paul and others to reach many people in the name of Jesus (Acts 19:11-20). The movement of God among the Ephesians was so great that it began hurting the economy because people were no longer buying as many coins in honor of Artemis (Acts 19:24). MacArthur believes that "no church in history had as rich a heritage as the congregation at Ephesus."¹² Four decades following the start of the Ephesian church, Jesus' revelation recorded through John arrives via the messenger of the Ephesian church (2:1). In the letter, He commends it for its good works, condemns it for its sins, and calls on it to repent or be shutdown.

To Ephesus, and the other churches listed in Revelation, Jesus begins His praise with the words *oida ta erga sou*, "I know your works" (Rev 2:2, 2:9, 2:13, 2:19, 3:1, 3:8, 3:15). Beale and Campbell believe that in doing so, Christ clearly articulates that

¹¹ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 129.

¹² MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, 56.

He is “intimately aware of all that is going on in the churches.”¹³ Thomas asserts that Jesus’ words reveal His “absolute clearness of mental vision, which photographs all facts of life as they pass.”¹⁴ In other words, Jesus informs the Christians in each church that He sees, with absolute clarity, both the positive and negative manner in which they are conducting themselves. He knows about the good works that are visible to the outside world, He knows the condition of their collective hearts, and He knows whether their works are for His glory or their own.

As it pertains to the church in Ephesus, Jesus compliments their good works (2:2-3). First, He commends them for their *kopos* (‘toil’). Christ is fully aware of the amount of good they are accomplishing in a city full of evil. He knows they are always “engaged in slavish toil to the point of exhaustion”¹⁵ as they serve the city in His name. Second, He acknowledges their “patient endurance” (2:2c). He knows they have zero tolerance for the evil people (2:2d) who are falsely claiming “to be apostles and are not” (2:2e). Instead, the Ephesian Christians are working hard and “enduring patiently” in the name of Jesus (2:3). Thomas explains, “Despite toil to the point of weariness they had not grown weary (*ou kekopiakes*). . . . They persevered for the sake of the purity of the message they preached.”¹⁶ Unfortunately, though, their tireless works lead them to forget their first love.

Proverbs 21:2 postulates that “every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart.”¹⁷ Despite their works, the omniscient Lord weighs the hearts of the Ephesian Christians and finds that they “have abandoned the love [they] had

¹³ Beale and Campbell, *Revelation*, 54.

¹⁴ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 133.

¹⁵ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 134.

¹⁶ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 139.

¹⁷ All Scripture Quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

at first” (2:4). The apostle Paul’s description of works minus love in 1 Corinthians 13 adequately describes the Ephesian Christians during this time for their works without love was nothing more than a “noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor 13:1c).

There is division among scholars as to whether Jesus rebukes the Ephesian Christians for abandoning their love for Him, others, or both. For example, Matthew Henry contends that Jesus is “grieved and displeased with his people when he sees them grow remiss and cold towards him.”¹⁸ Conversely, theologians such as George Ladd believe Jesus is denouncing them for allowing their commitment to “doctrinal purity”¹⁹ trump the love they are supposed to have for others. While both claims have merit, it is hard to imagine that Jesus would condemn the Ephesians for abandoning one or the other.

In Mark 12, Jesus answers a question from a scribe concerning the greatest commandment by saying, “The most important is, ‘Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (vv. 28-31). His response, therefore, makes it reasonable to believe that His rebuke of the Ephesian Christians is referring to their love for Him and others. Osborne agrees with this belief as he asserts that “the one demands the other, for one cannot love God without loving his children and vice versa (1 John 2:9-10).”²⁰ To this point, Robert Mounce argues that the Ephesian Christians’ “hatred of heresy and extensive involvement in the works appropriate to the faith had allowed the first fresh glow of love for God and one

¹⁸ Matthew Henry, *Acts-Revelation, Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 6 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1996), 906.

¹⁹ George E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), chap. 2, Kindle.

²⁰ Osborne, *Revelation*, chap. 2.

another to fade.”²¹ While it is suitable for Christians to work at protecting orthodoxy, Christ’s judgment of the Ephesians makes clear that diligent work does not outweigh love for Him and others. Thankfully, Jesus does not immediately shut the church down. Instead, as He always does with His children, He offers them a path toward redemption.

Jesus implores the Christians to recall ‘from where [they] have fallen; repent and do the works [they] did at first,’ otherwise, He promises to “come” and “remove” their “lampstand from its place” (2:5). Conversely, if they heed the Savior’s call to repent and return, then He will allow them “to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (2:7). The message to the Ephesian Christians is simply to remember that they were once dead in their sins until they first heard and accepted the gospel, repent from their sin of abandoning their love for Christ and others, and return to working in the name of Jesus with a loving disposition. Stephen Smalley suggests that not doing so means “the community is in danger of extinction.”²²

As previously explained, current statistics reveal that thousands of American churches are in a state of decline. Given the plethora of reasons for their decline, one cannot abstain from the idea that many of these churches resemble the Ephesian Christians. They are diligently working to preserve doctrine; however, their misguided zeal causes them to abandon the required love for God and others. Referring to the sin that plagued the Ephesian church, Smalley correctly argues that a “lack of love leads to spiritual death, individually, and corporately.”²³ Simply put, like the Ephesian church, many of today’s declining churches tend to focus more on locking sinners out instead of loving them into

²¹ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 69.

²² Stephen Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 62.

²³ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 62.

the arms of Jesus. For these reasons, the GBA Revitalization Residency will equip future revitalizing pastors to diligently pursue personal and corporate evangelism.

Pergamum

Even though Pergamum did not have a significant trade route or a harbor like Ephesus and Smyrna, it was considered one of the great cities of antiquity. Mitchell Reddish claims that it was “one of the leading cultural centers in the Mediterranean world.”²⁴ With its population between 120,000 and 200,000 people, the city was home to large buildings of grandeur and pagan temples. A considerable amount of buildings and artwork in Pergamum were places of worship in honor of numerous Greco-Roman gods.²⁵ Reddish believes that Asclepius and Dionysos “were the more dominant in the religious life of the city.”²⁶ The temple dedicated to Asclepius—a god of healing that was represented by a serpent—was full of world travelers searching for relief from their sicknesses. Thomas explains that, as an act of worship, citizens came to the temple “where nonpoisonous snakes were allowed to roam” in hopes of being “touched by one of these snakes (i.e., by the god himself)” and cured of their sickness.²⁷ Additionally, the temple dedicated to Dionysus—the son of Zeus and god of wine and ecstasy—was located near the grand theater in Pergamum. Worshippers would enter Dionysus’s temple for wild parties that included sexual fornication. Although the intensity with which the people worshipped the Greco-Roman gods was high, it paled in comparison to their dedication to the imperial cult.

²⁴ Mitchell G. Reddish, “Hearing the Apocalypse in Pergamum,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 41, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 3.

²⁵ Reddish, “Hearing the Apocalypse in Pergamum,” 4.

²⁶ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 179.

²⁷ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 179.

Pergamenes worshipped Roman rulers with more passion than any of the other cities.²⁸ In 29 BC, Pergamum became the first city in Asia allowed to construct a temple in honor of Caesar Augustus and the goddess Roma.²⁹ During the reign of Emperor Trajan (AD 98-117), the construction of a second temple dedicated to emperor worship took place, earning the city its first of three titles for being a *neokoros* “temple sweeper (or warden).”³⁰ Ladd describes that during this time, the city became known as “the chief seat in Asia of the worship of the emperor.”³¹ It is within this environment that the Pergamene church existed.

Jesus begins His address to the Church in Pergamum by describing Himself as δ ἔχων τὴν ρομφαίαν τὴν δύοστομον τὴν ὀξεῖαν (*ho echōn tēn rhomphaian tēn distomon tēn oxeian*)—“The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword” (2:12). During the years of Rome’s reign, the *rhomphaian* sword, which was a Thracian broadsword used during military raids, became a symbol of their power.³² Jesus’ use of the sword to describe Himself conflicts with Rome’s view that they have “the *ius gladii* (‘right of the sword’), or the power to execute at will,”³³ thus indicating to the church that Rome’s power over the sword pales in comparison to His sovereignty and omnipotence over all earthly kingdoms. Not only is He the warrior who will defeat His enemies on the battlefield, but He will also proclaim judgment upon them.³⁴

²⁸ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 179-80.

²⁹ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 79.

³⁰ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 179.

³¹ Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, chap. 2.

³² Osborne, *Revelation*, chap. 2.

³³ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 68.

³⁴ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 180.

Next, Jesus notifies the Christians of three things that He knows: (1) the evil that surrounds them, (2) their steadfast faith in Him, and (3) their perseverance in the face of persecution (2:13). First, Jesus tells the church, “I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is” (2:13a). Osborne points out that in using the κατοικεῖς (*katoikeis*, you dwell) followed by ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ Σατανᾶ (*hopou ho thronos tou Satana*, where Satan has his throne), Jesus acknowledges “that Pergamum is Satan’s special habitation, his ‘throne.’”³⁵ Furthermore, Smalley suggests that “at Pergamum, Satan is enthroned and holds his court.”³⁶ The most probable reason Pergamum is the place where “Satan’s throne” exists is due to imperial cult worship.³⁷ Thomas believes that although “Rome is nowhere mentioned in the message to Pergamum, this appears to be the root meaning of the presence of the throne of Satan.”³⁸

The fascistic rule of the Roman empire conflicted with Pergamene Christians. The reason for this conflict, according to Thomas, is “because of its totalitarian demands for absolute allegiance to the state and because in her was embodied the epitome of all paganism and worldliness.”³⁹ That is why Jesus commends those who “hold fast” His “name” and “not deny [His] faith” (Rev 2:13b). Thomas goes on to explain, “Despite having permanent residence in a setting where Satan has his throne, these Christians were continuing faithful.”⁴⁰ The loyalty of the citizens for pagan and imperial worship made the city a dangerous place for Christians. This challenge, according to Thomas, is due to the fact that “in other cities, a Christian might be in danger on only one day a year when a

³⁵ Osborne, *Revelation*, chap. 2.

³⁶ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 68.

³⁷ Osborne, *Revelation*, chap. 2.

³⁸ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 185.

³⁹ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 185.

⁴⁰ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 185.

pinch of incense had to be burned in worship of the emperor. In Pergamum, however, Christians were in danger every day of the year for the same reason.”⁴¹ Despite the existential threat of persecution that existed, the Pergamene Christians maintained their resolve for worshiping the One true God. An example of their resolve, according to Jesus, is their enduring loyalty to Christ following the death of Antipas (2:13b).

Little is known about Antipas outside of Jesus’ description of him as a “faithful witness, who was killed” (2:13c). Some believe Pergamum was not his place of birth since his name is omitted from their book of martyrs.⁴² Although Christian persecution was widespread throughout the Roman empire, Jesus’ listing of Antipas as a single martyr leads Thomas to believe that his “death may have happened through mob violence.”⁴³ No matter the manner or by whom, the point Jesus makes to the Christians is that despite the death of Antipas, they did not deny Him.

After offering His praises, Jesus pronounces two indictments against the Pergamene church (2:14-15). First, He says, “You have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans” (2:14b-15). These sins, according to MacArthur, are “two heresies [that are] being tolerated”⁴⁴ by the church members as they allow false teachers from two different groups to infiltrate their congregation with heretical teachings concerning food and sexual fornication.

To illustrate the heresy of the first group, Jesus offers the Old Testament example of Balaam and Balak (Num 22–24, 31:16). As the story goes, Balak, king of

⁴¹ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 180.

⁴² Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 186.

⁴³ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 186.

⁴⁴ MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, 87.

Moab, entices the prophet Balaam by offering him money to place a curse on the Israelites. Balaam, however, refuses Balak's monetary offers, angering the Moab king (Num 22–24). Later, “While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women. . . . So Israel yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor” (Num 25:1-3a). The action leads to “the LORD’S anger burning against them” (Num 25:3b). The belief among scholars is that Balaam caved to Balak’s offers by telling him how to lure the Israelites away from the LORD.⁴⁵ According to Ladd, “Balaam is a prototype of those who promote compromise with paganism in idolatry and immorality.”⁴⁶ For this reason, Jesus takes issue with the Christians for allowing the group of Balammites to set traps for church members that involve food and fornication.

Thomas explains that in the Greek language, σκανδαλον (*Skandalon*) is a metaphor that describes a trap that is “small enough to catch a bird or large enough to entangle a man’s foot and cause him to stumble.”⁴⁷ Likewise, the adjective ειδωλόθυτα (*eidōlothytá*) refers to items sacrificed during pagan worship ceremonies. In the case of Pergamum, the sacrificed item is meat burned on the altar, eaten during ritual meals, and sold in the market. Therefore, because some of the Pergamene Christians are participating in feasts involving unclean meat, they are committing an egregious act against God, thus leading to Jesus’ first indictment.

In His second indictment, Jesus condemns the Pergamene Christians for πορνῦσαι (*porneusai*, to commit immorality). Some, such as Beale and Campbell, believe the immortality that Jesus refers to is a metaphor for spiritual immorality.⁴⁸ Others, such as Osborne and Thomas, suggest the opposite. While he admits that either theory may be

⁴⁵ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 190.

⁴⁶ Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, chap. 2.

⁴⁷ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 190.

⁴⁸ Beale and Campbell, *Revelation*, 66.

correct, Osborne argues for the literal interpretation for sexual immorality by citing Jesus' condemnation of the church in Thyatira for allowing Jezebel to lure Christians into sexual promiscuity, suggesting that "it is more likely that literal promiscuity is in view" in the end.⁴⁹ Thomas's basis for a literal interpretation centers on two facts. First, "to theorize a metaphorical meaning here," argues Thomas, "is to ignore that spiritual fornication has already been covered in the phrase *phagein eidōlothyta*."⁵⁰ Thomas continues by stating that "the literal sin of fornication was closely associated with this city's pagan feasts and was an inescapable consequence of them."⁵¹ The main point of Jesus' second indictment is the toleration of some of its members by the Pergamene church as they defraud the Lord.

Finally, Jesus concludes His indictment of the Pergamene Christians by discussing the second group of heretics who are influencing church members with false teachings. According to Jesus, there are those "who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans" (2:15). Originally mentioned in the letter to the Ephesians, knowledge concerning the identity of the Nicolaitans is limited. Some scholars associate the group to a man named Nicolas who was one of the seven men appointed to administer the distribution of food in Acts 6. John MacArthur explains that one theory regarding Nicolas is that he "was a false believer who became an apostate, but retained influence in the church because of his credentials."⁵² A second theory is that the Nicolaitans perverted Nicolas's teachings.⁵³ No matter their founding, what is known about the group is they were determined to lead people away from Jesus and into pagan worship. Moreover, Thomas insists they were a

⁴⁹ Osborne, *Revelation*, chap. 2.

⁵⁰ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 192.

⁵¹ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 192.

⁵² MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, 61.

⁵³ MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, 61.

separate group, who like the Balammites, since they are teaching idol worship and sexual immorality.⁵⁴ Conversely, the Pergamene Christians are tolerating the group and allowing them to infiltrate the church, which brings about Jesus' disapproval.

The only remedy, according to Jesus, is for the Pergamene Christians to “repent” (2:16). Consequently, failure to adhere to Jesus' call for repentance will result in His coming to wage “war against them with the sword of [His] mouth” (2:16c). Henry succinctly points out, “No sword cuts so deep, nor inflicts so mortal a wound, as the sword of Christ's mouth.”⁵⁵ After offering the only remedy to the Pergamene church's sins, Jesus closes the letter by saying, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (2:17a). The command, according to Osborne, “is a prophetic warning to heed the words of this letter.”⁵⁶ Essentially, it is a call to stop tolerating false teaching or else face the consequences.

Ultimately, Jesus makes three promises for “the one who conquers” (2:17). First, He promises the one who obeys His commandment “some of the hidden manna” (2:2b). Every Christian Jew connected to the Pergamene Church understands the context of the “hidden manna” reference. Moses records that, following the Exodus, the Hebrews memorialized God's saving them from Egyptian captivity by placing a pot of manna in the ark of the covenant (Exod 16:32-34). Hebrew folklore records that upon the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians (587 BC), either Jeremiah or an angel retrieved the ark of the covenant and hid it in the earth until the time of the Messiah.⁵⁷ Smalley suggests that Jewish Christians would have found solace in Jesus' promise because He is telling them that “Proper faith in the Messiah, coupled with the right behavior, were to be

⁵⁴ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 192.

⁵⁵ Henry, *Acts-Revelation*, 909.

⁵⁶ Osborne, *Revelation*, chap. 2.

⁵⁷ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 70.

rewarded by blessings: such as feeding on manna in the messianic kingdom.”⁵⁸ The promise, however, does not end with eternal manna.

Second, Jesus promises the overcomer that He “will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it” (Rev 2: 17d). Although there is much speculation regarding the precise meaning of the “white stone,” Smalley’s suggestion that Jesus is likely referring to a “token of admittance, membership or recognition”⁵⁹ is most rational. Moreover, Beale and Campbell believe the hidden manna represents the promised meal in the messianic kingdom (Rev 19:7-9) and possession of the white stone allows entry into the messianic kingdom.⁶⁰

Finally, Jesus promises the overcomer that the “white stone” will have “a new name written” on it “that no one knows except the one who receives it” (2:17). Jesus’ words are most likely referring to the new identity the overcomer will receive once He enters the Messiah’s kingdom. Beale and Campbell agree that “the reception of this name by believers in 2:17 represents their final reward of being consummately identified and united with the intimate, end-time presence and power of Christ in His kingdom.”⁶¹

Jesus’ call to the leadership of the church in Pergamum, and therefore churches throughout the ages, is a command to stop tolerating false teachers who are attempting to synchronize cult worship with Christianity. One of the many reasons today’s churches are at risk is due to their toleration of the same type of synchronization that plagued the Pergamene church. Through the Pergamene Church Jesus establishes a paradigm for church revitalization as He calls on the leaders of today’s churches to lead them to repent

⁵⁸ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 70.

⁵⁹ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 71.

⁶⁰ Beale and Campbell, *Revelation*, 68.

⁶¹ Beale and Campbell, *Revelation*, 68.

and rid themselves of all worldliness that threatens their relationship with Him. Instead of falling into the trap of conforming to the world's standards, Jesus is calling on the modern church, just as He did the Pergamene church, to reverse course and “renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age” (Titus 2:12). Additionally, He is calling on church leaders to teach them that “friendship with the world is enmity with God” (Jas 4:4). Therefore, a second goal of the GBA Revitalization Residency is to utilize works such as Donald Whitney’s *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* and Timothy Whitmer’s *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church* to equip future revitalizing pastors with spiritual and practical ways for protecting their congregations from improperly assimilating with the world’s ethos.

Thyatira

Situated on the Lycus River Valley near Pergamum and Sardis, Thyatira was not considered a glorious city by any means. Mounce, quoting Colin Hemer, writes, “The longest and most difficult of the seven letters is addressed to the least known, least important, and least remarkable of the cities.”⁶² William Ramsay explains that the history of Thyatira is so obscure that “the character and circumstances of the city in the first century after Christ, are almost entirely unknown to us.”⁶³ Despite the limited historical knowledge regarding the city, some facts are known. For example, concerned for the safety of his empire, Seleucus I (385–281 BC) established the city of Thyatira as a military garrison to slow down approaching armies so his city could prepare for attacks.⁶⁴ It was

⁶² Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 106, quoted in Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 84.

⁶³ William M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia: A History of the Early Church*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Endeavor Media, 2017), chap. 23, Kindle.

⁶⁴ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 72.

not until 190 BC, when Rome took over Thyatira, that the city experienced longevity of peace.⁶⁵ Moreover, Smalley writes, “Under Roman rule, and with the establishment of peace and greater stability, the city grew and prospered as a marketing and manufacturing Centre.”⁶⁶ Mostly, Thyatira’s location under Roman occupation made it a suitable place for blue-collar workers and powerful trade guilds.

Thyatira’s trade guilds were distinct from other cities in the province because of the large number that existed there.⁶⁷ These guilds were well-organized, powerful, and highly influential on the city’s culture. The guilds wielded so much power that it was an expectation for all workers and business owners to be members of one if they wanted to work in Thyatira. Ramsay suggests there were seven trade guilds, including “guilds for wood workers, linen workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave dealers, and bronze smiths.”⁶⁸ Smalley, however, adds three others to the list, including outer garment makers, dyers, and leatherworkers.⁶⁹ Textile was one of the more significant industries in the city. One such textile guild member was a lady named Lydia (Acts 10:14). Luke records that after hearing Paul speak about Jesus, “The Lord opened her heart,” and she and her family were immediately baptized (Acts 10:14-15). Furthermore, Lydia’s presence in the Macedonian city potentially demonstrates the extent of Thyatira’s trade efforts in the ancient world.

Knowledge concerning religious worship in Thyatira is vague. For this reason, historians have relied upon Thyatiran coinage to determine their gods.⁷⁰ What is known,

⁶⁵ MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, 98.

⁶⁶ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 72.

⁶⁷ Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, chap. 23.

⁶⁸ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 207.

⁶⁹ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 72.

⁷⁰ Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, chap. 24.

though, is that many Thyatirans worshipped the false gods that were recognized by the individual trade guilds. Ramsay believes each guild paid homage to their gods via different rituals involving partying and fornication. Citing a coin entitled “Caracalla adoring the God of Thyatira,” Ramsay suggests that one such god was “A hero Tyrimnos” who represents “the Thyatiran conception of the city’s function in the world.”⁷¹ Additionally, MacArthur argues that the principal god for the Thyatirans was the sun god, Apollos.⁷² Johnson suggests that in addition to Apollos, the Thyatirans paid equal respect to Artemis.⁷³

The Bible does not indicate who started the church in Thyatira.⁷⁴ Some, such as Walvoord, suggest that Lydia (Acts 16) started it.⁷⁵ Others, such as Johnson, believe that either the apostle Paul or some of his converts did. One thing that is certain about the church is that they never accomplished anything worth noting in historical records.⁷⁶ For these reasons, much of what is known comes from the following verses in Revelation.

Jesus opens His letter to Thyatira with three representations of Himself. First, He communicates that He is “the Son of God” (2:18a). Thomas explains that this description denotes Jesus’ “superhuman personality” that is “divinely commissioned to implement God’s purpose for His people.”⁷⁷ There are varying degrees of thought as to why this is the only time in Revelation where Jesus utilizes this title to describe Himself.

⁷¹ Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, chap. 24.

⁷² MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, 98.

⁷³ Johnson, *Revelation*, 622.

⁷⁴ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 208.

⁷⁵ Thomas cites that Walvoord was one scholar who maintained Lydia helped start the church in Thyatira. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 208.

⁷⁶ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 208.

⁷⁷ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 209.

Osborne insists that this is likely due to “the centrality of Apollo, son of Zeus, in Thyatira.”⁷⁸ While Mounce agrees with Osborne’s claim, he goes on to assert that Jesus’ claim also alludes to imperial cult worship. The worship of Apollos and the emperor was an amalgamation of the emperor and Zeus’s son, so “that both were acclaimed as sons of Zeus.”⁷⁹ For this reason, Mounce believes Jesus’ use of this description is to ensure Thyatiran Christians that “it is not the emperor or the guardian deity of Thyatira, but the resurrected Christ, who is the true son of God.”⁸⁰ Conversely, Thomas believes this argument “is open to serious question . . . because pressure from Rome to impose emperor worship in Thyatira was negligible.”⁸¹ Instead, argues Thomas, Jesus is referring to Psalm 2 where “it suggests the joint rule of the overcomer with Christ in the future kingdom.”⁸² Therefore, while both Osborne and Mounce make valid arguments, Thomas’s claim is most likely correct.

Second, Jesus describes Himself as “the one who has eyes as a flame of fire” (2:18b). Here Jesus is using a metaphorical description of Himself to let the Thyatiran Christians know that His unmatched omniscience allows Him the ability to search every “mind and heart” and judge each person by their works (2:23). Osborne agrees with this conclusion as he writes that this description depicts “the penetrating insight and judgment of Jesus.”⁸³ As Thyatira will learn, Jesus’ flaming eyes see their “love and faith and service and patient endurance” (2:19) while at the same time seeing their acceptance of Jezebel and her false teachings (2:20).

⁷⁸ Osborne, *Revelation*, chap. 2.

⁷⁹ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 84.

⁸⁰ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 84.

⁸¹ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 209.

⁸² Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 209.

⁸³ Osborne, *Revelation*, chap. 2.

The third way Jesus describes Himself to the Thyatiran Christians is “his feet are like gleaming bronze” (2:18c). The description of Jesus’ feet as “gleaming bronze” is similar to the one given in John 1:15. Thomas states that while the definition of χαλιβάνο (chalkolibanon) is unclear: “In ancient times it was interpreted a ‘mixed metal of great brilliance,’ a burnished brass or bronze, a brightly gleaming metal or metallic compound.”⁸⁴ While some, such as Johnson, believe the reference is meant to grab the attention of the bronze-worker trade guild,⁸⁵ the more likely reason is the purity of the metal. Referencing scriptures from Ezekiel⁸⁶ and Daniel,⁸⁷ Thomas argues that the brightness in the metal is an illustration of God’s purity.⁸⁸ The symbolism in Jesus describing His eyes and feet in these two manners is a foreshadowing of the coming judgment that He pronounces on those who fail to adhere to His call for repentance. Before accosting them with their sins, though, Jesus offers four commendations to the Thyatiran Christians.

First, Jesus apprises the Thyatiran church concerning their works. Second, He offers four approbations in “two classes of works.”⁸⁹ Thomas explains, “Love and faith are abstract qualities or motive forces for Christian activity, and service and endurance are outward fruit or the results that flow from these motive forces.”⁹⁰ Primarily, the

⁸⁴ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 100.

⁸⁵ Johnson, *Revelation*, 623.

⁸⁶ Ezek 1:27 reads, “I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metals, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him” (NIV).

⁸⁷ Dan 10:6 says, “His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.”

⁸⁸ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 210.

⁸⁹ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 211.

⁹⁰ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 211.

Thyatirans' love for God and others is understood in the way they serve their neighbors, while their faith in God is observed in their endurance despite ongoing persecution. Moreover, Jesus' inimitable praise of the Christians for their love and service is the only time the occurrence happens in the seven letters.

The first group that Jesus mentions is love and service. He applauds them for their expression of ἀγάπη (*agápē*, “love”) that they show toward God and man. Unlike the Ephesians, the Thyatiran Christians have not forgotten their first love. Instead, as Thomas correctly explains, “the expression of love in practice at Thyatira has increased.”⁹¹ The inner love the Thyatirans have for God and man manifests itself in their acts of διακονίαν (*diakonia*, “service”) toward others. Their service, according to Osborne, “refers to an active life of care and help, charitable service and ministry to others.”⁹² Finally, their service is not out of compulsion; instead, it is due to their love for Christ and their neighbors.

The next group of works that Jesus praises is faith and endurance (2:19). Osborne believes that the faith of the Thyatiran Christians displays their “trust in God rather than in this world.”⁹³ These Christians are living in a time where they are under immense pressure to worship false deities, yet they remain committed to Christ as seen in their “endurance” (2:19c). Recall that membership in one of the dominant trade guilds was a requirement for employment. One obligation of guild members was participation in pagan rituals to show loyalty to the guardian god of their particular occupation. Thomas best describes these expectations:

Pagan worship was associated with trade guilds in that each guild had its guardian god. Guild members were expected to attend the guild festivals and to eat food, part of which had been offered to the tutelary deity and which was acknowledged as being

⁹¹ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 74.

⁹² Osborne, *Revelation*, chap. 2.

⁹³ Osborne, *Revelation*, chap. 2.

on the tables as a gift from the god. At the end of the feast grossly, immoral activities would commence. To exit at the time of such activity would lay a person open to ridicule and other kinds of persecution, a situation well reflected in the message to the church in the city.⁹⁴

Osborne further explains that the endurance shown by the Thyatiran Christians is “active perseverance in the midst of pressure and hard times.”⁹⁵ Nevertheless, amid these immoral behaviors, Jesus exhorts the Christians for their “latter works exceed the first” (2:19). Once again, Jesus differentiates Thyatiran Christians from those in Ephesus where their love is forgotten, by commending them for their spiritual growth despite external factors.

Even though the Christians are growing in their love for God and others, and remaining faithful to Him as they endure persecution, Jesus still offers words of rebuke. According to Jesus, the Thyatiran Christians are tolerating a sectarian party led by “Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing [His] servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols” (2:20). This declaration makes a clear distinction between the people in the church who are doing as Christ expects (vv. 18-19) and the other groups who are not.

The name Jezebel is most likely emblematic of a woman within the church who, like the Jezebel in the Old Testament, is teaching heresy.⁹⁶ The Bible paints Jezebel as a fierce, violent, and uncontrolled woman (1 Kgs 16:31; 18:4; 19:2; 21:5-14, 2 Kgs 9:22). She was strong-minded, prideful, and full of evil schemes (1 Kgs 21:25). Her maliciousness knew no bounds (1 Kgs 18:4). According to Scripture, Jezebel marries Israel’s King Ahab and immediately begins encouraging him to worship her god Baal (1 Kgs 16:29-34). The Lexham Bible Dictionary states that Baal “was recognized as sustaining the fertility of crops, animals, and people. His followers often believed that

⁹⁴ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 208.

⁹⁵ Osborne, *Revelation*, chap. 2.

⁹⁶ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 86.

sexual acts performed in his temple would boost Baal's sexual prowess, and thus contribute to his work in increasing fertility."⁹⁷

Jesus associates the Jezebel of Thyatira with the cunning and evil likeness as the Old Testament Jezebel. First, He notes that she "calls herself a prophetess" (Rev 2:20). Thomas writes, "In her own eyes, Jezebel's special revelations from God qualified her as an authoritative teacher in the church." Second, even though she refers to "herself [as] a prophetess" her teachings are false. Smalley maintains that just as Ahab's Jezebel led Israelites away from the Lord, this Jezebel is "using her persuasive influence to encourage [Christians] to compromise with the pagan society in which they lived: by indulging in sexual licence (*sic*) and by sharing common meals dedicated to pagan deities."⁹⁸ Essentially, the Thyatirans are allowing Jezebel to embolden Christians to practice pagan beliefs while compromising Jesus' teachings.

Because the Thyatiran Jezebel is leading His people astray, Jesus pronounces judgment by stating the time for her "to repent of her sexual immorality" (2:21) is over. Consequently, according to Mounce, a "severe punishment is about to be meted out."⁹⁹ The punishment, Jesus declares, is Him "casting her into a bed" (2:22). The bed, however, is not one of comfort or rest. Instead, it is a bed of sickness.¹⁰⁰ Jezebel's unrepentant participation in supporting trade guild rituals and leading Christians to do the same will result in God inflicting physical suffering on her that will most likely lead to death. Moreover, Thomas believes that based on the times Jesus "used *ballō eis*" in the gospels, Jesus' throwing of Jezebel on a sickbed represents "the casting of people into the

⁹⁷ J. D. Barry and L. Wentz, eds., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), s.v. "Baal."

⁹⁸ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 74.

⁹⁹ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 87.

¹⁰⁰ Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, chap. 2.

place of eternal torment.”¹⁰¹ Jesus’ judgment, though, is not just for Jezebel, but also for her unrepentant followers.

The second group Jesus casts judgment on are Jezebel’s followers (2:22b). R. H. Charles defines this group as those who “thought they could combine faithfulness to Christ with the concessions to the pagan spirit that their membership of the business guilds involved.”¹⁰² He maintains that while they still have time to repent, they must “come to see that they cannot serve two masters.”¹⁰³ Even though their judgment is less severe than that of Jezebel, Jesus promises great suffering and pain for those who fail to repent from their sins (2:22b). The same, however, cannot be said for those whom Jesus calls Jezebel’s children.

Third, Jesus pronounces judgment against Jezebel’s “children” (2:23a). Jesus is not referring to the physical children of Jezebel but is instead alluding to her followers. According to Thomas, this is due to the fact that “‘Children’ is a customary way of referring to one’s spiritual progeny.”¹⁰⁴ Thomas continues by stating that these “children” are individuals who have fully “embraced the antinomian doctrines of their spiritual mother and are properly referred to as her spiritual offspring.”¹⁰⁵ Their refusal to “repent of her works” (2:22c) will lead to the same fate as their spiritual mother (2:23a). Charles affirms that because “they are one with their spiritual mother in aim and character. For them . . . there is nothing but the doom of destruction.”¹⁰⁶ Additionally,

¹⁰¹ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 218.

¹⁰² R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), chap. 6, Logos Bible Software.

¹⁰³ Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, chap. 6.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 222.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 222.

¹⁰⁶ Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, chap. 6.

Jesus avows that the judgment of Jezebel and her children will authenticate to the seven churches His omniscience and righteous judgment (2:23b).

Next, Jesus issues one promise and two commandments to the Thyatiran Christians “who do not hold to this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan” (2:24). First, He promises to refrain from placing “any other burden[s]” (2:24d) on them since they are already persevering against the false teaching that is proliferating in the church and combating external evils. Thomas suggests that “Christ promises to place upon them no other burden other than continuing to stand against [Jezebel].”¹⁰⁷ Additionally, Jesus issues two commands to assist the Christians in their fight against Jezebel and her followers.

The first commandment is to “hold fast what you have” (2:25a). Thomas asserts, “Κρατέω (Krateō) is a common metaphor to describe strict adherence to a tradition or teaching either in a good sense . . . or in a bad sense.”¹⁰⁸ Its usage in this verse represents Jesus’ authoritative command for them to continue enduring and persevering in the face of evil. They must refuse to capitulate to the immense pressure from Jezebel and her followers no matter how difficult life becomes. Next, Jesus offers the Christians a timetable as to how long they must fight against the evils that surround them by charging them to hold on “until I come” (2:25b). These instructions, according to Osborne, reflect “the key message of the book” to persevere ‘to the end.’¹⁰⁹ Thomas further suggests, “The nearness of His coming is held up as an incentive to stand true in the face of pressure to compromise right standards of behavior.”¹¹⁰ Following these two directives, Jesus moves on to issue a challenge to overcome and one final demand for the

¹⁰⁷ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 230.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 231.

¹⁰⁹ Osborne, *Revelation*, chap. 2.

¹¹⁰ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*. 231.

Christians.

The first of the final two declarations that Jesus issues begin with Him stating, “The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. And I will give him the morning star” (2:26-27). The initial promise made by Jesus is for faithful Christians who understand His expectations of them. The one who lives out the Word of God, as demonstrated in their faithfully carrying out Jesus’ works, is promised a great reward. Thomas summarizes that Jesus is assuring Christians that “the ‘end’ of the struggle to maintain an obedient life will coincide with the return of Christ to deliver the overcomer.”¹¹¹ Next, Jesus describes the substance of the promise. Here He references a messianic prophecy from Psalm 2:7-9 where the son of David, as ruler of Israel, is promised that “the ends of the earth [will be his] possession,” thus allowing him the authority to “break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” This promise, according to Smalley, is “a characteristic feature of Jewish eschatology, carried over into Christian thought, that the followers of the Messiah would share in his final rule.”¹¹² Therefore, to the one who endures persecution from Jezebel and her followers until Jesus returns to save them, God gives the same authority that He granted Jesus to shepherd the nations.¹¹³

The final promise Jesus makes to the Thyatiran Christians who overcome is “the morning star.” Even though there is not a defined meaning concerning the star, Thomas suggests that Jesus is referring to a promise for Christians in the messianic kingdom. The morning star in ancient times represented the brightest star. Several passages

¹¹¹ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 232.

¹¹² Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 77.

¹¹³ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 90.

of Scripture allude to this. For example, the morning star is a sign of royalty in Matthew 2:2. In Daniel 12:3, the wise and faithful will “shine like the brightness of the sky above . . . like the stars forever and ever.” Finally, in Matthew 13:43 Jesus promises that “the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” Therefore, Jesus’ promise to give the morning star to overcomers is in connection with His promise in verse 27, where those who receive it will govern the nations alongside Him (2:27). His final instruction to the Thyatiran Christians is to listen to the message of the Holy Spirit (2:29).

Jesus’ message to the Thyatiran church is clear: He expects His church to avoid defiling themselves by refusing to assimilate their beliefs with cultural philosophies that go against His teachings. The same message is true for today’s modern churches who attempt to synthesize God’s expectations with the worlds. Therefore, the GBA Revitalization Residency will equip future revitalizing pastors with a biblical ecclesiology that will allow them to identify the difference between God’s teachings and improper cultural ethos.

Sardis

Located about fifty miles east of Ephesus and due south of Thyatira along the Central Anatolian plateau in front of Mount Tmolus, was the city of Sardis. Its original geographical location made the city an ideal fortress, which is why the Lydian kingdom established Sardis as its capital around 1200 BC.¹¹⁴ Moreover, the original city existed 1,500 feet above the plain on top of a series of sedimentary hills and was only accessible at one point.¹¹⁵ Despite its geographical advantage, Sardis found itself under constant attack from its enemies, albeit to no avail. Ramsay maintains that Sardis “was a great,

¹¹⁴ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 240.

¹¹⁵ Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, chap. 25.

wealthy, impregnable city, over which victory was practically impossible,”¹¹⁶ that is until Croesus king of Lydia unwisely attacked Cyrus king of Persia in the middle of the sixth century and was ultimately defeated. The fall of the city sent shock waves of disbelief throughout all of Greece.¹¹⁷ The downward spiral of the city, however, had just started. Antiochus the Great, 350 years later, laid siege to the city, and in AD 17 the city was ravaged by a deadly earthquake.¹¹⁸ The once wealthy and impregnable capital city was known for nothing more than its trade routes. By the time of Roman occupation, Sardis’s best days were in its past.

Despite these setbacks, luxurious and loose lifestyles characterized the people of Sardis.¹¹⁹ Sardian culture defined their religious ethos since theirs was a peculiar and complex religious culture. While Sardians practiced imperial worship, they primarily worshiped Anatolian gods. Ramsay suggests, however, that they “modified, and put their own individual character into, the general Anatolian religious forms.”¹²⁰ Primarily, the Anatolian religion emphasized the worship of nature and its role in death and self-reproduction.¹²¹ Although the chief deity of the city was the goddess Cybele, also known as the Greek goddess Artemis, the Sardinians further synthesized religions with their belief in the god of the underworld. Hot springs existed two miles outside of the city that people believed could restore life to the dead. The springs, writes Thomas, “were viewed as visible manifestations of the power of the god of the underworld, which was prominent

¹¹⁶ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 241.

¹¹⁷ Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, chap. 25.

¹¹⁸ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 241.

¹¹⁹ Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, chap. 3, Kindle.

¹²⁰ Ramsay, *Revelation 1-7*, chap. 25.

¹²¹ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 243.

in the local religious legend.”¹²² Within this mysterious and convoluted religious system the Christian church attempted to exist. The church, though, was not functioning to Jesus’ satisfaction.

Just as He has done in the previous letters, Jesus opens His letter to the Sardian Christians by speaking in such a way that those who hear the letter will know that He is speaking directly to them. By describing Himself as the One “who has the seven spirits of God” (3:1b), Jesus, according to Thomas, is informing them that He has received direct knowledge concerning their actual spiritual condition from “the Third Person of the Trinity, who knows all and whose purpose is to testify through the seven lampstands established in the seven cities.”¹²³ Furthermore, Jesus controls “the seven stars” (3:1c), which are “the seven angels of the churches” (1:20), thus giving Him sovereign control over the churches. James Hamilton ascertains that Jesus’ introduction to the Sardian Christians communicates that He “is fully alert, fully informed, and completely aware of all that takes place in Heaven and on earth.”¹²⁴ Whereas the Sardian Christians can hide their real spiritual condition from the world, they cannot hide it from the omniscient Jesus.

Unlike He did with the five previous churches, Jesus does not inform the Sardian Christians concerning their good works. Sardis joins Laodicea as the only two churches to receive letters without any commendations from Jesus. Instead, He conveys to them that despite their “reputation of being alive” they are a “dead” church (3:1f). Mounce believes that, at their core, Sardian Christians were “untroubled by heresy and free from outside opposition” therefore, “it had so completely come to terms with its pagan environment that although it retained the outward appearance of life, it was

¹²² Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 243.

¹²³ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 244.

¹²⁴ James M. Hamilton, Jr., *Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: Crossway, 2012), 105.

spiritually dead.”¹²⁵ They do not have to ward off false doctrines since there is no mention of groups like the Nicolaitans and Balammites, nor are they being swayed away from Jesus by a false prophetess like Jezebel. Furthermore, Jesus does not mention that Sardian Christians are experiencing threats of persecution from pagan worshippers. A majority of its members are willing participants in going through the motions of being a Christian, but their efforts are fruitless. Though it is a dead church, there is still some hope, but only if its members will heed the forthcoming command of Christ.

Just like their city, who at one time believed they were invincible, the Sardian Christians are suffering from a false sense of security. Recall that the city was twice attacked, once in 549 BC and again in the third century because they believed they were impregnable until sneak attacks revealed they were not.¹²⁶ Regarding this thought, Ramsay believes that “phrase after phrase is chosen for the evident purpose of recalling that ancient memory, which was undoubtedly still strong and living among the Sardians.”¹²⁷ That is why Jesus commands the Christians to first “be watchful” (3:2a KJV). In their context, the Sardians would hear Jesus saying, “Wake up and keep on watching.”¹²⁸ It is a command to cease their current attitude of complacency and to stop blending their Christian identity with the Sardian culture.

Next, Jesus commands them to “strengthen what remains and is about to die” (3:2b). Thankfully for the Sardian Christians, Jesus’ earlier statement that the church is dead is not absolute. Thomas maintains that Jesus will allow them to live if they will recommit themselves “once again [building] the impressive spiritual fortress that had

¹²⁵ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 92.

¹²⁶ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 93.

¹²⁷ Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, chap. 25.

¹²⁸ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 248.

once stood in this pagan city.”¹²⁹ Jesus’ patience, mercy, and forgiveness are in full display since He is willing to allow the church to heed His command and live again. The reason for Jesus’ warning is explained in the latter part of the second verse as He tells them that after hearing the testimony from the Holy Spirit, He has “not found their works complete in the sight of God” (3:2c). The language Jesus uses here refers to the quality of their works and not the quantity. Mounce rationalizes that the works of the church “lacked the appropriate motivation and spiritual orientation, without which all external activity is morally impotent.”¹³⁰ In other words, their works mean nothing because they are spiritually corrupt in their reasons for doing them.

Fourth, Jesus goes on to give three additional commands for the church to follow if they are to live again: remember, keep, and repent (3:3). First, they must “remember . . . what [they] received and heard.” In ordering them to ‘remember,’ Jesus is telling the Sardian Christians to remain keenly aware of the Good News they received at the beginning. About this command, Osborne rationalizes that Jesus is demanding “a continual recall and actualization of the past truths they had been taught.”¹³¹

Additionally, they are to “Keep it” (3:3a). Unlike the city, which became complacent in paying attention to all manners of their security, the Sardian Christians should always remain vigilant about growing in their faith. It is one thing for the Sardian Christians to recall and remain aware of their salvation, but they must go a step further by continuously paying attention to their faith. Thomas believes that this “is a call to devote earnest attention to rebuilding on what was left from the earlier days of fruitfulness: ‘keep on giving earnest attention to the need to strengthen the leftover vitality.’”¹³² Completing

¹²⁹ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 249.

¹³⁰ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 93.

¹³¹ Osborne, *Revelation*, chap. 2.

¹³² Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 251.

the previous commands are meaningless unless the Sardian Christians adhere to Jesus' final imperative to "repent" (3:3a).

Though it is listed last, all of the previous imperatives are mute if the Sardian Christians fail to "repent" (3:3a). Johnson correctly states that "repentance was the only way out of certain and final death."¹³³ Moreover, Thomas correctly argues, "In contrast to the first two commands, which require a continued mental perspective, this one calls for a quick and decisive change of thought and behavior."¹³⁴ Basically, without an immediate transformation of their hearts and behaviors, the church in Sardis will perish. The reality of this imminent death is confirmed in the following verse as Jesus promises a visit resulting in the extinguishing of their existence.

Jesus guarantees that failure to heed His final warnings will result in the Sardian church's demise. If they determine to remain complacent and resist Jesus' call to repent, He will "come against" them, "like a thief" at an unexpected hour (3b). Regarding this vow, Henry holds that "Such a visit from Christ will be to their loss; he will come as a thief, to strip them of their remaining enjoyments, and mercies, not by fraud, but in justice and righteousness."¹³⁵ Also, just as the city of Sardis was previously conquered because of their complacency, the failure of the Sardian church to awaken and repent from spiritual complacency will result in the righteous judgment of Christ conquering them. While a majority of the church members are not living up to God's expectations, a few are.

According to Jesus, not everyone in the church has fallen into the same languor as the majority of believers (3:4). These people, according to Jesus, "have not soiled their garments" (3:4). Jesus is saying that not all of the Christians are defiling their relationship with Him by sinning. Thomas best explains the Lord's words: "The refreshing thing about

¹³³ Johnson, *Revelation*, 628.

¹³⁴ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 252.

¹³⁵ Henry, *Acts-Revelation*, 912.

this remnant in Sardis is that members had not fallen into sinful practices and so had remained pure in contrast to most of their fellow churchmen.”¹³⁶ Because they have remained pure, they will receive four rewards.

First, Jesus promises the faithful believers that their worthiness will result in their walking with Him “in white . . . garments” (3:4-5a). Continuing with the theme of garments, Jesus says that the ones who did not defile themselves with sin will receive the honor of joining Him in wearing white clothing. The symbolic nature of this reward is the purity of the color white. In agreement, Thomas writes, “It seems evident that the whiteness of these new garments stands for holiness and purity.”¹³⁷ Ladd believes, “This is a promise of victory and purity in the messianic kingdom.”¹³⁸ Moreover, Plummer ascertains that the unsoiled white clothes of the faithful are symbolic of “the perfect purity of glorified saints in heaven.”¹³⁹ Their unrelenting faithfulness in Christ Jesus will receive the great reward of being clothed in white by Him. In addition to receiving this reward, Jesus goes on to make two more promises that the Saints will receive upon arrival in the heavenly kingdom.

The third promise Jesus makes to the “one who conquers” is to “never blot his name out of the book of life” (3:5b). Instead of having their names removed from the book of life, like God’s enemies in Psalm 68:29, these faithful believers receive a “promise of deliverance rather than judgment.”¹⁴⁰ Rather than facing eternal separation from God, Jesus is assuring them of eternal salvation for refusing to capitulate to their culture.

Finally, Jesus promises those who remain faithful to Him that He will

¹³⁶ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 257.

¹³⁷ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 257.

¹³⁸ Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, chap. 3.

¹³⁹ Plummer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 109.

¹⁴⁰ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 260.

“confess” their names “before [His] Father and before his angels” (3:5c). Those who are giving into the desires of the culture and polluting themselves with sins will be denied by Jesus while in God’s courtroom. Conversely, these faithful few will receive Jesus’ acknowledgment in God’s court. Though these saints may suffer persecution, even to the point of death, while on this earth, Smalley explains that “beyond earth, and in the heavenly court, they will be openly vindicated.”¹⁴¹ Which, according to Thomas, there is no greater reward for a person than to receive the honor of having the Lord Jesus Christ “affirm their worthiness and the legitimacy of their claim to the bliss of the future kingdom.”¹⁴² Following these four-fold promises, Jesus concludes His letter with the familiar command to listen and “hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (3:6). Though Christ is the speaker, the Holy Spirit is His mouthpiece in each of the letters. Therefore, those who hear the letters are wise to listen to and obey their contents. That message is not only true for the churches in Asia, but the message holds for all churches that like Sardis are close to death.

If there were ever a church that resembles today’s American church, Sardis is that church. Craig Keener suggests that Jesus’ message to Sardis is “relevant to sleeping churches—that is, to those that are guided more by their culture than by Jesus’ voice or any sense of future reckoning before him.”¹⁴³ No longer are they practicing the necessary spiritual disciplines to help them grow in Christlike maturity (1 Tim 4:6-8); thus, they are imitating the world more so than Christ. Furthermore, many of these same churches have grown complacent in their way of doing church. Their focus is on maintaining a large budget and having the most beautiful building instead of sharing the gospel with those who are far from God. One of the primary goals of the GBA Revitalization Residency is

¹⁴¹ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 86.

¹⁴² Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 265.

¹⁴³ Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 145.

to train revitalization pastors to develop a discipleship model that will see people growing in their Christlike maturity. Without such emphases, the American church will continue to struggle and remain uninfluential in their communities.

Laodicea

Laodicea, along with Colossae and Hierapolis, was located in the Lycus valley. It was the most easterly and southernmost Asian Minor city to receive Jesus' revelation.¹⁴⁴ The city was nearly impenetrable as it sat several hundred feet high atop a plateau, but as MacArthur describes, "its vulnerability to attack was due to the fact that it had to pipe in its water from several miles away through aqueducts that could easily be blocked or diverted by besieging forces."¹⁴⁵ Despite this vulnerability, Laodicea's geographical location made the city a commercial and financial power during the days of the Roman Empire.¹⁴⁶ Its production of a highly sought after lustrously soft black wool helped make Laodicea a highly luxurious place to live. MacArthur explains that the city became so wealthy "that it paid for its own reconstruction after a devastating earthquake in A.D. 60"¹⁴⁷ without any Roman financial assistance.

Located thirteen miles to the west of Laodicea lay a temple dedicated to the Phrygian god Men Karou. According to Ramsay, "his temple was the centre (*sic*) of society and administration, intercourse and trade, as well as religion."¹⁴⁸ Thomas notes that, in conjunction with the nearby temple, Laodicea was home to a school of medicine

¹⁴⁴ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 296.

¹⁴⁵ MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, 135.

¹⁴⁶ Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, chap. 29.

¹⁴⁷ MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, 135.

¹⁴⁸ Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, chap. 29.

that followed the teachings of the Greek physician Herophilos (350–250 BC).¹⁴⁹ Over time, the medical school became famous for its development and production of an eye salve that healed eye diseases. MacArthur explains that the eye salve was so esteemed “it was exported throughout the Greco-Roman world.”¹⁵⁰ The city’s manufacturing, financial, and medical prominence afforded the people a luxurious lifestyle that Jesus brings to light in His condemnation of the Laodicean church.

Although the Phrygian god Men Karou was the supreme god the Laodiceans worshiped, the influence of the Greeks led them to pay homage to other pagan gods such as Zeus, Dionysus, Helios, Hera, and Athena.¹⁵¹ Moreover, Ramsay articulates that the city was also known for its imperial worship as it earned “the Temple—Wardenship under Commodus, A.D. 180-191.”¹⁵² Together with its tremendous economic prosperity, the religious practices in Laodicea influenced the Christian church in such a great way that Christ sees fit to indict them for their superficial commitment to Him.

In addition to the negative impact the culture had on the spiritual condition of the Laodicean church, Colossae’s close proximity to the city was also a potential issue for the church. Paul’s letter to the Colossians identifies that a group of heretics known as Gnostics were teaching that Christ was nothing more than one of God’s created beings. In response to the false doctrine, Paul writes concerning Christ’s preeminence over all creation (Col 1:15-17). MacArthur maintains that it is likely “the same heresy plaguing the Colossians had made its way to Laodicea.”¹⁵³ Additionally, not only did Paul intend his letter for the Colossian church, but he also expected it to be read to the Laodicean

¹⁴⁹ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 298.

¹⁵⁰ MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, 135.

¹⁵¹ Keener, *Revelation*, 157.

¹⁵² Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, chap. 29.

¹⁵³ MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, 134.

Christians (Col 4:16). Therefore, one believes that this heresy is a key reason for Laodicea's lack of spiritual fervor and the need for Christ's letter to them.

Understanding the descriptions Christ prescribes to Himself in the opening passage of His letter to the Laodicean Christians is paramount for understanding the spiritual condition of the Laodicean church. Jesus opens the letter with three descriptions of Himself. First, He claims the name $\delta \text{ Αμήν}$, (*ho Amēn* “the Amen”). Jesus' use of this term in Revelation 3:14 is the only time in the New Testament it is used as a descriptive name.¹⁵⁴ Here Jesus uses “*ho Amēn* to convey a sense of certainty regarding the forthcoming promises. As Smalley explains, Jesus is “guaranteeing the truth of his message, just as God's sure character stands behind his word.”¹⁵⁵ Jesus is calling on the Laodiceans to pay careful attention to the forthcoming message because the One who is delivering it epitomizes truth in every form.

The second description Jesus ascribes to Himself, $\delta \text{ μάρτυς } \delta \text{ πιστός και } \alpha\lambda\eta\theta\iota\nu\acute{o}\varsigma$ (*ho martyrs ho pistos kai alēthinos* “the faithful and true witness”), further elucidates His initial title of “the Amen” (3:14b). Thomas explains that because He is “the Amen” (3:14b), the veracity of Christ's words makes Him “the exemplification of the perfect ideal of a witness in whom all the highest conditions of a witness are met, one whose testimony never falls short of the truth.”¹⁵⁶ Finally, Jesus pronounces Himself as $\eta \text{ αρχή της κτίσεως του θεοῦ}$, (*hē archē tēs ktiseōs tou theou*, “the beginning of God's creation”). While some, such as the Gnostics, attempted to utilize this verse to lessen Christ's Divinity, *archē* in its original form establishes that Christ is the source of all creation and not a created being. Plummer verbalizes that *archē* establishes Christ “as the

¹⁵⁴ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 96.

¹⁵⁵ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 96.

¹⁵⁶ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 302.

Beginner, the Author, Moving Principle, or Source of all the things which God created.”¹⁵⁷ For both Laodicean and today’s Christians, Jesus expects His followers to recognize His authority over creation from the beginning (Rev 22:13), and how all things were created through His power (John 1:3; Heb 1:2; Col 1:15-17). The Laodiceans, however, failed in this expectation, which as MacArthur explains, “was the reason the Laodicean church was spiritually dead.”¹⁵⁸ The seriousness of Christ’s descriptions of Himself establishes the foundation for His forthcoming critic of the Laodicean church’s spiritual condition.

Continuing with the pattern He established in the previous six letters, Jesus opens His message to the Laodiceans by saying Οἶδά (*Oida*, “I know”). In using these words, the Lord establishes His omniscience concerning the inner and outer spiritual conditions of the Laodicean Christians. The substances of His knowledge are σου τὰ ἔργα (*sou ta erga* “your works”), which not only concern their outer actions, but the true motivation behind them. Thomas expounds, “They are a reflection of life and conduct in general, including outward and inward spiritual activities. They are evidence of the inward spiritual condition the Lord alone sees and knows.”¹⁵⁹ What the Lord discovers as He observes the Laodicean Christians is a church that is so depraved that they are void of any works worth commending. Moreover, Jesus’ upcoming scolding of the church is the most contemptuous of any of the churches that received a letter.

Just as He did in the previous letters, Jesus utilizes metaphorical language that is relevant to the city’s culture to convey His message to the church. In the case of the Laodiceans, Jesus relates the tepidness of their drinking water to the church’s spiritual fervor. Neighboring Hierapolis was known for its hot spring water that was believed to have medicinal advantages. Laodicea’s other neighbor, Colossae, was known for its

¹⁵⁷ Plummer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 114.

¹⁵⁸ MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, 134.

¹⁵⁹ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 304.

naturally cold water that many believed had life-giving effects. By the time the water from these two cities reached Laodicea it had turned lukewarm. According to Thomas, “Such tepid water was sickening to drink on either a hot or a cold day.”¹⁶⁰ Thus, as Smalley suggests, Jesus’ description of the spiritual condition of the Laodicean Christians as “neither hot nor cold” (3:15a) exemplifies how they are “neither ‘against’ Christ nor ‘for’ him.”¹⁶¹ Likewise, just as the city’s lukewarm water was undrinkable and useless, so was the Laodicean church unusable for Christ’s purposes, which according to Matthew Henry is “the vilest imposture” and “inexcusable”¹⁶² Following Jesus’ state of the church pronouncement, He expresses His desire for them to choose a side (3:15b). Their commitment to Christ, however, was nothing more than a superficial assertion.

Following His appeal for the Christians to decide whether they are for or against Him, Jesus conveys how their indifference repulses Him by announcing that He is μέλλω σε ἐμέσαι ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου (*mellō se emesai ek tou stomatos mou*, “about to spew you out of my mouth”). Jesus’ use of the term ἐμέσαι (*emesai*, “vomit”) to describe the potential expulsion of the church from His presence is a vivid representation of the effect one has whenever drinking lukewarm water. As Osborne explains, the city’s lukewarm water “provided a perfect metaphor for the shallowness of the church.”¹⁶³ Plummer likens Jesus’ declaration “as a figure in which to express [His] abhorrence . . . for those who lacked zeal in his service.”¹⁶⁴ MacArthur notes, “Some churches make the Lord weep, others make Him angry, the Laodicean church made Him sick.”¹⁶⁵ To help the

¹⁶⁰ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 307.

¹⁶¹ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 98.

¹⁶² Henry, *Acts-Revelation*, 914.

¹⁶³ Osborne, *Revelation*, chap. 2.

¹⁶⁴ Plummer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 115.

¹⁶⁵ MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, 136.

complacent church grasp their depravity, Jesus offers them a detailed account of their reality.

In verse 17, Jesus outlines the false sense of security that permeates the Laodicean church. According to Christ, the church, much like the city, believe they have no needs due to their monetary wealth (3:16a). While they are focused on their physical wealth, Jesus is more concerned with their spiritual health. That is why He informs them that in reality they are “wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked” (3:16b). According to MacArthur, the fact that Jesus considered them “wretched” and “pitiable” demonstrates how they believed “they were to be envied” while in reality “they were in fact to be pitied.”¹⁶⁶ Moreover, Jesus goes deeper into their disillusionment by pronouncing that while they believe there are wealthy, they are in fact “poor”; while they celebrate having a medicine that helps people see, they are in fact “blind”; and while they are known for clothing others with their manufactured garments, they are in fact “naked.” Beale understands Jesus’ alluding to the church’s resources as a way of describing their true condition as he writes that the Christians “placed too much trust” in “its banking system . . . its famous eye salve, and its textile trade.”¹⁶⁷ The truth for the congregants, however, is that they are morally and spiritually bankrupt. Despite this, though, Jesus offers them grace.

Despite their sinful lifestyles and misguided spiritual reality, Jesus offers relief to the lukewarm Christians by advising them of their need to purchase three items. First, συμβουλευῶ σοι ἀγοράσαι παρ’ ἐμαυτοῦ χρυσὴν πεπυρωμένον ἐκ πυρός ἵνα πλουτήσῃς (*symbolouēō soi agorasai par’ emou chrysiōn pepyrōmenon ek pyros hina ploutēsēs*, “I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined by fire that you may become rich”). In using the term *symbolouēō* (“I advise” or “I counsel”), Jesus is telling the church that believes they

¹⁶⁶ MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, 137.

¹⁶⁷ Beale and Campbell, *Revelation*, 91.

need nothing, that because of their spiritual poverty they need His wisdom regarding their spiritual flaws.¹⁶⁸ Thomas emphasizes how “the pronouns *soi . . . emou* are specific and emphatic: ‘you buy from Me.’”¹⁶⁹ Not only do the Laodiceans need Jesus’ wisdom regarding their spiritual condition, they also need Him to purify them.¹⁷⁰ The church that believes they can purchase anything they desire is being told the one thing they cannot afford to purchase is purification for their sins.

Not only are the Christians told to purchase refined gold from Jesus, but He goes on to say *καὶ ἱμάτια λευκά ἵνα περιβάλη καὶ μὴ φανερωθῇ ἡ αἰσχύνη τῆς γυμνότητός σου* (*kai himatia leuka hina peribalē kai mē phanerōthē hē aischynē tēs gymnotētos sou*, “and white garments that you may be clothed and the shame of your nakedness may not be exposed”). In this second pronouncement, Jesus juxtaposes the exotic black garments the Laodiceans manufacture with the pure white robes of His righteousness.¹⁷¹ According to Leon Morris, “*Nakedness* was in the ancient world the ultimate humiliation, while contrariwise to be clothed in fine clothing was to receive honour (*sic*).”¹⁷² The reality for the church that believed they did not need anything was potential shame and humility unless they purchased the pure white robes of righteousness from Christ. Unfortunately, they were unable to see their spiritual depravity due to their blindness.

Third, Jesus exhorts the Laodiceans to cure their inability to see their spiritual reality by purchasing *κολλούριον ἐγγχεῖσαι τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς σου ἵνα βλέπῃς* (*kollourion enchrisai tous ophthalmous sou hina blepēs*, “eyesalve to anoint your eyes that you may

¹⁶⁸ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 312-13.

¹⁶⁹ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 313.

¹⁷⁰ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 110.

¹⁷¹ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 99.

¹⁷² Leon Morris, *Revelation*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1987), 85.

see”). Thomas explains, “*Kollourion* (“eyesalve”) is derived from *κολλύρα* (*kollyra*), which is a course bread, cylindrical in shape. This elongated lump was impregnated with medicines and used as bandage for sore or weak eyes.”¹⁷³ Once again, Jesus utilizes a material the city was widely known for producing and a source of their wealth and pride as a manner to exploit their spiritual weakness. Ladd maintains that while “Phrygian physicians might aid men in their physical blindness; only Christ can heal the eyes of those who are spiritually blind.”¹⁷⁴ Essentially, the Laodicean Christians are unable to see their spiritual depravity without the anointing of Christ’s “eye salve.” Hamilton best captures Christ’s words by writing that the Laodiceans “see themselves as rich, prosperous, needing nothing. Jesus offers them sight, that they might see themselves as they are— ‘wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked’ (3:17).”¹⁷⁵

In contrast to His promise to “vomit” the lukewarm Christians “out of [His] mouth” (v. 16), Jesus apprises the Laodiceans of His “love” (v. 19) for them. He says in verse 19, ἐγὼ ὅσους ἐὰν φιλῶ ἐλέγχω καὶ παιδεύω (*egō hosous ean philō elenchō kai paideuō*, “as many as I love, I reprove and chasten”). In an almost exact quotation from Solomon’s words in Proverbs 3:12, Jesus expresses that His love for His children prompts Him to “reprove” (*elenchō*) and “chasten” (*paideu*) them. Jesus’ purpose, according to Osborne, is to show “those who fail in their walk, divine love must lead to discipline.”¹⁷⁶ Moreover, as Plummer explains, “the stern reproof administered was a pruning, which was evidence of God’s loving care for them.”¹⁷⁷ The Lord’s expected outcome is for the chastised Christians to ζήλευε οὖν καὶ μετανόησον (*zēleue oun kai metanoēson*, to “be

¹⁷³ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 315.

¹⁷⁴ Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, chap. 3.

¹⁷⁵ Hamilton, *Revelation*, 123.

¹⁷⁶ Osborne, *Revelation*, chap. 2.

¹⁷⁷ Plummer, *The Revelation of St. John Divine*, 117.

zealous, therefore, and repent”). Instead of continuing in their lukewarm approach concerning their faith in Him, Jesus commands the Laodiceans to become passionate believers. Thomas explains this verse further: “A continuing zeal is commanded in place of lukewarm indifference that had characterized the people heretofore.”¹⁷⁸ Likewise, Mounce writes that Jesus’ “advice to the Laodiceans, therefore, is that they repent and make it their practice to continue to live zealously for the Lord.”¹⁷⁹ Basically, Christ is calling out to the Laodiceans to cease their carefree attitude toward their relationship with Him by recognizing how desperately they need Him.

Continuing His expression of love expressed in verse 19, Jesus references a passage from Song of Solomon in verse 20 to describe the intimacy He desires with His children: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (3:20). Thomas expounds on Jesus’ words when he writes, “The picture comes from Song of Sol. 5:2 where the bridegroom knocks and seeks to be admitted by the bride.”¹⁸⁰ Smalley explains the depicted image as one where “those who had in their self-sufficiency excluded him from their fellowship, Christ waits for a personal relationship to be restored.”¹⁸¹ Plummer ascertains, “The whole figure is an image of the perfect nature of the sinner’s reconciliation with God, and of the wonderful goodness and condescension of Christ.”¹⁸²

Finally, Jesus makes a second allusion to His desired intimacy with His children as He promises to dine with the one who “opens the door.” Smalley explains, “To share a

¹⁷⁸ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 319.

¹⁷⁹ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 112.

¹⁸⁰ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 321.

¹⁸¹ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 101.

¹⁸² Plummer, *The Revelation of St. John Divine*, 117.

common meal in the Middle East, then as now, is a sign of intimacy and trust.”¹⁸³ The illustration not only points to present communion with the Lord, but also portrays the eternal union that awaits all believers. Concerning this, Thomas maintains, “The mutual exchange of camaraderie pictured in the present verses depicts ultimate closeness with Christ in the future.”¹⁸⁴ Not only will the one who responds to Jesus’ knocks on the door receive the blessing of Him dining with them, but they are also promised a special seat in the Messianic Kingdom as Jesus promises to give “The one who conquers” a seat on His “throne, as [He] also conquered and sat down with [His} Father on his throne” (3:21). Recall the extremely high view the Laodiceans have of themselves and their wealth. Unlike the fading earthly wealth they have amassed, Jesus promises the true Christian an everlasting throne as “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom 8:17 AV). Henry expounds on Jesus’ promise: “That those who are conformed to Christ in his trials and victories shall be conformed to him in his glory; they shall sit down with him on his throne.”¹⁸⁵ Jesus is promising the one who repents of his sins and trusts in Him as his Savior an eternal wealth that is far more prestigious than anything this world has to offer.

The church in Laodicea was marked by a self-reliant pride in worldly wealth that caused their zeal for pursuing an intimate relationship with Christ to falter. Instead of placing their trust in Jesus to supply their needs, they trusted in themselves and their wealth. MacArthur rightly posits that the spiritual condition of the Laodicean Christians is by far “the worst of the seven churches addressed by our Lord.”¹⁸⁶ In the same way, many issues that contemporary churches face today are the result of the same lack of

¹⁸³ Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 101.

¹⁸⁴ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 324.

¹⁸⁵ Henry, *Acts-Revelation*, 916.

¹⁸⁶ MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11*, 132.

fervor for Christ that plagued the Laodiceans. Instead of seeking God's will and purpose for the church, church members and their leaders place their preferences and desires above the Father's. Likewise, church members too often base their success on the vastness and beauty of their buildings, the amount of people who fill their worship centers, and their large budgets. While the spiritual condition of church members can rightly be attributed to their lack of personal fervor for Christ, it is the responsibility of those who Christ entrusted to shepherd the church to point out these fallacies and utilize God's Word to call them into repentance. Therefore, the GBA's Center for Church Revitalization Residency will train future church revitalizing pastors to comprehend God's expectations of them as pastors by instilling the value of daily prayer and Bible study, the necessity of exegetical preaching, and ongoing personal and churchwide evangelism. It is essential for pastors who are serving churches in need of revitalization to understand that only by leading their church to consistently pursue Christ through these disciplines can they return to the type of zeal that Christ expects from His followers. Only then will these lukewarm churches return to vibrancy.

Conclusion

Andrew Davis correctly posits, "The timeless message of Revelation 1-3 must be applied to churches in our generation."¹⁸⁷ The church in Ephesus had forsaken its first love (2:4), the church in Pergamum allowed false teachers to infiltrate its doctrinal teachings (2:14-16), Christ condemned the church in Thyatira for participating in pagan worship and committing sexually immoral acts (2:20-23), Sardis was dead (3:1-2), and Laodicea's lukewarm spiritual condition nauseated Jesus to the point of sickness (3:15-16). The only remedy, according to God's Word, was for them to repent and return to Him. Failure to adhere to the Lord's command would result in the church's death. Today,

¹⁸⁷ Andrew Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Help Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 16.

Jesus is calling on the multitude of American churches infected with the equivalent sins as five of the seven churches in Revelation to repent and return to Him or face the same repercussions. If these churches are going to experience new birth and a return to vitality, it is going to take a well-trained, God-called individual to lead them toward repentance and a return to the Lord. Thus, the need for a church revitalization residency to provide practical training to help the potential revitalizing pastor prepare for the demands of leading a church back to health.

CHAPTER 3

A CONTEMPORARY ARGUMENT FOR A CHURCH REVITALIZATION RESIDENCY

More churches in this nation today resemble the churches in Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea than resemble the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia. As explained in chapter 2, while each of the five churches Jesus rebuked existed in a different period and context, His message to them is just as relevant to today's American church. Jesus called on the five churches to repent and return to Him or suffer the consequences of His judgment, and He expects today's churches to do the same. The purpose of this chapter is to explain the need struggling churches have for a well-trained revitalization pastor. First, it informs the reader about the context where the GBA's church revitalization residency exists by describing an area in Greenville County, South Carolina, known as the Textile Crescent. The remainder of the chapter focuses on explaining the five requirements church revitalizing pastors must meet to successfully revitalize a dying church.

The Textile Crescent

Around one hundred years ago, at the height of the textile industries' boom Greenville, South Carolina was home to eighteen cotton and dye mills.¹ A majority of these mills formed a crescent moon configuration around the city's western side. This area became known as the textile crescent.

¹ Kelley Bruss, "Greenville's Old Mills Forge New Paths," *Greenville News*, April 29, 2016, <https://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/insider/extras/2016/04/19/greenvilles-old-mills-forge-new-paths/83230136/>.

During this time period, mill presidents believed that caring for the needs of their workers and their families led to better production at work. So, they went to great lengths to meet their physical, emotional, educational, and spiritual needs. Don Koonce, a local historian and creator of a documentary about the Textile Crescent, said, “The presidents took care of their people because their people were money.”² Thus, to meet these needs, the mill presidents created small communities within walking distance of the mills that included housing, general stores, schools, activity centers, and churches.

Unfortunately, the textile industry began declining in the 1970s. Larger mills purchased the smaller ones and began moving operations overseas because of cheaper labor costs. When this occurred, all but three of the mills within the textile crescent sat abandoned for decades. Simultaneously, the neighborhoods that made up the mill villages around the closed textile buildings went through a dramatic transformation.

Once older people that worked in the mills died and their children moved out of the villages, many of the houses became rental properties. The formerly well-maintained villages deteriorated and became lower class socio-economic and ethnic areas. As these changes occurred, the local churches did not adjust, and they grew out of touch with the community. The remaining church members drove to the villages for church each week but hardly any of them lived in the community. Over time, the churches began to dwindle in numbers, and as finances tightened, the church buildings began deteriorating.

In the last decade, the allure of a re-energized downtown Greenville has led to a population surge of younger people and those nearing retirement. The influx of new people created a high demand for housing near Greenville’s downtown epicenter. As older homes were renovated and newer homes constructed, they were immediately purchased, creating a housing shortage. Recently, developers began purchasing the unused

² Jessica Mullen, “Local Historian Don Koonce Releases Documentary about Greenville's Textile History,” *Greenville Journal*, November 14, 2019, <https://greenvillejournal.com/news/local-historian-don-koonce-releases-documentary-about-greenvilles-textile-history/>.

mill buildings and turning them into condominiums, townhomes, and apartments. Doing so resulted in the mill houses being torn down and replaced with brand new homes or the existing homes being renovated. Consequently, as these changes occur, taxes and insurance costs are growing, and the poor who cannot afford to pay them are forced to leave the communities.

Of the one hundred and three churches that make up the Greenville Baptist Association, thirty-three exist within the textile crescent. Despite the new growth in these areas, out of the thirty-three GBA churches, eighteen (54 percent) are at high risk of closing, six (18 percent) are in the process of being revitalized, three (1 percent) are new church plants, four (12 percent) are plateaued, and two (.05 percent) are healthy.³ These statistics prove that, once again, the mill village churches are unprepared for the changes around them.

The run-down church buildings are not appealing to the new neighbors moving into these villages. Moreover, the worship services and programs are designed for older members. The churches have lost their vision for reaching unbelievers with the gospel and making disciples who replicate themselves. While the existing members are confused and discouraged about reaching those moving into their neighborhoods, they often refuse to make the necessary changes to help them become relevant once again. Some churches are currently without a permanent pastor, and others are led by pastors who do not know how to lead them through these tumultuous times. Simultaneously, others are led by pastors on the brink of retiring and are therefore unwilling to push for the necessary changes. The bottom line is these churches are spiritually, financially, and leadership poor.

In the fourth quarter of 2020, Al Phillips, the GBA's Director of Missions, announced "The Textile Crescent Initiative" (TCI) to help revitalize the twenty-two

³ Statistics taken from a handwritten report from the Greenville Baptist Association's Director of Missions, Al Phillips.

churches that are high-risk for closing or plateaued. The vision of the TCI is to help realign existing churches with their communities so that the people living there can have access to the gospel in a way they understand. Mark Hallock understands this need when he writes that if the church truly desires “to push back the darkness in our communities, we must also do all that we can to restore dying churches to health and vibrancy.”⁴ For this to happen, churches without pastors and churches whose pastor may be close to retiring will need a new pastor who is specifically called and trained to lead a church through the revitalization process. After all, as Hallock expresses, “for any dying church to be replanted, it takes a humble, joyful, godly replanter to lead the charge.”⁵ Therefore, the GBA Church Revitalization Residency will train and equip future pastors to lead their congregations by helping them understand five requirements for successfully revitalizing churches.

Five Requirements for Successfully Revitalizing Churches

It seems as if hundreds of books are being published each year detailing how to successfully revitalize an at-risk or plateaued church. Engaging in the enormous amount of instruction that fills the pages of these books can be overwhelming, even for those who passionately desire to revitalize churches. After reading many of these books, speaking with pastors who have led churches back to vitality, and researching the Scriptures, I determined five requirements a revitalizing pastor must comprehend to successfully revitalize a church. In no specific order, the five requirements are vision, the biblical expectations of a shepherd, biblical church ecclesiology, personal spiritual development, and leadership development.

⁴ Mark Hallock, *Replant Roadmap: How Your Church Can Help Revitalize Dying Churches* (Littleton, CO: Acoma Press, 2017), 19.

⁵ Hallock, *Replant Roadmap*, 17.

Vision

Vision is key to all businesses, large and small, and biblical vision is key to all churches, large and small. A popular verse often cited in relation to a lack of vision is Proverbs 29:18: “Without revelation, people run wild, but one who follows divine instruction will be happy” (CSB). The first half of this verse relates well to at-risk and plateaued churches since so many of them have lost their vision and purpose. Anyone that has or has ever had children understands what it means to run wild—especially when it comes to little boys. When little boys are left without structure, supervision, or direction, they tend to run wild and do as they please. The same is true for churches that lack vision.

Revitalization pastors should understand that for God to use them to lead an at-risk or plateaued church back to vitality, they will have to cast a clear, God-given vision for the church to get behind. William Henard rightly argues in his book *Can These Bones Live? A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* that “if the church loses its vision, it loses direction and begins to decline.”⁶ Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon Penfold claim, “The major reason so many churches are plateaued or in decline is that they’ve either lost their vision or adopted the wrong vision.”⁷ Moreover, as churches lose sight of their God-given vision, people begin doing as they please, and little to nothing gets accomplished.

In *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches*, Mark Clifton identifies eight characteristics of a dying church. Four of the characteristics Clifton cites are the result of churches that have lost their vision. The first characteristic of a dying church, according to Clifton is that “they value the process of decision more than the outcome of decision.”⁸ Clifton believes that churches that identify with this characteristic do so because “in the

⁶ William Henard, *Can These Bones Live? A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* (Nashville: B & H, 2015), chap. 10, Kindle.

⁷ Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon E. Penfold, *Re:Vision: The Key to Transforming Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 13.

⁸ Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 21.

absence of meaningful ministry through the church, they often spend their time meeting together to make oftentimes meaningless decisions.”⁹ Clifton’s argument is correct. If dying churches have a clear, concise, and God-given vision driving its ministry areas, then there would be no time for pointless meetings. Instead of not understanding “how to reach the community”¹⁰ or making “real and significant change,”¹¹ these churches will grasp the vision and mission of the church as given by Jesus in Matthew 28:16-20.

Second, Clifton describes dying churches as those that “value their own preferences over the needs of the unreached.”¹² Thom Rainer describes the outcome of churches such as these: “A church cannot survive long-term where members are focused on their own preferences.”¹³ Recall the earlier example of little boys who, when left without any structure or direction, run wild and do as they please? In the midst of their running wild, they are not focused on anyone or anything other than themselves. They do not care that their little brother was playing with the toy first or that mom and dad are trying to rest. They are focused on their wants until someone redirects their focus by showing them another way. The same is true for dying churches. When there is no purpose, no direction, and no vision, the people choose their wants over all else, including the unchurched. And when a church ceases converting unbelievers with the gospel, the church will eventually cease to exist.

Third, Clifton claims that dying churches “grow dependent upon programs or personalities for growth or stability.”¹⁴ Clifton goes on to explain, “Declining churches

⁹ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 21.

¹⁰ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 21.

¹¹ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 21.

¹² Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 22.

¹³ Thom Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville: B & H, 2014), chap. 7, Kindle.

¹⁴ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 23.

reach for programs and personalities they believe will turn the church around without embracing the changes needed to become healthy again.”¹⁵ One of the greatest misconceptions of churches is the idea that large personalities or programs can quickly turn the tide of decline. There is a chance that one or both of these solutions may work for a time, but in the end a majority of churches learn that these false solutions are unsustainable. Alvin Reid writes, “Revitalization is a process . . . there is no magic bullet, no simple fix, no eight-steps to forever change.”¹⁶ Conversely, Reid explains that church revitalization begins and ends with “a fresh vision of God and His Lordship over the church.”¹⁷

Clifton’s fourth characteristic of a dying church that is due to a lack of vision is, “They confuse caring for the building with caring for the church and the community.”¹⁸ Expounding on this characteristic, Clifton writes,

Often, declining churches see no difference between the building and the church. The primary motivation of the remaining members may be to “keep the church doors open” or to make sure they don’t lose possession of the place that has meant so much to them throughout the years. At times, the most important and coveted committees in the congregation revolve around the church’s properties and facilities. More and more of the time, attention, and resources of the church find their way into maintaining the building. It’s not unusual for several meetings to be consumed with endless discussions about a roof, mechanical systems, or maintaining the lawn. While these issues may need attention, they seem to become the primary reason the church exists.¹⁹

Too often, leaders in these churches buy into the lie that facilities draw guests to the church. While it is important to maintain the facilities in such a way that honors God, this task can never replace God’s true vision for the church as it is defined in the

¹⁵ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 23.

¹⁶ Alvin Reid, *REVITALIZE Your Church Through Gospel Recovery* (self-published, 2013), 7.

¹⁷ Reid, *REVITALIZE*, 11.

¹⁸ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 28.

¹⁹ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 28.

Scriptures.

Author and Pastor Andrew Davis understands the critical role a visionary leader plays in church revitalization: “Visionary leadership is vital in all churches in order for them to bear maximum fruit for the glory of God. But it is especially essential in church revitalization situation.”²⁰ A God-centered visionary leader points the church away from focusing on how they make decisions, self-centered preferences, large personalities and alluring programs, and maintaining the facilities and toward fulfilling the mission of King Jesus. Davis describes this type of visionary leader as someone who

is able to keep clearly in front of the people, week after week from the pulpit, a clear vision of God on his throne, as Isaiah did. He is able to greatly expand their estimation of the awesome power of God enthroned, above the circle of the earth, before whom all nations are like a drop from the bucket and dust on the scales (Isa. 40:15). He is able to preach so powerfully of the holiness of God that people’s consciences are searched and their lives purified by the vision. He is able to assert that God’s plan and power cannot be thwarted by any created being: his plan extends over every nation on Earth and every era of human history, and his hand is stretched out with omnipotence to bring it about (Isa. 14:26–27). This is the most important vision a godly leader can impart.²¹

Therefore, the GBA’s Church Revitalization Residency will prepare a pastor to understand that successfully revitalizing churches will require him to set aside his wants to follow God’s vision for the church and lead his flock to do the same.

Biblical Expectations of a Shepherd Leader

It is a serious matter to be called upon to shepherd God’s flock. One way to understand this role is to look back at biblical times and examine the primary functions of the shepherd toward his flock. Essentially, a shepherd was expected to care for his flock by meeting their most basic needs and protecting them from any enemies that wished to bring them harm. Each day he provided food to eat and water to drink. When one of his

²⁰ Andrew Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 104-5, Kindle.

²¹ Davis, *Revitalize*, 108-9.

flock strayed away, he did everything within his power to rescue it. If a predator threatened one of his flock, he fought off that predator. The apostle Paul understood the imperativeness of a Godly shepherd when he instructed the Ephesian pastors to “be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock among you which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God which he obtained through the blood of his own Son” (Acts 20:28). These same basic principles apply to all who God calls to lead His church, but they are indispensable to the one He calls on to revitalize an at-risk or plateaued church.

The apostle Peter explains the expectation God places on pastors to “shepherd the flock” (1 Pet 5:2). In their work *The God Who Goes Before You: Pastoral Leadership as Christ-Centered Followership*, Michael Wilder and Timothy Paul Jones explain, “God refers to his people as sheep and to their leaders as shepherds—a metaphor that places leaders among the people, personally sustaining and safeguarding the flock (Num. 27:15-18; 2 Sam 5:2; 1 Kgs. 22:17; Ps. 77:20).”²² Accordingly, pastors should take seriously the God-given tasks of meeting the most basic needs of the people He places in their care, while also leading them to become more like Christ. To fulfill this requirement, revitalizing pastors will need to embody the following three characteristics as they shepherd their churches.

First, revitalizing pastors must teach God’s Word alone. There are those who fill pulpits each week claiming to preach the Word of God, but in reality, are teaching something far from God’s Word. Some knowingly lead people astray and some unknowingly do it. At the worst, these false teachers confuse and lead people away from true biblical teaching. And when that happens, it not only impacts the individual, but it impacts the entire church. Michael Ross believes, “If revitalization of the church is to be

²² Michael S. Wilder and Timothy Paul Jones, *The God Who Goes Before You: Pastoral Leadership as Christ-Centered Followership* (Nashville: B & H, 2018), 110, Kindle.

seen, then a revival of the biblical pulpit must occur.”²³ Thus, as Harry Reeder correctly asserts, “for a church to go from embers to a flame, God’s message must be preached and taught by gifted and qualified men.”²⁴ Revitalization pastors must commit to teaching in such a way that there is no doubt as to the absolute authority of God’s Word.

Building on Wilder and Jones’ argument that God sees His shepherds as those who sustain and safeguard the flock, the greatest source of nutrition revitalizing pastors can point their flocks to is God’s Word. Wilder and Jones explain, “One key aspect of protection and provision has to do with faithfully proclaiming God’s Word to the people and guarding against doctrinal error.”²⁵ Mark Dever maintains, “The first mark of a healthy church is expositional preaching. It is not only the first mark; it is far and away the most important mark of them all, because if you get this one right, all of the others should follow.”²⁶ God’s Word must be at the center of everything the revitalization pastor does at the church God places him over. Dever goes on to explain that when pastors “establish the priority of the Word, then you have in place the single most important aspect of the church’s life, and growing health is virtually assured.”²⁷ When the authority of God’s Word is lacking, the church will not grow.

The second characteristic revitalizing pastors must embody is caring for the needs of both the congregation and the community. To do this, he must remove himself from the office and spend time with the people. Wilder and Jones emphasize that shepherds must refrain from following the example of corporate America by not giving

²³ Michael F. Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization: How to Revitalize Your Church Through Your Pulpit* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2006), 37.

²⁴ Harry L. Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008), chap. 8, Kindle.

²⁵ Wilder and Jones, *The God Who Goes Before You*, 125.

²⁶ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 42, Kindle.

²⁷ Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 43.

into the idea that “successful leadership correlates with inaccessibility; the most successful leaders are protected by layers of security, staff, and secretaries.”²⁸ Instead, the shepherd leader must adhere to Jesus’ example which demonstrates that “to be a shepherd leader is to be present with the people we lead.”²⁹ Otherwise, he will not understand their needs nor will he understand how to minister to those needs. Wilder and Jones write, “The more time pastors spend with their flock, the better they understand how people view the world, in what areas they struggle most, and how the gospel can best be applied to their lives.”³⁰ How else will the flock know that their shepherd cares for them unless he devotes time to them.

Third, revitalizing pastors must be humble. Just as some modern pastors fail to adhere to accurately teaching God’s Word, others may utilize their pulpits for financial gain and power. Jesus warned His disciples about this type of pride: “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you” (Mark 10:42-43a). The apostle Peter calls on pastors to “shepherd the flock . . . willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge” (1 Pet 5:2-3a). Al Mohler declares, “The Christian leader will serve by leading and lead by serving, knowing that the power of office and leadership is there to be used, but to be used toward the right ends and in the right manner. Power can never be seen as an end in itself.”³¹ Essentially, there are two types of pastors: those who love to serve and those who expect to be served.

Churches in need of revitalizing are facing tumultuous times as it is, and the last thing they need is a pride-filled pastor lording power over them. Mohler proclaims,

²⁸ Wilder and Jones, *The God Who Goes Before You*, 123.

²⁹ Wilder and Jones, *The God Who Goes Before You*, 123.

³⁰ Wilder and Jones, *The God Who Goes Before You*, 125.

³¹ R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *The Conviction to Lead* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2012), 111, Kindle.

“The true Christian leader cannot succumb to the temptations of ostentation and the glorification of power.”³² The true shepherd understands his role as a humble servant leader. Returning to Mark 10, Jesus instructs His disciples, saying, ““But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave for all”” (Mark 10:43b-44). In *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make*, Hans Finzel writes, “A servant leader must be willing to get down and dirty with his troops.”³³ Humility and willingness to set an example of servant leadership is a must for all pastors. Therefore, the GBA Revitalization Residency emphasizes this characteristic by providing residents the opportunity to lead by serving.

Biblical Church Ecclesiology

For a revitalization pastor to lead a struggling church back to health, he must understand the basic tenants of church ecclesiology, especially the makeup of the New Testament church. Chances are the struggling church lost God’s original vision and purpose for them long before the revitalizing pastor arrived. Therefore, the church will need someone to lead them back to a basic understanding of that vision. Henard offers five biblical priorities for struggling churches based on the New Testament church in Acts 2:41-47: worship, evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, and ministry.³⁴ These priorities, along with placing a high priority on church membership, are the foundational building blocks every revitalization pastor must understand as he begins the work of church revitalization.

The first priority Henard mentions is worship. Luke explains in Acts 2 that about three thousand people accepted Christ as Lord following Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41). Following their baptism, Luke goes on to describe the activities

³² Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, 111.

³³ Hans Finzel, *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2007), chap. 1, Kindle.

³⁴ Henard, *Can These Bones Live*, chap. 14, Kindle.

of these new Christians. He writes that they went to “the temple together” (2:46a) and came together in their homes to worship the Lord (2:46-47a). The Psalmist writes, “Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together” (Ps 34:3 ESV). The Hebrews writer explains how believers must “meet together, as is the habit of some, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near” (Heb 10:25 NLT).

There cannot be any confusion that the object of biblical Christian worship must be the Lord Jesus Christ. This fact is true for healthy and struggling churches alike. Brian Croft correctly posits that believers must gather to “worship God with all our heart, mind, souls, and strength.”³⁵ Chuck Lawless expresses that whenever a church’s “worship is awry, every other purpose in the church is affected.”³⁶ Church revitalization pastors must lead their congregations to accept that while the object of worship is the same in all churches, a majority revitalization churches will need to be flexible in their style of worship, particularly when it comes to music. The object of worship must always be the same, but the style of worship may need adjusting to better match the demographics of the community. Andrew Davis believes that if a church is to be revitalized, it must “become supple in worship, willing to be stretched into new patterns for the sake of the young and the lost. If it refuses to do so, it will simply get older and die.”³⁷ If the surrounding community of a struggling church is made up of millennials, then the worship style should engage millennials. If the surrounding community is predominately senior adults, then the worship style should reflect a more traditional model. Finally, if the surrounding community is a mix of generations, then the worship style must be an even mixture of those generations. A church revitalization pastor will need to be equipped to

³⁵ Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), chap. 9, Kindle.

³⁶ Chuck Lawless, *Discipled Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches That Are Equipped for Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), chap. 3, Kindle.

³⁷ Davis, *Revitalize*, 187.

recognize dynamics of the church and community to establish a worship environment that engages the people the church is trying to reach.

The second priority Henard emphasizes in church revitalization is evangelism. One of the marks of at-risk or plateaued churches is that they are no longer sending people out to share the gospel. Unfortunately, their priorities have shifted away from fulfilling the Great Commission. Thom Rainer compares the priority of the Great Commission in a healthy church versus a struggling church when he writes, “Thriving churches have the Great Commission as the centerpiece of their vision, while dying churches have forgotten the clear command of Christ.”³⁸ The Bible articulates that one of the fundamental elements of the church are to seek out the unchurched and present the gospel of Jesus Christ to them.

Luke records that Jesus’ final promise to His disciples was, “when the Holy Spirit has come upon you . . . you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8 ESV). Therefore, Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert argue, “The mission of the church is to go into the world and make disciples by declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit and gathering these disciples into churches, that they might worship the Lord and obey his commands now and in eternity to the glory of God the Father.”³⁹ Church revitalization pastors must be prepared to make evangelizing their community and surrounding areas a high priority if God is going to allow the church to live again. Mark Clifton and Kenneth Priest remark that the local church “must begin again with a true zeal for evangelism.”⁴⁰ As vital as a plan for evangelism is to the health of a church, an equally important priority is an

³⁸ Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, chap. 6.

³⁹ Kevin DeYoung and Gregory D. Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 62, Kindle.

⁴⁰ Mark Clifton and Kenneth Priest, *Rubicons of Revitalization: Overcoming 8 Common Barriers to Church Renewal* (Littleton, CO: Acoma Press, 2018), chap. 3, Kindle.

intentional discipleship process.

The third priority Henard lists as a must for churches to return to health is a deliberate method for discipling new believers. Clifton and Priest believe that “discipleship not only involves the process of becoming a disciple, but of making other disciples through teaching and evangelism.”⁴¹ In reality, if a struggling church is not reaching the unchurched, then they do not have a discipleship process. Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson maintain in *Comeback Churches* that “evangelism that does not result in discipleship is flawed.”⁴² Therefore, Clifton and Priest write that churches must develop an intentional “strategy that permits the church to move forward in reaching the lost and discipling the new converts and maturing disciples.”⁴³ Revitalization pastors must have a clear vision for both evangelism and discipleship before beginning to serve in a struggling church.

Before beginning the work of revitalizing a struggling church, the revitalization pastor must prayerfully seek out God’s vision for discipling new believers. Davis offers his support for this when he writes, “The revitalizing leader needs to have a clear vision of what a mature disciple is and how to move people toward that goal.”⁴⁴ Davis believes revitalization pastors will know a person is becoming more like Christ when he demonstrates spiritual maturity in the areas of knowledge, faith, character, and action.⁴⁵

First, Davis maintains that Christians mature as they become knowledgeable about God through their study of the Scriptures and “experiential knowledge gained from daily life in the Spirit.”⁴⁶ Next, Davis believes the Christian’s faith will strengthen as

⁴¹ Clifton and Priest, *Rubicons of Revitalization*, introduction.

⁴² Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Church* (Nashville: B & H, 2007), 117, Kindle.

⁴³ Clifton and Priest, *Rubicons of Revitalization*, chap. 4.

⁴⁴ Davis, *Revitalize*, 202.

⁴⁵ Davis, *Revitalize*, 202.

⁴⁶ Davis, *Revitalize*, 202.

knowledge about God grows: “A mature disciple of Christ has a strong and clear spiritual vision of unseen realities based on the Word of God.”⁴⁷ Third, Davis claims that as the Christian’s knowledge about God grows and faith strengthens, he will also see a transformation in character because “a mature disciple of Christ has a heart conformed to Christ in what they love, hate, desire, choose, think, and feel.”⁴⁸ Finally, Davis maintains that growth in the areas of knowledge, faith, and character will result in action. Concerning this, Davis says, “A mature disciple of Christ lives a daily life of habitual obedience to God’s Word, refusing to be polluted by sin, and actively obeying in main areas like worship, missions to non-Christians, stewardship, stewardship, and work.”⁴⁹ In the end, Davis believes an intentional pursuit of these four areas will lead to the continual development of a Christlike attitude, which is, after all, what discipleship is all about.⁵⁰

The next biblical priority that Henard lists is the priority of fellowship. There are various connotations whenever the word *fellowship* is used in a traditional Southern Baptist Church. For example, upon hearing that term, a typical Southern Baptist may immediately think about a potluck meal or an after-church ice-cream social. While these are not incorrect meanings of the term, they are not the definitions one utilizes to describe the type of fellowship that exists in a healthy church.

The type of fellowship that Henard argues as a priority for church revitalization is based on 1 John 1:6-7, where the apostle John writes, “If we say we have fellowship with [God] while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” The fellowship found in this verse focuses on an individual’s fellowship with God and not believers. Thus, for a church to undergo

⁴⁷ Davis, *Revitalize*, 202.

⁴⁸ Davis, *Revitalize*, 202.

⁴⁹ Davis, *Revitalize*, 202.

⁵⁰ Davis, *Revitalize*, 202.

revitalization, the church members must focus on their personal relationships with God.

It is only natural that as a believer's personal fellowship with God grows in strength, it will have an influence on the corporate body of believers. In other words, a healthy fellowship with the Lord will equate to a healthy church. Lawless agrees with this assessment as he writes, "Our personal walk with God is to be evident in our family, our church, and our workplace."⁵¹ Church revitalization pastors must teach the absolute necessity of believers spending time with God each day in Bible study and prayer because, as Lawless explains, "healthy churches lead their members to know God in the power of His Spirit and to know who they are in Christ."⁵²

Finally, Henard believes that struggling churches must prioritize the biblical definition of ministry to return to health. He bases his argument on 1 Peter 4:8-11, where the apostle commands believers to

keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. (1 Pet 4:8-11a ESV)

Stephen Macchia affirms this priority as he explains, "The healthy church is intentional in its efforts to build loving, caring relationships within families, between members, and within the community they serve."⁵³ This biblical idea of ministry has faltered in many churches leading to division and decline. Lawless believes that healthy churches have members who "love God, love one another, and love the unreached. They also *do something* with their faith, including ministering to those who have little to offer in return."⁵⁴ Church revitalization pastors must comprehend how to lead the struggling

⁵¹ Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors*, chap. 1.

⁵² Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors*, chap. 1.

⁵³ Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church: Ten Traits of a Vital Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker), 95, Kindle.

⁵⁴ Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors*, chap. 6.

church to work through issues causing division among them or else the church will continue to decline until it no longer exists.

Personal Spiritual Development

When leading a church, especially one that will demand as much attention as a church in need of revitalization, it is easy for pastors to focus on completing the daily tasks of pastoral work and lose sight of developing their personal relationship with Jesus. Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby accurately assess, “The greatness of an organization is directly proportional to the greatness of its leader.”⁵⁵ Dan Dumas emphasizes, “God demands holiness from all of his people, and rarely do people rise above their leaders; as the leaders go, so go the people.”⁵⁶ Thus, whenever a pastor loses focus on building his personal relationship with Jesus, he runs the risk of having that relationship become stale. Moreover, that staleness will likely carry over to the church as a whole as they follow the model set before them by their pastor. For this reason, the fourth requirement of a church revitalization pastor is personal spiritual development.

The key to personal spiritual development hinges on a person’s willingness to learn how to discipline themselves for the purposes of growing closer to Christ. Paul exhorts his apprentice Timothy to “discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness” because “godliness is beneficial for all things”(1 Tim 4:7 NASB). J. Oswald Chambers stresses that discipline is the “essential quality” that all aspects of the Christian life are built upon because “before we can conquer the world, we must first conquer the self.”⁵⁷ Chambers goes on to suggest that Christian leaders who lack discipline “do not qualify to

⁵⁵ Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God’s Agenda* (Nashville: B & H, 2011), 51, Kindle.

⁵⁶ Dan Dumas, *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, ed. R. Albert Mohler (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2015), 19, Kindle.

⁵⁷ J. Oswald Chambers, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 2007), 52.

lead” because they have “large areas of [their lives] floating free from the Holy Spirit’s control.”⁵⁸ Therefore, it is essential for church revitalization pastors to discipline themselves in the area of spending time alone with God in Bible study and prayer.

Before the Bible can be the lifeblood of the church, it must be the center of a leader’s life. Davis explains, “The more the revitalizing leaders trust the Word of God alone, the more powerful their efforts will be.”⁵⁹ Hence, the more in depth-study of God’s Word the leader does each day, the more he will learn to apply its teachings to his life. In turn, God will cultivate within him the necessary tools to lead the church through the revitalization process. Davis asserts, “Every church revitalizer should ‘put all his eggs in one basket’ by putting his full trust in God’s Word to prosper his efforts at transforming the church.”⁶⁰ Without the sufficiency of God’s Word, revitalizing pastors will certainly fail at leading an unhealthy church back to health.

The second discipline that all revitalizing pastors must focus on mastering is the discipline of prayer. Reeder explains, “To see our churches go from embers to flames, prayer is the spiritual element that corresponds to oxygen in a fire. Without the oxygen of prayer to produce the flame of renewal, no amount of human effort can make it happen.”⁶¹ Clifton and Priest maintain, “For all of the work [pastors] do, none of it makes a difference without the power of the Holy Spirit, and that comes when we pray. Scripture makes abundantly clear that when God’s people pray, God moves.”⁶² In other words, without a committed prayer life, revitalizing pastors will find themselves disconnected from the power of the Holy Spirit and consequently powerless in attempts at leading an

⁵⁸ Chambers, *Spiritual Leadership*, 52.

⁵⁹ Davis, *Revitalize*, 78.

⁶⁰ Davis, *Revitalize*, 80.

⁶¹ Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame*, chap. 5.

⁶² Clifton and Priest, *Rubicons of Revitalization*, chap. 1.

unhealthy church back to health.

Unfortunately, many pastors become so wrapped up in the daily tasks which pastoring a church presents that they fail to spend time communicating with the Father. Prayer should never become an afterthought. Clifton and Priest believe that pastors “should pray before we ever get started. The time to pray is before we even begin to plan. The time to pray is when you’re at the beginning.”⁶³ Revitalizing pastors must understand that the difficulty in what God has called them to do is too great to attempt with their own wisdom and their own strength. Clifton understands this as he writes, “If you don’t cry out to God in consistent, passionate prayer, you won’t replant a church.”⁶⁴

Leadership Development

The final requirement a revitalizing pastor must comprehend to lead a church back to health is the necessity of leadership development. One of the key reasons many churches become unhealthy is due to a lack of biblically based leaders. Bob Bickford and Mark Hallock ascertain,

Sadly, while pastors have been equipped well in regard to their biblical and theological preparation, along with their preaching and counseling ministries, often times pastors have not learned much about leadership. Specifically, they don’t know how to effectively raise up other leaders in a local congregation. For many, they simply have not been taught how to develop clear leadership pipelines whereby those in the congregation are being equipped to serve in various areas of ministry and leadership.⁶⁵

Conversely, churches led by people who understand the biblical marks of healthy leadership can return to life. According to Stetzer and Dodson, “Leadership was rated as the number one factor by the churches that experienced revitalization.”⁶⁶

Revitalizing pastors have to know how to develop a process for creating spiritual leaders.

⁶³ Clifton and Priest, *Rubicons of Revitalization*, chap. 1.

⁶⁴ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 55.

⁶⁵ Bob Bickford and Mark Hallock, *Am I a Replanter? 30 Days of Discerning God’s Call*, The Replant Series (Littleton, CO: Acoma Press, 2017), 125.

⁶⁶ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 34.

Simply put, the development of healthy biblically based leaders is essential in the process of church revitalization.

Stetzer and Dodson describe that a key for pastors who successfully led their churches back to health was the intentionality of developing leaders. They write that these pastors “reordered their priorities to spend time with other leaders and created change in those leaders’ attitudes.”⁶⁷ In part, these pastors trained leaders how to carry out some of the pastor’s responsibilities, which freed the pastor from the burden of feeling as though he had to do everything himself. Stetzer and Dodson explain, “Comeback leaders saw the need to train lay leaders for a higher level of ministry involvement and commitment, which ultimately relieved time constraints and responsibilities on comeback pastors.”⁶⁸ The overarching principle is that “often, leadership is more about what you can get done through others than what you can do yourself. Comeback leaders began to understand this principle and found ways to train others to use their time, talents, and treasures fulfilling ministry needs.”⁶⁹ Thus, for an unhealthy church to return to health, it must be led by a pastor who is willing to share the responsibilities of pastoral care and overseeing other ministries by intentionally developing leaders.

Conclusion

In the context of the GBA, and in particular for the Textile Crescent Initiative to be successful, raising up pastors who understand the requirements of revitalizing a church is mandatory. Thus, the GBA Church Revitalization Residency will train and equip future pastors to understand the five requirements for church revitalization: vision, the biblical expectations of a shepherd, biblical church ecclesiology, personal spiritual

⁶⁷ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 42

⁶⁸ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 45.

⁶⁹ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 45.

development, and leadership development. Without these elements, leading a church back to health will be difficult, if not impossible.

CHAPTER 4

REVITALIZATION RESIDENCY IMPLEMENTATION

The purpose of the GBA Revitalization Residency was to prepare a pastor with the biblical, academic, and practical foundations to lead an at-risk church through the revitalization process. Therefore, as outlined in chapter 1, the project consisted of four goals. The first goal was to utilize specific assessment tools to evaluate prospective candidates. The second goal was to provide practical experience in leadership development. The third goal was to equip the resident with the tools to develop a fifty-two-week preaching plan that included four biblically based book studies relevant to church revitalization. The fourth goal was to equip the resident with the necessary tools for developing and implementing a biblically focused, five-year strategy for leading a plateaued or dead church through the revitalization process. Despite circumstances deeming it necessary to adjust some aspects of the residency, God's presence in its creation and implementation allowed the project to achieve its intended goals.

Residency Framework

In 2016, God began burdening my heart about the high rate of South Carolina Baptist churches closing their doors each year. I was particularly burdened for the struggling churches in the Greenville Baptist Association. The purpose statement of the GBA says that it exists to “Create Access to the Gospel for All, starting [in Greenville County].”¹ To be successful in fulfilling its purpose, however, something had to be done to help the large number of struggling churches in the GBA.

¹ The Greenville Baptist Association's purpose statement can be found on its website's homepage located at <https://greenvillebaptist.org>.

During the first semester of the Doctor of Education Ministry program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, God used Mark Hallock's *Replant Roadmap*² to reveal to me His desire for a church revitalization residency in the Greenville Baptist Association that would help prepare pastors for the work of leading struggling churches through the revitalization process. Therefore, in the fall of 2019, I approached the GBA's DOM, Al Phillips, about the possibility of a revitalization residency in the association. Thankfully, the Lord was already at work preparing the way for the residency as He had already convinced Phillips that something needed to be done to help struggling churches in the GBA.

Before I approached Phillips with the residency idea, he was already in the process of creating a Center for Church Revitalization to help provide resources to struggling GBA churches. Moreover, Phillips was putting together a team of pastors from healthier churches who were collectively passionate about helping churches through the revitalization process. The purpose of this new GBA Church Revitalization team was to oversee the Center for Church Revitalization. For these reasons, Phillips agreed to allow me to create a revitalization residency. Furthermore, Phillips decided to set aside \$30,000 from the GBA's annual budget to pay a monthly salary to the resident and to offer small grants to struggling churches in need of minor building repairs and to assist with outreach efforts. With Phillips' approval, I drafted the residency's framework in a Revitalization Residency syllabus³ and presented it to the GBA Revitalization Team in September 2019. The team unanimously approved the framework.

Academic Training Tools

In addition to providing practical training in revitalization for the resident, part

² Mark Hallock, *Replant Roadmap: How Your Church Can Help Revitalize Dying Churches* (Littleton, CO: Acoma Press, 2017).

³ See appendix 4.

of the vision was to provide an avenue for the resident to learn from current and former pastors, church strategists, and theologians. Therefore, within the program's framework were seven required readings from pastors Bob Bickford, Bryan Chapell, Mark Clifton, Brian Croft, Mark Dever, Mark Hallock, and John Piper.⁴ Also, the resident read four books by LifeWay Resources' Vice President Eric Geiger, Church Strategist Thom Rainer, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Professor Donald S. Whitney, and Westminster Theological Seminary Professor Timothy Z. Witmer.⁵ Furthermore, the resident submitted book summary reports on three required readings.⁶

A second academic training tool was the *Forty Foundations of Church Revitalization* training videos from the Calvary Family of Churches' Revitalization Residency led by Pastor Mark Hallock.⁷ With Hallock's permission,⁸ the resident watched the videos in order as prescribed in the calendar portion of the syllabus. The contents of each video changed from week to week; however, their primary function was to help the resident determine his call to church revitalization and the challenges related to revitalizing churches.

Two Unforeseen Changes

In 2019, one year before the idea of a revitalization residency came about, the pastor of one of the textile crescent churches reached out to Phillips for assistance. Knowing his retirement from the ministry was drawing close, the pastor recognized that his church was in a state of decline. Its dwindling congregation no longer resembled its

⁴ See appendix 4.

⁵ See appendix 4.

⁶ See appendix 4.

⁷ The Foundational Videos, Teaching Notes, and Student Notes can be accessed by visiting Calvary Family of Churches, "Replanting and Revitalization," <https://thecalvary.org/ministry-resources/replanting-revitalization/>.

⁸ See appendix 6.

mill village community resulting in a lack of influence in the neighborhood. Not wanting to be remembered as the one who led the church to close its doors, the pastor approached Phillips for assistance in helping the church return to vitality.

Phillips, along with the pastor, deacons, and other key leaders, began a year-long revisioning process that included assessing the church's spiritual health, examining the facilities, conducting a community demographics study, and community and church-wide surveys. After compiling the data, Phillips and the GBA's church revitalization team made three recommendations to the church. The first recommendation was for the textile church to enter an eighteen-month partnership with a healthy sister church from within the GBA. Second, the textile church would relinquish their decision-making to the partner church during the eighteen-month partnership. The final recommendation was a two-year transition of the senior pastor position to an individual chosen by God and recommended to the textile crescent church by the partner church. The leadership from the partner church and the textile crescent church agreed on the structure and details of the partnership. They presented the recommendations to the members of the textile church for a vote in May 2020. The members of the textile crescent church unanimously approved the recommendations at that time.

During this time, a young man approached the GBA seeking information about the revitalization residency. While speaking with him, he indicated his belief that God was calling him to serve as the pastor of the same textile crescent church with which the GBA had just finalized the partnership agreement for revitalization. After introducing the potential candidate to the leadership team of the partner church, they determined that he fit their vision for the textile crescent church. Therefore, the GBA and the partner church decided to begin the evaluation process with the potential resident in hopes of placing him in the textile crescent church.

If, following the evaluation process, the GBA and the partner church agreed to hire the young man for the residency, then he would serve as the textile crescent church's

associate pastor from July 2020 thru February 2021. Next, the resident would serve side-by-side with the retiring senior pastor as the textile crescent church's co-senior pastors from March 2021 through December 2021. Finally, on January 1, 2022, the individual would become the church's sole senior pastor, and the current senior pastor would have the option of retiring or becoming the church's part-time associate pastor over senior adults.

The second unforeseen change involved the timeline of the residency. Initially, the residency was to last for thirty weeks. However, if the resident were placed in the textile crescent church, the GBA revitalization team deemed it necessary to extend the length of the residency to one year. The team made this decision because the potential resident's primary source of income was working at a local coffee shop, and he was beginning his final year of seminary. Therefore, if hired, the GBA Revitalization team believed adjusting the residency timeline to twelve months would help the potential resident maintain a satisfactory income.

Candidate Evaluation

The first goal of the project was to utilize specific assessment tools to evaluate prospective residency candidates. First, as the resident supervisor, I conducted an informal conversation with a potential candidate in May 2020. During our time together, we discussed the residency's purpose, description, and expectations⁹. Following this initial conversation, the resident and I felt God leading us to move forward in the process. Next, the resident electronically completed the GBA's Center for Church Revitalization Job Description and Application document on the Google Documents platform and submitted it to Al Phillips and me.¹⁰ The application required the candidate to list his previous ministry experience, describe his theological stance on doctrines like biblical authority,

⁹ See appendix 5.

¹⁰ See appendix 5.

the Trinity, salvation, the person of Jesus Christ, and other issues. Furthermore, the resident described his pastoral calling, understanding of pastoral leadership, process for personal spiritual development, and a section for him to answer questions that helped us get to know him on a personal level.

In addition to the application, the residency candidate completed LifeWay Christian Resources' Spiritual Gifts Survey, a personality profile from DiscProfile, and a CliftonStrengths profile. First, the GBA's Revitalization team utilized the LifeWay Spiritual Gifts Survey to assess the individual's spiritual gifts. Second, the residency candidate completed a DiscProfile assessment. This assessment determined the candidate's personality traits so that the Revitalization Team could evaluate how he would function as a teammate, the best forms of communicating with him, and how to help him produce at a high level during his time in the residency and beyond. Finally, the residency candidate completed a CliftonStrengths finder assessment. The strength's finder assessment assisted the Revitalization Team in learning the candidate's strengths to help him maximize his talents as part of the revitalization residency.

Following the residency candidate's completion and submission of the application, Phillips emailed copies of the form to the GBA's Revitalization Team. Next, we scheduled a Zoom meeting for May 6, 2020, between the residency candidate and the GBA Revitalization Team. During the interview, the GBA Revitalization Team examined the completed application with the candidate, clarifying answers if needed. When the interview concluded, Phillips and I recommended the GBA Revitalization Team hire the candidate as the first participant in the GBA's Center for Church Revitalization Residency. The Revitalization Team unanimously approved the hiring during the June 3, 2020, monthly meeting, and he started the residency program on July 2, 2020. Subsequently, as described in the previous section, the partnering church placed the newly hired resident in the textile crescent church where he began his service as its associate pastor.

Practical Experience in Shepherding and Leadership Development

The second goal of the revitalization residency was for the resident to serve in four different church contexts receiving shepherding and leadership development from that church's mentoring pastor. Under the mentoring of that church's senior pastor, the resident would spend thirteen hours per week over twenty-eight total weeks helping develop leaders in the preschool and children, student, worship, and discipleship ministry areas. Additionally, the senior pastor would involve the resident in his weekly pastoral care and administrative duties. Though the context changed because of the partnership with the healthy GBA church and the onset of the COVID19 pandemic, the resident met all requirements for accomplishing this goal as outlined in appendix 1.

As previously described, the establishment of the partnership between the textile crescent church and a healthy GBA church forced a change in the original design of the residency. One area that required revamping was the leadership development piece. Instead of spending time with four different pastors over seven weeks, the resident met with the lead pastor of the partnering church for leadership development mentoring, participated in a six-month leadership development training group, and served in three key leadership roles that allowed him to influence change.

On Tuesdays for fifteen weeks, the resident spent two hours with the lead pastor of the partner church examining leadership development imperatives in church revitalization. First, they discussed ways to recognize leadership qualities within church members and the importance of placing leaders in areas of ministry based on their spiritual gifts. Next, the lead pastor and the resident examined how to develop potential leaders and how to help them thrive wherever they serve.

Subsequently, the mentoring pastor explained ways to strengthen the existing deacons' ministry at the textile crescent church. Specifically, they explored the necessity of people having a call from God to the deacon ministry. Furthermore, they studied the

biblical marks and duties of a deacon and practical approaches for training and sending deacons out to care for church members.

Next, the mentoring pastor spent a considerable portion of time training the resident on the critical subject of vision casting and vision implementation. The mentoring pastor stressed that the resident's vision for the church must come from God alone. Moreover, the mentoring pastor emphasized that the only way to discover God's vision for the church is for the resident to spend quality time praying to God and spending time in God's Word Bible. Additionally, the mentoring pastor helped the resident seek God's purposes for the textile crescent church by thinking through various mission and ministry ideas to help the church reach its neighborhood with the gospel. Finally, they discussed the need to rewrite the church's by-laws and set up the annual budget to reflect God's vision for the church. The partnering church and its leadership team are committed to helping the textile crescent church in this process.

The resident received leadership development training a second way by participating alongside eleven other churches from the GBA in a six-month leadership training led by Mac Lake of the Multiply Group. In total, the resident received thirty hours of consulting with Lake and his group. The central principle of the training was helping participants build a deliberate leadership development stratagem that would result in a repeated stream of pinpointing and developing new leaders. Moreover, this training paralleled with the resident's time with the partnering church's lead pastor, so for several months he immersed himself in leadership development training.

Third, the Calvary Family of Churches' revitalization foundational videos 8–13, and 24, provided leadership training for the resident. This section of videos described the importance of a revitalization pastor being patient while leading the remaining congregants of a struggling church to make the complex changes necessary for the church to return to vitality. Additionally, the topics covered in the videos examined how to lead from a posture of humility, leading with love, leading with patience, leading with faith,

leading with passion, and leading with joy. Foundational video 24 focused on developing and utilizing leaders.

Fourth, the resident served in two key leadership roles that allowed him to lead the church in making changes to the church's facility. First, he supervised renovations to the sanctuary, and the church's front lobby. Second, he oversaw the construction of a small room adjacent to the church's sanctuary that is now used as a "Welcome Area" for first-time guests.

The fifth function of the leadership development portion of the residency was for the resident to receive pastoral care training by making hospital, home, assisted living, and nursing home visits with a mentoring pastor. Due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the resident was unable to make hospital, assisted living, and nursing home visits. The resident, however, spent time with the textile crescent's senior pastor visiting shut-ins and church members who did not mind having them in their home.

Experience in Developing and Delivering Sermons

The third goal of the GBA's Church Revitalization was to provide practical experience in developing and delivering sermons. Initially, the expectation was for the resident to create a year-long preaching calendar that included at least four book series centered around the personal spiritual growth of church members. The resident was also to develop and preach three different sermons in three separate churches within the GBA. Then, members of the GBA Revitalization would evaluate those sermons and give the resident feedback.

Because of the partnership agreement between the resident's church and the healthy GBA church, the details for accomplishing goal 3 changed. In short, for the duration of the eighteen-month partnership, the resident gathered Thursday mornings with the teaching pastors from the five campuses of the healthy church for sermon collaboration. The team developed the sermon title, main idea, and teaching outline for the upcoming

sermon series during their time together. For example, from July 12, 2020, through September 20, 2020, the healthy church's five permanent campuses, along with the textile crescent church, preached through the book of Ephesians together. Each location utilized the same series name, "Ephesians: Made for More," and, with few exceptions, they used the same sermon outline.

The result of the preaching collaboration rendered it impossible for the resident to develop a fifty-two-week preaching plan. Moreover, he was unable to preach three sermons at three separate locations. Consequently, members of the GBA Revitalization team did not have the opportunity to conduct in-person evaluations of the resident's preaching. Though we were unable to meet the initial terms of this goal, the time the resident spent with the teaching pastors from the partner church provided him with sufficient training in developing sermons. Furthermore, the resident met the requirements for delivering sermons since he preached a total of fifteen sermons at the textile crescent church.

Creating and Implementing a Five-Year Vision Plan

Another positive consequence of the partnership between the two churches was how the resident and other leaders from the textile crescent church participated in a revisioning process led by the senior pastor of the partnering church. First, the senior pastor trained team members on the necessity of pursuing God's vision for the church instead of creating one outside of God's influence like so many churches often do. Subsequently, the team learned that following God's vision gives purpose and meaning to everything the church does in missions and ministries.

The result of the resident's one-on-one weekly meetings with the senior pastor assisted him in developing a five-year vision plan for the textile crescent church. Accordingly, his participation as part of the revisioning team allowed him to share and explain the five-year vision plan to the members clearly and concisely. Moreover, the

resident and the mentoring pastor spent time answering the team's questions about the potential long-term impacts on the community the vision could provide the church so long as they follow through with it. Even more, these conversations allowed the resident to generate excitement for God's future work in the community through the church.

At the same time, the resident received training in creating an intentional vision and mission strategy from the Calvary Family of Churches revitalization foundational video series. Foundational video 18 details the necessity of the revitalization church's mission and vision aligning with God's vision for the church. From this video, the resident learned two theological convictions that should serve as foundations for the church's mission and vision. The first foundation centers on God's desire for glory and the second God's commandment for His followers to make disciples in His name.

Finally, per the syllabus, the resident created a strategic church revitalization plan for the textile crescent church. Consistently citing Scripture and the required readings, the resident wrote a twelve-page paper outlining a five-year strategic process to make the church viable. Specifically, the resident detailed how he would cultivate a fresh vision for the church to follow. Next, the paper included details on how he would structure the church's governance, a mission and evangelism strategy to reach the lost within the church's community and a discipleship strategy for helping Christ-followers grow in their relationship with Christ. Based on the rubric provided in appendix 3, the resident scored 95 percent, thus surpassing the goal for this project.

Summation of One-on-One Meetings

This section summarizes the one-on-one meeting I conducted with the resident from July 2020 through June 2021. This summary will describe the residency's schedule on a month-to-month basis. The summary is month-to-month and not week-to-week for two reasons. First, as detailed in the previous sections, the structure of the residency changed because of the three-way partnership between the GBA, the healthy GBA church, and the textile crescent church where the resident carried out his responsibilities.

Additionally, being that I was at the mercy of the GBA because of its funding of the residency, the schedule changed from twenty-eight weeks to fifty-two weeks to accommodate the resident's financial needs.

Finally, the addition of a second resident in October 2020 changed the dynamics of the weekly meetings with the original resident as we moved from meeting one-on-one each Thursday to me meeting with both residents each Monday afternoon. Consequently, I was unable to discuss the videos in detail with the original resident as he was thirteen weeks ahead of the newly hired second resident. During the weekly meetings we discussed a variety of topics and issues related to the context of each resident. For example, we brainstormed sermon illustrations, helped exegete texts for upcoming sermons, discussed conflict management, and deliberated about new ministry and mission ideas. The weekly video schedule, reading assignments, and due dates did not change.

July 2020

During the month of July, the resident and I met on July 2, 10, 16, and 23. He watched the first three foundational videos from the Calvary Family of Churches' Replant Residency (CFC). Mark Hallock, Pastor of Calvary Church Englewood, and President of the Calvary Family of Churches led each session. The topics covered were, "What Is Church Revitalization," "Why Is Church Revitalization Needed," and "Understanding God's Heart for Revitalization." I utilized the discussion questions in the teacher's notes provided by CFC to review the topics covered in each video with the resident.¹¹

The reading assignments for the month of July were chapters 1–2 of *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* by Bryan Chapell, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* by Mark Clifton, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald S. Whitney, and chapters 1–5 of *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving*

¹¹ See appendix 7.

Effective Shepherding in Your Church by Timothy Z. Witmer.¹² No assignments were due in July.

August 2020

Because of previously scheduled vacations, the resident and I met three times in August. These meetings took place on August 13, 20, and 27. During our time together, the resident watched CFC's fourth, fifth, and sixth foundational videos. Hallock covered the following topics: "Counting the Cost: 11 Potential Disadvantages and Challenges in Revitalization," "Counting the Joy: Potential Advantages and Opportunities in Church Revitalization," and "Is This Church Ready for Revitalization." Following the videos, I utilized the discussion questions provided by the CFC to continue the discussion of each topic with the resident.¹³ In addition to the videos, the resident completed the following reading assignments; chapters 3–5 of Chapell, Clifton, and Whitney's work, and chapters 6–7 of Witmer's.¹⁴ No assignments were due in August.

September 2020

The resident and I met on September 3, 10, 17, and 24. On September 3, we discussed the role of the under-shepherd in Christ's church. The purpose for this meeting was to lay the foundation for the upcoming foundational videos on the topic of pastoral leadership. Primarily, the meeting centered on the necessity of revitalization pastors taking on the posture of a servant leader by willingly humbling themselves before God and the people they lead.

¹² Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018); John Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B & H, 2016); Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014); Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010).

¹³ See appendix 8.

¹⁴ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*; Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*; Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*; Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader*.

During our meetings on the 10, 17, and 24, the resident watched foundational videos 7–9. The titles of those videos were “Am I Ready for Revitalization,” “Heart Posture #1: Humility,” and “Leading with Love.” Following each video, I utilized the teaching notes to review each topic that Hallock covered in the videos.¹⁵ The required readings for the month were Chapell, Clifton, and Whitney’s chapters 6–8, and Witmer’s chapters 8–9.¹⁶

On September 24, the resident turned in the first of three required book summaries.¹⁷ The first summary was about Clifton’s *Reclaiming Glory*. One argument from the book that had the most impact on the resident was Clifton’s belief that dead churches returning to life bring glory to God the Father because they are an example of the gospel message. I evaluated the summary utilizing the requirements listed under the Course Requirements section of the syllabus,¹⁸ and found that the resident met all requirements. Therefore, he received a passing grade.

October 2020

I met with the resident five times in the month of October on the 1, 8, 15, 22, and 29. Throughout the month, we continued with the pastoral leadership theme as the resident watched foundational videos 10–13. The topics covered in the videos were “Leading with Patience,” “Leading with Faith,” “Leading with Passion,” and “Leading with Joy.” I reviewed each week’s topic with the resident by paying special attention to the discussion questions at the end of the provided teacher’s notes.¹⁹

¹⁵ See appendix 9.

¹⁶ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*; Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*; Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*; Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader*.

¹⁷ See appendix 4.

¹⁸ See appendix 4.

¹⁹ See appendix 10.

Additionally, the resident completed Chapell's book and wrote the second of three book summaries about it.²⁰ He turned in the assignment on October 29. The resident found the book's overall content insightful, but what stood out to him the most was Chapell's focus on the fallen condition of mankind. This topic appealed to the resident because it helped him understand in greater depth the common need among all of humanity for the saving grace of Jesus Christ. The resident believes this understanding will help him persuade people about the power of the gospel in freeing them from sin's bondage. I evaluated the summary utilizing the requirements listed under the Course Requirements section of the syllabus,²¹ and found that the resident met all requirements. Therefore, he received a passing grade.

In addition to completing Chapell's book and writing the book summary, the resident also completed Witmer's book and read chapters 9–10 in Whitney.²² Once again, the five October meetings were the final one-on-one meetings I conducted with the primary resident because of the addition of the second resident. Although we did not discuss the remaining foundational videos in detail, the primary resident continued watching them until all were completed. He also continued turning in the required assignments on or before the due dates.

November 2020

In the month of November, the resident completed foundational videos 14–16. Those videos covered the following topics: “Humble, Dependent Prayer,” “The Power and Necessity of Shepherd Preaching,” and “Knowing, Serving,” and, “Networking in the Community.” Also, the resident completed Whitney's book, and then read chapters 1–2 from Mark Hallock's *The Posture of a Godly Leader*, and chapters 1–3 of *Biblical*

²⁰ See appendix 4.

²¹ See appendix 4.

²² Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader*; Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*.

Church Revitalization by Brian Croft, and Timothy Witmer’s *The Shepherd Leader at Home: Knowing, Leading, Protecting, and Providing for Your Family*.²³ No assignments were due this month.

December 2020

The resident completed videos 17–19 during the month of December. The topics covered were “Building Trust and Winning the Hearts of the Congregation,” “Creating a Mission Strategy,” and “Leading Effective Change with the Word.” Originally the fifty-two-week preaching plan was due on December 17, however, as explained in a previous section, the resident was unable to complete this assignment due to the partnership agreement with the healthy GBA church. In addition to the videos, the resident read chapters 3–4 in Hallock’s book, chapters 4–6 in Croft and Witmer’s works, and the first three chapters of Mark Dever’s *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*.²⁴

January 2021

In January, the resident completed foundational videos 20–23, entitled, “Creating a Clear Shepherding Strategy,” “Leading and Shepherding Difficult People,” “The Necessity of Biblical Leadership: Pastors and Deacons,” and “Membership Matters: How to Do Membership Well. Additionally.” The resident completed Hallock’s book, read chapters 7–9 of Croft’s book, chapters 7–10 of Witmer’s book, and chapters 4–6 of Dever’s book.²⁵ No assignments were due in January.

²³ Mark Hallock, *The Posture of a Godly Leader*, Starting Right in Church Revitalization Series (Littleton, CO: Acoma Press, 2019); Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization* (Fearn: Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016); Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader at Home: Knowing, Leading, Protecting, and Providing for Your Family* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway), 2012.

²⁴ Hallock, *The Posture of a Godly Leader*; Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*; Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader at Home*; Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway), 2013.

²⁵ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*; Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader at Home*; Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*.

February 2021

Throughout February, the resident completed foundational videos 24–27. The subjects covered were “Developing and Deploying Leaders,” “Designing a Gospel-Centered Weekend Worship Experience,” “Reimagining Adult Sunday School and Christian Education,” and “Ministering Strategically to Children and Teenagers.” Also, the resident completed Croft’s book, read chapters 7–9 in Dever’s book, and completed the first four chapters of Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger’s *Simple Church: Returning to God’s Process for Making Disciples*.²⁶

Finally, the resident completed the final book summary²⁷ on Brian Croft’s *Biblical Church Revitalization*.²⁸ The resident gleaned seven valuable lessons from Croft’s book: the value of a long-term ministry in the same setting, the expectation for suffering while pastoring a revitalization church, constant reliance upon God’s Word and prayer, remembering that the gospel is a message not only for the lost but even those who have accepted Christ, church leadership, the importance of church membership, and worship is not limited to just singing.

The resident was also touched by Croft’s testimony about his service as the Senior Pastor at Auburndale Baptist Church. Croft’s testimony reminded the resident that Satan will do anything to keep God’s church from flourishing. Furthermore, the resident was inspired by Croft’s humility as a leader and the patience he had for the Auburndale congregation. I evaluated the summary utilizing the requirements listed under the Course Requirements section of the syllabus,²⁹ and found that the resident met all requirements. Therefore, he received a passing grade.

²⁶ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*; Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*; Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God’s Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: B & H, 2011).

²⁷ See appendix 4.

²⁸ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*.

²⁹ See appendix 4.

March 2021

During March, the resident watched foundational videos 28–31. The lessons covered were “Creating Transformational, Biblical Community, Making Disciples through Intergenerational Discipleship Groups,” “Showing and Telling the Gospel through Strategic Relational Evangelism,” and “Redeeming Empty Space: Maximizing the Use of Your Church Building.” Additionally, the resident completed Rainer and Geiger’s book, and read the first four chapters of John Piper’s *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*.³⁰ There were no assignments due in March.

April 2021

In April, the resident completed foundational videos 32–35. The subjects covered were “Rooting Your Life and Ministry in the Gospel,” “Cultivating A Heart for Long Haul Ministry,” “Putting Your Marriage and Family First,” and “Growing in Emotional Intelligence.” Furthermore, the resident read chapters 5–6 from Piper’s book.³¹ There were no assignments due in April.

May 2021

Throughout May, the resident watched foundational videos 36–39. The topics covered were “Facing Criticism in a Godly Manner,” “Handling Conflict Biblically,” “Caring for Your Soul through Spiritual Disciplines,” and “Managing Your Schedule.” Additionally, the resident completed the final four chapters of Piper’s book.³² There were no assignments due in May.

³⁰ Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*; John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Colorado Spring: Multnomah, 2011).

³¹ Piper, *Desiring God*.

³² Piper, *Desiring God*.

June 2021

The month of June was the resident's final month in the GBA's residency program. He completed the fortieth foundation video entitled, "Training Up and Sending Out Church Revitalizers and Replanters." There were no reading assignments for this month, but two assignments were due.

As detailed in a previous section, on June 3, the resident submitted a five-year vision plan for revitalizing the textile crescent church. I evaluated the assignment using an analytic rubric.³³ To receive a passing grade, the resident had to achieve a minimum 92 percent of all the rubric indicators.³⁴ Upon examination of the assignment, I determined the resident achieved a passing grade of 95 percent.

The second assignment the resident submitted were his personal development reflections. The resident was required to maintain a weekly journal where he recorded his reflections on his personal spiritual health and the spiritual health of his family. Also, the journals had to include reflections on his readings from Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Piper's *Desiring God*, and Witmer's *The Shepherd Leader*. I determined that the resident met the requirements to receive the maximum fifteen points for this assignment.³⁵

Conclusion

Although the dynamics of the GBA's Revitalization Residency changed from the original concept, its creation and implementation were a success. The GBA's Church Revitalization Team successfully achieved the first goal of utilizing assessment tools to effectively evaluate prospective candidates and hire an individual for the program. Additionally, the second goal was achieved as the resident received hands-on training in leadership development both in his ministry context and from the senior pastor of a

³³ See appendix 3.

³⁴ See chap. 1 of this project.

³⁵ See appendix 4.

healthy partner church. Even though the framework changed, and the resident was unable to create a fifty-two-week preaching plan that incorporated a minimum of four biblical books and displayed an immediate relevance to church revitalization, the third goal was still successfully met since the resident learned about sermon preparation from the teaching team of the partnering church. Additionally, the resident preached fifteen times during the residency program, which provided him with valuable experience. Finally, the residency equipped the resident with the necessary tools for developing and implementing a biblically focused, five-year strategy for leading a plateaued or dead church through the revitalization process.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION AND THE FUTURE

The accomplishment of this project had an immediate impact on the GBA, and it will aid in revitalizing struggling churches in the future. Furthermore, the creation of the residency produced a revitalization pastor trained in leadership development, sermon development, and sermon delivery. Moreover, the residency equipped the future revitalization pastor with a five-year strategy to lead a plateaued or dying church through the revitalization process, which is contextualized to his current church setting. Finally, by creating the residency, the GBA is now capable of establishing a pipeline of revitalization pastors who are well-trained and prepared for the difficult work of leading struggling churches through the revitalization process.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The specified purpose of this project was to create a church revitalization residency at the Greenville Baptist Association in Greenville, South Carolina. I determined the need for this project by recognizing that despite ongoing population growth in Greenville County, South Carolina,¹ 64 percent of the 113 GBA churches were declining.² Also, for years the SCBC and the GBA emphasized the need to start new churches throughout South Carolina, but churches continued to struggle despite their best efforts.³

¹ Gabe Cavallaro, "4 Greenville County Cities among the Fastest Growing Places in S.C., per New Census Estimates," *The Greenville New Online*, June 3, 2019, <https://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/news/local/2019/06/03/greenville-sc-population-growth-census-data-shows-rate-compared-to-state/1269128001/>.

² Greenville Baptist Association, "2018 Greenville Baptist Association Annual Report," 23.

³ Rudy Gray, "Challenges for the Church," *Baptist Courier*, November 12, 2018, <https://baptistcourier.com/2018/11/editors-word-challenges-for-the-church/>.

Therefore, I determined the best way to help the struggling churches in the GBA was to place an equal number of resources into training both church planting and church revitalization pastors beginning with a Church Revitalization Residency.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The goals for this project were chosen and arranged in such a way as to ensure that the revitalization residency provided residents with biblical and academic foundations along with tangible experiences to prepare them for leading a church through the revitalization process. The first goal was for the GBA's church revitalization team to utilize assessment tools to effectively evaluate prospective candidates for the revitalization residency. The second goal was to equip the resident with hands-on experience in leadership development. The third goal was to equip the resident with the proper tools to develop a fifty-two-week preaching plan that incorporates at least four biblical books and displays immediate relevance to church revitalization. The fourth goal was to equip the resident with the necessary tools for developing and implementing a biblically focused, five-year strategy for leading a plateaued or dying church through the revitalization process. A job description, application form, three assessments, a syllabus, and three rubrics were used to evaluate the achievement of these goals.

Goal 1

The first goal was for the GBA church revitalization team to utilize assessment tools description to evaluate prospective candidates for the residency. The first step in this process was to create a job description⁴ that detailed the characteristics of the residency program. Al Phillips, the Director of Missions for the Greenville Baptist Association, and I collaborated on the creation of the job description. Once we completed the first draft, we presented it to the GBA church revitalization team during the April 2020 meeting for their review and to allow them the opportunity to offer suggestions. After receiving

⁴ See appendix 5.

feedback and making suggested changes to the job description, we placed a finalized copy on the GBA's website for potential candidates to view.

The next step in achieving the first goal of residency's creation was to develop an application⁵ for prospective candidates to complete. The application consisted of three primary sections. First, we required a current resumé that consisted of the following details: their current contact information, education background, previous and current ministry experiences, and references.

The second portion of the application asked the candidate to provide two letters of recommendation, one from their current pastor and the other from a former pastor. Specifically, the letters were to describe the candidate's character, experience, skills, strengths, and weaknesses. Additionally, I required each letter to state the amount of time the pastor knew the candidate and in what capacity. Finally, if the resident was married, I required one of the pastors to describe their marriage and speak to its suitability for ministry.

The third section of the application focused on the candidate's theological alignment with the GBA, their calling to the ministry, leadership style, spiritual development, and personal story. First, the theological section listed ten questions for the candidate to answer in two to five sentences. For example, I asked candidates to explain their beliefs about the authority of the Bible, the triune God, the doctrine of salvation, the person of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, human destiny, and the role of the church in the Christian life.

Second, in the section focusing on the candidate's calling to the ministry, I asked him to describe in two to three paragraphs his conversion experience, paying close attention to how God got his attention, and significant experiences and people that God used to reach him. Moreover, I required him to detail how his spiritual journey may have prepared him for the revitalization residency. The final question in this section of the

⁵ See appendix 5.

application asked the applicant to define how the residency fit into his short- and long-term goals, what he hoped to gain from it, and why he believed God called him to apply for the position.

Third, the section about the candidate's leadership styled contained four questions. First, I asked for his definition of leadership in five sentences or less. Next, I asked him to list his leadership strengths. Third, I asked him to detail the areas of leadership where he needs to focus attention. Finally, I asked him to list the leaders who have inspired him in the past and to explain how those leaders inspired him.

The next section of the application dealt with the applicant's spiritual development. Specifically, I asked him to describe his typical quiet time. I asked for this information to help me assess the time and effort he was placing on spending time alone with God. The final portion of the application consisted of four questions designed to help the GBA revitalization team get to know the applicant away from ministry life. For example, I asked him to describe what he does for fun in his free time. I also asked his favorite genre of music and to list some of his favorite musical bands and artists. Next, I asked him to list his favorite podcasts, and with the fourth question I asked the candidate to describe one book, outside of the Bible, that had made a great impact on his life.

After I finished writing the application, I sent it Al Phillips for his review. After examining the document, he suggested adding three questions to the theological section. First, he wanted to know the applicant's beliefs on the Bible's teachings about the consumption of alcohol, and whether he was an active consumer of alcoholic beverages. Second, Phillips wanted to know the candidate's stance on divorce and the pastorate, and whether he or his wife had ever been divorced. Finally, he wanted to know the applicant's beliefs on what the Bible teaches about homosexuality, particularly focusing on same-sex marriage. Therefore, I added the three questions to the application.

With Phillip's approval, I presented the residency application to the GBA's revitalization team during the April 2020 meeting. Following their review, the team

unanimously approved the document. During that same meeting, the team approved the use of LifeWay's *Spiritual Gifts Survey*,⁶ the Discprofile⁷, and the CliftonStrengths Finder,⁸ to assess applicants' spiritual gifts and personalities.

In May 2020, a candidate for the residency position completed the application and the three assessments. Copies of his responses and the findings of the three assessments were emailed to the revitalization team members for review. After evaluating the information, the team unanimously decided to interview the candidate. The interview was conducted via a Zoom Conference call on June 3, 2020. Based upon the applicant's responses, assessments, and the interview, the GBA revitalization team collectively decided to approve the hiring of the candidate. His hiring successfully completed goal 1.

Goal 2

The second goal was to equip the resident with hands-on experience in the areas of shepherding and leadership development. The expectation was for the resident to spend three hundred hours with mentoring pastors, being trained in the areas of pastoral care, administration, and leadership development. Moreover, the resident was expected to spend a total of three hundred additional hours in four church contexts developing leaders in the key ministry areas of preschool and children, students, worship, and discipleship. Finally, the resident was expected to meet a minimum of 92 percent of all evaluation indicators as outlined in the evaluation rubric⁹ that I created to aid in the completion of this goal.

⁶ LifeWay Christian Resources, "Spiritual Gifts Survey," accessed July 19, 2019, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/lifewayblogs/wp-content/uploads/sites/83/2018/03/21175436/DOC-Spiritual-Gifts-Survey.pdf>.

⁷ Discprofile, "Everything DiSC Work of Leaders Profile," accessed July 19, 2019, <https://www.discprofile.com>.

⁸ CliftonStrengths, "Strengths Finder 2.0," accessed July 19, 2019, https://www.gallupstrengthscenter.com/home/enus/strengthsfinder?utm_source=strengthsfinder&utm_campaign=coming_soon&utm_medium=redirect.

⁹ See appendix 1.

As outlined in chapter 4, the specifics of this goal changed with the formation of the partnership between the resident's textile crescent church and the healthy GBA church. It was no longer feasible for the resident to spend time with a variety of mentoring pastors or in four different church contexts. Instead, we focused on achieving this goal by allowing the resident to spend time with the senior pastors of the partner church and the textile crescent church where he served as an associate pastor for much of the residency.

First, according to The Shepherding and Leadership Development Evaluation Rubric,¹⁰ which was used to measure achievement of the second goal, the resident was to receive pastoral care training by spending one hundred and fifty hours with a mentoring pastor making hospital, home, assisted living, and nursing home visits. Additionally, the resident was responsible for maintaining a weekly journal detailing the practices he learned from the mentoring pastor while making the visits. To satisfy this requirement, the resident spent time with the senior pastor of the textile crescent church making visits.

Even though the onset of the COVID19 pandemic resulted in changes being made to the senior pastor's normal pastoral care plan, he and the resident spent three days a week visiting the homes of church members and elderly people on the church's shut-in list. Another consequence of the COVID19 pandemic was that the resident was limited in meeting and getting to know many of the textile crescent church members. The older church members were concerned with being in large group surroundings, so they did not attend the weekly worship services. Thus, the resident and the senior pastor believed the best way for members to get to know the resident was through home visits. As a result, the two men took time to make home visits to church members who were not opposed to having people in their home.

Based on the evaluation rubric (see table 1), the resident met the requirement of participating in one hundred and fifty hours of pastoral care training by a mentoring

¹⁰ See appendix 1.

pastor. Additionally, he fulfilled the requirement of maintaining a weekly journal detailing what he learned from the senior pastor while making the visits.

Table 1. Scores from pastoral care section of the shepherding and leadership development rubric

1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary				
Criteria	1	2	3	4
Pastoral Care				
The resident logged 150 hours with a mentoring pastor making hospital, home, assisted living, and nursing home visits.				X
The resident maintained a weekly journal detailing the practices he learned from the mentoring pastor while making hospital, home, assisted living, and nursing home visits.				X

The second section of the shepherding and leadership development stage of the residency required the resident to record one hundred and fifty hours with a mentoring pastor in the following meetings: four deacon meetings, two finance team meetings, one church-wide budget meeting, and thirty weekly staff meetings. The resident surpassed the deacon meetings requirement by spending time in twelve deacon meetings. Though the textile crescent church did not have a finance team, he still accomplished the requirement for being involved with two finance meetings since the church entrusts the deacons and pastors to structure and finalize the annual budget. Moreover, the resident completed the requirement of being in one churchwide budget meetings as he was part of the meeting when the church approved the 2021 annual budget. Finally, the resident successfully completed the requirement of attending thirty weekly staff meetings as he, the senior pastor, and the church’s secretary met on Monday mornings.

Additionally, the resident was responsible for maintaining a weekly journal reflecting on how the lessons he learned through the readings, one-on-one discussions with the resident supervisor, and time spent in meeting settings can be practically applied

in a church revitalization context. As table 2 depicts, the resident received excellent marks in the administration and leadership section of the rubric.

Table 2. Scores from the administration and leadership section of the shepherding and leadership development rubric

1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Administration and Leadership					
The resident logged 150 hours with a mentoring pastor in the following settings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (4) Deacon Meetings • (2) Finance Team Meetings • (1) Church-Wide Budget Discussion Meeting • (30) Weekly Staff Meetings • 1.5 hours per week for 30 weeks (45 total hours) in one on one training. 				X	
The resident maintained a weekly journal reflecting on how lessons learned through the readings, one-on-one discussions with the residency supervisor, and time spent in meeting settings can be practically applied in a church revitalization context.				X	

The third section of the shepherding and leadership rubric required the resident to complete a total of three hundred hours applying leadership skills in the preschool and children, students, worship, and discipleship ministry areas. Initially, this requirement was supposed to be carried out in four different church settings under the leadership of four different pastors. The partnership between the textile crescent church and the healthy church, though, changed the dynamics and hindered the resident’s ability to float from church to church during the thirty-week residency. Therefore, the resident was unable to spend the required time in four different churches under the mentoring of four different pastors. As a result, the resident was not able to successfully meet all the requirements for this section as specified in the rubric.

The revitalization supervisor, however, determined that the resident met the expectation of applying learned leadership skills for the following reason. The resident

led the way as the church performed major renovations to the front lobby and the sanctuary. He also oversaw the development and construction of a new “Welcome Area” that was adjacent to the sanctuary. The resident served as a liaison between the textile crescent church and their partner church as design decisions were made. In this role, the resident helped the older church members understand why updating the aging facility was necessary for future growth. Moreover, the resident and his wife created a new discipleship model for the children and preschool ministry. They also trained new volunteers on how to execute the model. Finally, the resident spent time mentoring a new volunteer worship leader.

Considering the resident utilized the leadership skills he was learning while in the residency program, I concluded that he had sufficiently met the requirements for this portion of the shepherding and leadership piece of the residency. Furthermore, the resident maintained a weekly journal reflecting on the lessons learned through the required readings, one-on-one discussions with the residency supervisor, and his time spent in each ministry area of the textile crescent church. Table 3 reflects my decision as the residency supervisor that the resident met the requirements for the service in ministry areas section of the rubric.

Table 3. Scores from the service in ministry areas section of the shepherding and leadership development rubric

Shepherding and Leadership Development Rubric					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Service in Ministry Areas					
The resident completed 75 hours (300 total) applying learned leadership skills in the following ministry areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preschool & Children • Students • Worship • Discipleship 				X	
The resident maintained a weekly journal reflecting on how lessons learned through the readings, one-on-one discussions with the residency supervisor, and time spent in each ministry setting can be practically applied in a church revitalization context.				X	

The final portion of the shepherding and leadership development rubric required the resident to maintain a weekly journal detailing what he was learning each day during his time in prayer and Bible study. Specifically, the resident was required to give details on how practicing these spiritual disciplines impacted his personal spiritual journey and the spiritual leadership of his family. As table 4 reveals, the resident only completed a portion of this requirement. The resident struggled with this section, in part, due to being overwhelmed with keeping up with his ministerial duties aside from the residency while also pursuing a master’s level seminary degree.

Table 4. Score from the personal soul and family care section of the shepherding and leadership development rubric

Shepherding and Leadership Development Rubric					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
PERSONAL SOUL AND FAMILY CARE					
The resident maintained a weekly journal reflecting on how time spent practicing the spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible study impacted his personal spiritual journey and the way he spiritually led his family during the term of the residency.		X			

The achievement of the second goal was dependent upon the resident scoring a minimum of 92 percent on the evaluation rubric. As table 5 shows, the resident scored 93 percent. Therefore, the second goal of the project was achieved.

Table 5. Total score of shepherding and leadership development rubric

Total Possible Points	Total Points Earned	Final Percentage
28	26	92.857%

Goal 3

The third goal of the residency was to equip the resident with the proper tools to develop a fifty-two-week preaching plan that incorporated at least four biblical books and

displayed immediate relevance to church revitalization. The success of this goal was contingent upon the resident scoring a 92 percent or higher on the sermon evaluation rubric that I used with permission from the CFC.¹¹ Initially, the resident was supposed to preach three sermons from the fifty-two-week preaching plan to the congregation of one of his mentoring pastors, but the partnership between the healthy church and the textile crescent church resulted in portions of this goal changing.

First, as described in chapter 4, the partnership agreement required both the resident and the textile crescent church's senior pastor to follow the preaching calendar of the partnering church. In view of this expectation, the two pastors were also expected to join the teaching pastors from the partnering church by participating in the sermon development meetings that took place each Thursday morning. As a result, the resident was unable to preach sermons that displayed immediate relevance to church revitalization.

Second, the resident was unable to preach three sermons at three different church locations. Even though the resident preached a total of fifteen times during the residency program, his responsibilities to the textile crescent church made it impossible for him to travel to different churches for the purposes of preaching.

Another extenuating circumstance that affected the success of this goal was COVID19. Members of the GBA revitalization team were unable to evaluate the resident's preaching because they needed to be with their own church families as they navigated the ever-changing conditions of the pandemic. Moreover, if they met for in-person weekly worship, many churches were careful as to who they allowed in their facilities.

Despite these issues, the resident was able to receive sermon development training during his time with the teaching pastors from the five campuses of the partnering church. Moreover, he was able to preach fifteen times while in the residency program. Even though he did not meet the requirements as stated in the sermon evaluation rubric,

¹¹ See appendix 6.

the training the resident did receive will be invaluable as he continues leading the textile crescent church through the revitalization process.

Goal 4

The fourth goal was to equip the resident with the necessary tools for developing and implementing a biblically focused, five-year strategy for leading a plateaued or dying church through the revitalization process. Initially, the resident was required to create a strategic five-year church revitalization plan based upon a case study of a declining church. The case study would have been of an actual declining church but with the name changed. The partnership agreement altered this project in one way—instead of giving the resident a case study, it served him better to utilize the textile crescent church as the basis for the revitalization plan.

Consistently citing Scripture and the required readings, the resident was required to write a twelve- to fifteen-page paper outlining the first five years of ministry at the textile crescent church. Specifically, the resident was to define the strategic process by which he would address the various areas of the church that were not healthy and the ways he would cultivate a fresh vision. The plan had to consist of a first year preaching schedule, the overall mission and evangelism strategy, a spiritual growth plan, and a clear vision of where the church will be in five years. The success of this goal depended upon the resident scoring 92 percent or higher on the Five-Year Vision and Strategy Plan for Revitalizing a Dying Church evaluation rubric that I designed.¹²

First, the resident's revitalization plan was evaluated on his comprehension of the biblical text that he chose and how they applied to church revitalization. The resident's plan did not include any Scripture that demonstrated his understanding of how they apply to church revitalization. Therefore, as table 6 demonstrates, the resident scored a "1" on this section because he failed to complete this portion of the project.

¹² See appendix 3.

Table 6. Application of Scripture section of the five-year vision and strategy plan for revitalizing a dying church evaluation rubric

1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Scripture and Required Readings					
The strategy plan demonstrates the resident's comprehension of the chosen biblical text and how they apply to church revitalization.	X				

Second, the plan had to demonstrate the resident's comprehension of the required readings by applying what he learned from them to the revitalization plan. In the final analysis of the resident's plan, he scored a "4" on this section. Specifically, he utilized the readings to inform his understanding of church membership, missions, discipleship, and evangelism. For example, during year 1 as the senior pastor of the textile crescent church, the resident plans on creating a membership class that emphasizes the biblical responsibilities of church members. Moreover, the plan includes hosting six membership classes each year with the goal of adding a total of fifty new members by 2026.

Another example of the resident's understanding of the required readings is found in his intention on developing a process for disciple making. Notably, in 2022, the resident plans on developing and implementing a Christians basics class that would meet on Sunday evenings. In total, the class will teach believers basic theology and doctrines. Beginning in 2023 and continuing through 2026, the resident will develop an additional Sunday evening group that focuses on equipping parents to be the primary discipler of their children.

Finally, the resident's plan represents his understanding of the required readings through his intentional strategy for ministering to the community in the areas of missions and outreach. For example, the resident's revitalization plan includes the creation of community group reach weeks. The idea is that individual community groups will select one week out of the year to work together at accomplishing one or more mission projects. Additionally, the resident plans to establish local mission partnerships, increase churchwide missions giving by 10 percent, and introduce a church replanting internship designed to

prepare and send out church replanters. The revitalization plan also includes the church hosting weekly narcotics anonymous groups, community block parties designed to build relationships with families in the textile community, summer events for children, and annual holiday outreach events, like fall festivals. Therefore, the resident received exemplary marks for this section of the rubric (see table 7).

Table 7. Required readings section of the five-year vision and strategy plan for revitalizing a dying church evaluation rubric

1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Scripture and Required Readings					
The strategy plan demonstrates the resident's comprehension of the required readings by how he utilizes them to strengthen his plan.				X	

The third section of the revitalization plan's evaluation rubric focuses on the resident's vision for the church. First, the resident articulates a clear and well-developed vision statement. Furthermore, all five years of the revitalization plan remain focused on accomplishing the stated vision. Therefore, the resident received a "4" in each of these categories (see table 8).

Table 8. Vision section of the five-year vision and strategy plan for revitalizing a dying church evaluation rubric

1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Vision					
The strategy plan has a well-developed vision statement.				X	
The five-year strategy remains focused on accomplishing the stated vision.				X	

Next, the resident's plan had to identify and outline the reasons for the church's decline and list the practical and spiritual requirements the church must accept before beginning the process of revitalization. Finally, the resident had to demonstrate his

understanding of the required book and Scripture readings by utilizing them as the basis for each of the two requirements. The resident’s plan did not include information related to these two areas. It is important to note, however, that even though the resident did not include this section in the five-year plan, based on the one-on-one conversations I had with him during the residency, he is fully aware of both and understands their importance in the revitalization process. As a result of not including the required section in the plan, the resident received insufficient marks for the Church Health category of the evaluation rubric (see table 9).

Table 9. Church health section of the five-year vision and strategy plan for revitalizing a dying church evaluation rubric

1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Church Health					
The reasons for the church’s decline have been identified and outlined.	X				
The resident identifies the spiritual and practical requirements the church must accept prior to beginning the process of being revitalized. Each requirement is based on Scripture and the required readings.	X				

The fourth section of the evaluation centered on the creation of a fifty-two-week preaching calendar that includes the book of the Bible, the passage, and a theme. Although the residency syllabus indicated that the preaching plan piece was only necessary for the first year of the revitalization plan, the resident included an annual preaching plan for all five years.

Additionally, the resident’s preaching plan had to include a minimum of four book series and a half-page rationale for each series that explains how each contributes to the personal spiritual growth of church members. Even though the resident’s plan met the requirement of containing four Bible book series, he failed to give a half-page explanation concerning how each one contributes to the personal spiritual growth of the church. For

these reasons, table 10 below reflects that the resident did an excellent job on creating the preaching calendar, but only a satisfactory job giving details about each of them.

Table 10. Fifty-two week preaching calendar section of the five-year vision and strategy plan for revitalizing a dying church evaluation rubric

1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
52 Week Preaching Calendar					
The strategy plan includes a 52-week preaching calendar that includes the book of the Bible, passage, and theme.				X	
The calendar includes at-least four book series and a half-page rationale for each series that explains how each contributes to the personal spiritual growth of church members.			X		

The final two sections of the evaluation rubric concentrated on the resident’s spiritual growth plan and his missions and outreach strategies. Examples of each of these were given in previous paragraphs. The resident’s plan received excellent marks in both categories (see table 11).

The completion of the fourth goal was contingent upon the resident’s Five-Year Vision and Strategy Plan for Revitalizing a Dying Church receiving a minimum of 92 percent. As table 12 shows, the resident scored 79 percent on this assignment. Therefore, the fourth goal of the project was not achieved.

As the residency supervisor, I accept responsibility for the failure of this goal. I did not ensure that the resident fully understood the expectations of the assignment. I base this belief on the fact that the resident diligently worked to complete the other assignments, which yielded outstanding results.

Table 11. Spiritual growth plan section of the five-year vision and strategy plan for revitalizing a dying church evaluation rubric

5 Year Vision and Strategy Plan for Revitalizing a Dying Church					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Spiritual Growth Plan					
The strategy plan includes a model for discipling new believers through long-time Christians. The plan relies on the marks of a disciple as outlined in the Scriptures and demonstrates comprehension of the required readings.				X	
Mission and Evangelism Strategy					
The strategy plan includes evangelism training utilizing the 3 Circles Evangelism tool.				X	
The strategy includes a plan for intentional community involvement and lists potential mission projects for church members to be engaged in.				X	
The strategy includes a plan for engaging church members in domestic and international kingdom work.				X	

Table 12. Total score of five-year vision and strategy plan for revitalizing a dying church

Total Possible Points	Total Points Earned	Final Percentage
48	38	79%

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Project

In analyzing the project, I identified three strengths and two weaknesses. The first strength of the residency is it prepared the resident for the difficult work of church revitalization by providing practical experience in the areas of personal spiritual development, pastoral care, administration and leadership development, sermon development, and preaching skills. The resident spent one hundred and fifty hours with his senior pastor learning about pastoral care, and another one hundred and fifty hours with his senior pastor and the mentoring pastor from the partner church in meetings with key church leaders and staff. Furthermore, the resident had the opportunity to apply the leadership skills he learned from those two mature pastors as he spent another three

hundred hours developing leaders in the preschool and children, worship, and discipleship ministry areas, which provided him with an invaluable amount of experience. These six hundred hours of practical application and experience laid a solid foundation for the resident to build upon as he continues to learn how to lead people and change.

The second strength of the project is the mentoring the resident received from the senior pastor of the healthy GBA church. The fifteen weeks the resident spent in one-on-one meetings with the senior pastor talking through key leadership development ideas will serve the resident well in the future. For example, he received training on how to recognize leadership qualities in church members and the necessity of placing leaders in areas of ministry based on their spiritual gifts. It is important for all pastors to understand how these two ideas are a must for their churches, but they are especially necessary for churches going through the revitalization process. If the church is going to return to health, it is an absolute must for the right people to serve in the areas where they are most gifted because they will be most passionate about those areas.

The third strength of the project was the foundational videos developed and produced by the Calvary Family of Churches. To be clear, the information contained within the forty foundational videos is as essential to the success of the residency as providing practical experience for the resident. It was a blessing that Pastor Mark Hallock gave me permission to utilize these videos for the residency.

Even though I was unable to continue discussing the videos in detail with the resident after week 13, based on our conversations during our weekly meetings, I know he learned something valuable about the work of leading a church through the revitalization. For example, the videos challenged the resident to evaluate whether he was mentally and spiritually prepared to lead a church through the revitalization process or not. Also, Hallock pushed the resident to grasp how shepherding a church through revitalization was going to take a humble spirit and a loving heart. These are only a couple of reasons

why the videos were so valuable to the development of the residency, but I am convinced that, without them, the resident would not have accomplished the goals that he did.

As the first year of the residency concluded, I discovered three weaknesses in the project. First, the residency did not include a pre- or post-evaluation questionnaire to measure the resident's growth from the time he started the program until he completed it. While the required readings, assignments, and practical training the resident received during the program helped him grow, there is no definitive way for me to know if the residency was effective because I do not have a tool to measure his growth. For example, because I did not have the residency complete a pre-evaluation questionnaire, I did not know his level of understanding regarding the shepherd's role in pastoral care. As a result, there was no way for me to know if his understanding of the shepherd's role in pastoral care grew or remained the same after completing the residency.

The second weakness had to do with the addition of the second resident. As noted in chapter 4, the GBA revitalization team hired a second resident for the program thirteen weeks after the initial resident started the program. The issue with adding him that long after the original resident began the program is that it affected the agenda of the one-on-one meetings. Initially, once per week, the original resident and I spent our time praying together and discussing that week's foundational video, but the addition of the second resident meant that we could no longer discuss the foundational videos since the original resident was thirteen weeks ahead of him. Adding the second resident would not have been an issue had he been placed with another GBA revitalization team member or the GBA's DOM Al Phillips because they could have started with foundational video 1. Because of my duties as senior pastor, I could not add a second one-on-one meeting during the week to accommodate the second resident. Therefore, I began meeting with the two of them together each week.

The third weakness of the residency was the lack of an exploratory track before beginning the church revitalization residency. In the weeks following the initial resident's

completion of the program, the GBA revitalization team began assessing and interviewing potential candidates to fill the now open spot. As we met with two potential candidates, they expressed their lack of clarity as to whether God had called them into long-term church revitalization, church replanting, or church planting. Because the current residency is designed to prepare future revitalization pastors and not help potential residents explore their calling, the GBA revitalization team passed on two men who are qualified for the residency. Thus, this weakness necessitates the creation of an exploratory track.

Modifying the Project for Future Residents

The modifications I will make to the revitalization residency are focused on solving two of the weaknesses described in the previous section. First, I will create two evaluation forms to measure the effectiveness of the residency in preparing pastors to lead a church through the revitalization process. The purpose of these evaluations will be to measure the resident's growth from the time he begins the residency program until he completes it.

The first evaluation form will be designed to establish a well-defined benchmark against which to measure his anticipated growth as a church revitalizer. The second evaluation form will be designed to determine if the revitalization residency was successful in the desired outcome of preparing the resident to lead a dying church through the revitalization process. These assessments will aid me in making the necessary changes to the revitalization residency to guarantee that it is fulfilling its purpose.

The second modification that I hope to make is to create an exploratory track to help residents determine whether God has called them into long-term church revitalization work, church replanting, or church planting. To accomplish this goal, the GBA revitalization team will need to first determine the length of time of the exploratory track. For example, is six months enough time to help residents explore what type of pastoral ministry God is calling them into? Second, will the residents going through the exploratory track receive monetary compensation? Third, what will be the framework of

the exploratory track? For example, who will guide the residents through the process of exploring their calling? Finally, since the GBA has an existing church planting residency and a church revitalization residency, the GBA revitalization team will need to create a church replanting residency designed to prepare pastors who are called to the work of replanting a dead church. Because I am at the mercy of the GBA since it funds the revitalization residency, I can only make suggestions regarding the creation of an exploratory track. With that in mind, I am willing to do my part in helping this idea come to fruition.

Theological Reflections

Even though the seven churches in Asia Minor existed centuries ago, the sins that infiltrated Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea permeate countless American churches today. As a result, the American church finds itself in a downward spiral as thousands close their doors annually. For that reason, the church is in desperate need of well-trained pastors who are prepared to follow God's vision and lead them back to health. Therefore, the primary theological foundation for this project was built upon the revitalization paradigm that Jesus established in the letters He sent to five of the seven churches in Asia Minor.

Ultimately, the same sins that infiltrated five of the seven churches in Asia Minor continue to permeate innumerable churches in America today, therefore, today's churches must follow the revitalization paradigm that Jesus created or else they will die. The Pastor of First Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina, Andrew Davis, agrees with this argument as he writes, "Revelation 1-3 clearly indicates that the slide of local churches from health toward death has been an ongoing issue for twenty centuries," therefore, says Davis, "The timeless message of Revelation 1-3 must be applied to churches in our generation."¹³ That message, which is the paradigm for church revitalization, includes the

¹³ Andrew Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 14.

repentance of sins, a return to Jesus's ways of operating His church, or facing the consequence of permanently shutting down.

The best way to comprehend this theory is to compare the sins of the five churches in Revelation to the sins of dying modern churches. First, Jesus condemned the church at Ephesus for abandoning their first love (Rev 2:4). Even though there is some debate as to who Jesus meant by first love, I concluded in chapter 2 that He was referring to their placing a higher priority on protecting the way they did things over their love for Him and reaching lost Ephesians with the gospel. G. K. Beale argues for this theory as well when he writes, "A passionate love for Christ leads us to love those outside and seek to win them. This they have lost."¹⁴

Similarly, as Thom Rainer explains in *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive*, a lack of love for Christ and zealous pursuit of the lost in His name is a major reason why churches die today. Rainer states, "When a church ceases to have a heart and ministry for its community, it is on the path toward death."¹⁵ The church values itself more than it values reaching its community with the gospel, thus, as Rainer explains, it has "become self-centered and self-gratifying."¹⁶ These characteristics in no way resemble Jesus's commandment to love God and love others (Mark 12:30-31) and therefore cannot exist within His church. Thus, just as Jesus called on the Ephesian church to repent and return to His way (Rev 2:5a), He is also calling today's churches who have forgotten their first love to do the same. If not, then the same judgement that He promised the Ephesian Christians (2:5b) will befall them as well.

The sin that Jesus condemned the church at Pergamum for was allowing false

¹⁴ G. K. Beale and David H. Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 55.

¹⁵ Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 28.

¹⁶ Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 29.

teachers to continue to exist within the body of believers because they were leading people to perform wicked acts of worship in honor of false gods (2:14-16). Robert Mounce explains, “At Pergamum, where Satan sat enthroned, some within the church had decided that accommodation was the wisest policy. They taught the way of compromise.”¹⁷ Jesus’s fundamental issue with these heretics was their belief that they could compromise God’s expectations with the Roman culture. As a result, Jesus promised that without the repentance of sins, He was going to wage war against them with God’s Word (2:16).

Likewise, copious amounts of churches allow false teachers to remain in their churches despite the fact they are teaching the same fraudulent doctrine of compromise being taught in Pergamum. These churches no longer value God’s Word as the absolute Authority on all things or else they would not stand for what is being taught in their classrooms, and in some cases, from their pulpits. As Ed Stetzer explains, the apostles established the fact that every aspect of the Christian life must find its foundation on God’s Word alone. He writes,

The apostles continually appealed to the Old Testament as their authority in preaching and teaching. Peter's sermon in Acts 2 and Stephen's sermon in Acts 7 are dramatic examples. In his itinerant ministry, Paul customarily began ministering in the synagogue, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus must be the Messiah (Acts 17:2-3). In 2 Timothy 3:15-17, Paul established for all time the authority of the Scriptures in the life of the church.¹⁸

Without the Authority of God’s Word to guide every aspect of the Christian life, people will be left to teach whatever they please, which will result in them believing they can do whatever they choose, including compromising with culture’s standards.

In similar fashion as Pergamum, Jesus convicted the church at Thyatira for tolerating a group of a people who are following the teachings of a false witness (2:20). On one hand there are church members who are committed Christ followers that Jesus

¹⁷ Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, vol. 20 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 80.

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

commends for their works (2:18,19), but a second group exists within the church that is not doing what Jesus desires of His followers. In fact, they are listening to the heretical teachings of a woman referred to as “Jezebel” (2:20-23). Robert Thomas observes that Jesus’s use of the word “*apheis* (‘you tolerate’) is quite revealing. It shows that the dangers to this church were not external but internal, not a pagan deity but a false prophetess.”¹⁹ Thus, church leaders were allowing “Jezebel” to falsely teach that one could abide by pagan beliefs and practice and remain a faithful Christ-follower.

Essentially, church members were being taught that they could compromise God’s standards so they could continue indulging themselves in the world’s affairs. John MacArthur describes Jezebel’s lies when he writes, “According to Jezebel, it did not matter if Christians committed acts of immorality or ate things sacrificed to idols . . . since God would graciously forgive them.”²⁰ For that reason, Jesus promises to “throw her onto a sickbed” (2:22a), cast her unrepentant followers “into great tribulation (2:22b), and “strike her children dead” (2:23a), thus making them an example for surrounding churches who refuse to cleanse their churches of similar deceptive teachings (2:23b).

Through the letter to the church at Thyatira, Jesus sets the precedent for keeping His church free from all impurities because it belongs to a Holy God. Therefore, as Davis explains, “it is precisely because a church has drifted from holiness that it needs to be revitalized.”²¹ A second way many modern churches compromise the holiness of God’s church like Thyatira is that it allows church members to participate in worldly things that Jesus commands Christians to refrain from doing. Davis observes, “A church does not die

¹⁹ Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, Wycliff Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 213.

²⁰ John MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 100.

²¹ Davis, *Revitalize*, 65.

apart from a decisive move away from holiness.”²² There is still hope for these churches, though, so long as they are willing to follow Jesus’s command to repent. Davis concludes, “And revitalization begins with repentance for unholiness and a commitment to what God says.”²³

The problems the church at Sardis faced were worse than the previous three churches. Jesus had nothing good to say to them. Instead, He opens His letter by declaring, “You have the reputation for being alive, but you dead” (3:1d). From afar, the Sardian church looked alive, but as MacArthur writes, that was far from reality: “The church at Sardis was like a museum in which stuffed animals are exhibited in their natural habitats. Everything appears to be normal, but nothing is alive. Sin killed the Sardis church.”²⁴ Therefore, Jesus commands the church to repent and “wake up” (3:3b) or else He promises to “come like a thief in the night” (3:3c) and shut them down.

An innumerable number of churches live under the false pretense that because they have large buildings, vast budgets, and large crowds each week, they are a healthy and thriving church, but, as Bill Henard explains, “They ignore indications that trouble is brewing and the future does not look as bright as one might imagine. The church does not realize that it has turned inward and that introversion will eventually lead the church to experience a slow leak in attendance, finances, and future.”²⁵ Without doubt, dead churches should quickly repent of their sins and obey Jesus’s call to “wake up” by focusing ministries on reaching the communities where God has placed them with the gospel message. Simultaneously, God will give them the spirit of renewal and excitement because they are accomplishing His work. Mark Hallock believes this spiritual renewal occurs

²² Davis, *Revitalize*, 67.

²³ Davis, *Revitalize*, 67.

²⁴ MacArthur, *Revelation*, 111.

²⁵ William Henard, *Can These Bones Live? A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* (Nashville: B & H, 2015), chap. 8, Kindle.

because “the Spirit of God . . . [aligns] our desires with God’s desires; namely, living life on mission, seeking to reach those in the community with the gospel.”²⁶

The church at Laodicea was the final church in Asia Minor to receive a letter from Jesus. His problem with the Laodicean church is they “are neither cold nor hot” (3:15). His comparison of Laodicea’s spiritual climate to lukewarm water is because they are pridefully placing their faith in their wealth instead of placing it in Him alone. In fact, they believe they are without any needs at all, yet Jesus reveals to them that they are “wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked” (3:17), indicating that they are spiritually and morally bankrupt. Because the church is spiritually and morally bankrupt, it is useless to Christ. Alan Johnson concludes that the Laodicean church members “were useless to Christ because they were complacent, self-satisfied, and indifferent to the real issues of faith in him and of discipleship.”²⁷ For that reason, He warns them that, unless they repent, He is going to “spit [them] out of [His] mouth” (3:16).

If an innumerable number of American churches resemble the church at Sardis, then an equal number of churches also look like the church at Laodicea. Because America is an affluent nation, it is easy for its people, even those who fill its churches, to rely on themselves instead of relying on Christ alone. Davis remarks that God repudiates self-reliance; therefore, Christians must see “how pervasive it is in us, how difficult it is to detect, and how stubborn it is to drive out.”²⁸ Churches in the condition of being lukewarm typically lose their drive for pursuing a relationship with Christ, stop valuing what Christ values, and lose their vision for what is important to Jesus. For these reasons, they must repent and, as Davis explains, recognize that “God alone can give life, and God alone can

²⁶ Mark Hallock, *Replant Roadmap: How Your Church Can Help Revitalize Dying Churches* (Littleton, CO: Acoma Press, 2017), chap. 3, Kindle.

²⁷ Alan F. Johnson, *Revelation*, in vol. 13 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 636.

²⁸ Davis, *Revitalize*, 71.

revive a dying church. One of the greatest lessons for anyone yearning to see a church revitalized is to learn how to rely on God alone.”²⁹

In my study of these five churches in Asia Minor, I concluded that the letters Jesus sent to them clearly exhibit what must be done to revitalize dying churches. First, the church needs to recognize what sins have led to their decline. Second, they need to repent of those sins corporately and personally. Finally, they must return to doing church based on the model laid out for them in the New Testament. In many cases, these churches need a pastor who is specially trained for the work of revitalization to help shepherd them through a difficult process. Until recently, not much emphasis was being placed on training pastors for the work of revitalization. For these reasons, I decided to focus this project on creating a church revitalization residency within the GBA to train pastors to lead dying churches in the GBA back to health.

Personal Reflections

I love the local church, and I especially love nominal churches that have existed within communities for decades and even centuries. Over the years, many of those churches lost their way. For some, their decline can be attributed to changing demographics in their neighborhoods. For others, their decline goes much deeper because it was based on moral failures or a decrease in spiritual fervor among its members. No matter the reason and no matter how dire the situation may be, I am convinced that, though some of these churches will die, God still has a purpose for many of them. Therefore, I determined the best way I could help struggling churches in the GBA was to create a residency program that would equip pastors who are passionate about revitalization with the necessary tools to lead dying churches back to health. Little did I know what all God was going to teach me through the entirety of the process.

First, God taught me that the residency was just a small part of a greater plan

²⁹ Davis, *Revitalize*, 71.

that He has for the GBA. When I first approached Al Phillips with the idea for a revitalization residency, all I had were some ideas on a sheet of paper. I did not know that he had already put together the GBA's church revitalization team to oversee the newly created GBA Center for Church Revitalization. Thus, from Phillips's perspective, adding the revitalization residency was a natural next step in the process of creating a source of help for the struggling churches within the GBA.

During this time, a GBA church donated \$100,000 to the association, which allowed it to pay off its only debt. Doing so allowed the GBA's finance team to allocate \$30,000 in the GBA's 2020 annual budget for the Center for Church Revitalization. As a result, the revitalization residency was able to assign \$24,000 to pay up to two residents to go through the program.

Another way that God taught me that His plans for the residency were greater than anything I could have imagined was when He provided the first resident. Chapter 4 of this work explains the details about how the Lord brought the GBA together with the resident, the textile crescent church that eventually hired him, and the partner church that spent the three years guiding the textile crescent church through the revitalization process. Witnessing God bring these pieces together reminds me of Solomon's declaration: "The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps" (Prov 16:9).

Second, God taught me that some churches need to close. My desire for starting the residency was to help every declining church in the GBA return to health, but it quickly became clear that not every church can be revitalized, nor does every church need revitalizing. As Al Phillips and I began establishing the residency, we came to understand the need for preparing struggling churches for the revitalization process. Therefore, we concluded that the best tool to use to accomplish this task was the North American Mission Board's Church Assessment tool.³⁰

³⁰ This tool is only available to ministry leaders who attend a training held at the North America

Essentially, the tool allows the revitalization team to assess declining churches and its community so that we can make recommendations about what next steps they should consider if they are going to return to health. A few months ago, a GBA resident and I met with a local church that had been without a pastor for the last five years, during which they have declined to twenty members. Our goal was to secure their permission for the revitalization team to assess the church. We were not long into the meeting when I realized that this church was unwilling to make the necessary changes for revitalization to occur. Too many of the remaining members cared more about having their personal preferences met than allowing God to use them to reach their community with the gospel.

In short, the resident and I reported back to the revitalization team that the best thing that could happen for the community around the church would be for it to close so that the GBA could presumably assume their assets and plant a new church. A church closing its door is sometimes necessary when members of a dying church are unwilling to take the necessary steps to be revived, but I have learned that it is sometimes better for the community for these types of churches to close so they can be replaced with a new church that is less concerned with themselves and more concerned about reaching the neighborhood with the gospel.

Third, God taught me that church revitalization pastors cannot lead a church through the revitalization process alone. Even though the initial resident the revitalization team hired for the residency is almost twenty years younger than me and I have worked in vocational ministry thirteen years longer than he has, we started the work of revitalization at our current churches at the same time. We spent countless hours together talking about our respective churches and praying for one another as we attempt to follow God's vision for our churches. Furthermore, God used him to encourage me during moments of doubts and frustration. Finally, the personal friendship that our families

Mission Board's headquarters in Alpharetta, GA. Al Phillips and I attended the training together in early March of 2019. During the two-day event we were trained on how to utilize the tool to assess declining churches and make recommendations to them about what steps they need to take to return to vitality.

developed over the last twelve months will continue far into the future.

Conclusion

Before its inception, the GBA did not have a training mechanism for pastors who were called to lead struggling churches through the revitalization process, but now it has the necessary assessment tools to effectively evaluate prospective candidates for the revitalization residency. Second, the GBA can now equip future church revitalization pastors with hands on experience in leadership development. Third, it can equip them with the proper tools to develop a fifty-two-week sermon plan that incorporates a minimum of four biblical books that are relevant to church revitalization. Finally, the GBA can equip future revitalization pastors with necessary tools for developing a biblically focused, five-year strategy for leading a plateaued or dying church through the revitalization process. For these reasons, I believe this project will continue being a small piece of a larger plan that God will use to revive declining churches in the Greenville Baptist Association.

APPENDIX 1

SHEPHERDING AND LEADERSHIP
DEVELOPMENT RUBRIC

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Shepherding and Leadership Development Rubric					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Pastoral Care					
The resident logged 150 hours with a mentoring pastor making hospital, home, assisted living, and nursing home visits.					
The resident maintained a weekly journal detailing the practices he learned from the mentoring pastor while making hospital, home, assisted living, and nursing home visits.					
Administration and Leadership					
The resident logged 150 hours with a mentoring pastor in the following settings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (4) Deacon Meetings • (2) Finance Team Meetings • (1) Church-Wide Budget Discussion Meeting • (30) Weekly Staff Meetings • 1.5 hours per week for 30 weeks (45 total hours) in one on one training. 					
The resident maintained a weekly journal reflecting on how lessons learned through the readings, one-on-one discussions with the residency supervisor, and time spent in meeting settings can be practically applied in a church revitalization context.					

Service in Ministry Areas				
<p>The resident completed 75 hours (300 total) applying learned leadership skills in the following ministry areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preschool & Children • Students • Worship • Discipleship 				
<p>The resident maintained a weekly journal reflecting on how lessons learned through the readings, one-on-one discussions with the residency supervisor, and time spent in each ministry setting can be practically applied in a church revitalization context.</p>				
PERSONAL SOUL AND FAMILY CARE				
<p>The resident maintained a weekly journal reflecting on how time spent practicing the spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible study impacted his personal spiritual journey and the way he spiritually led his family during the term of the residency.</p>				

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 2

SERMON EVALUATION TOOL

EVALUATOR NAME: _____

Residence Name: _____

Date of Sermon: _____

Sermon Title: _____

Focus Text: _____

When rating a sermon, use the following 1-4 scale: “1” means “not at all” or “poor”, 3 means “consistently” or “fairly competent” and 5 means “always” or “extremely well done” Add additional comments below each set of numbers.¹

Sermon Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
General					
The speaker grabbed my attention. I found myself thinking, “I need to listen to this.”					
The sermon held my interest throughout.					
The speaker seemed to be in awe of God and full of the Holy Spirit.					
The conclusion of the sermon was compelling and moved me to action.					

¹ Evaluation form adapted from the *Preaching Cohort Evaluation Form* with permission from Pastor Mark Hallock, Founder of Nonignorable.org, a ministry of The Calvary Family of Churches in Littleton, Colorado. The Evaluation tool is located in the “Other Documents” tab found at <https://www.nonignorable.org/replanting-revitalization>.

Delivery					
The speaker engaged the audience with himself through an appropriate use of humor and self-disclosure.					
There was a balance of warmth, love and humility on one hand and confidence, power and authority on the other.					
The speaker avoided any annoying mannerisms or phrases (sticking hands in pocket, saying “you know,” self-conscious references, repeating themselves, nervous laughter).					
Exegesis/Theology					
The preacher clearly established the context of the focal passage.					
The preaching points were clearly rooted in the text.					
The flow of the sermon was concise, clear and easy to follow.					
Practicality					
The main idea/theme of the message was clear and persuasive.					
The sermon’s theme was relevant to church revitalization.					
The sermon was the right length.					
Application					
The speaker applied the text throughout – they didn’t just explain the text; they helped me figure out how to apply it to my life.					
The speaker avoided Christian jargon and statements that exclude non-Christians (“we all know the story...”)					
The sermon included a clear gospel presentation and ways to respond.					

APPENDIX 3

RUBRIC FOR THE FIVE-YEAR VISION AND STRATEGY
PLAN FOR REVITALIZING A DYING CHURCH

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

5 Year Vision and Strategy Plan for Revitalizing a Dying Church					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Scripture and Required Readings					
The strategy plan demonstrates the resident's comprehension of the chosen biblical text and how they apply to church revitalization.					
The strategy plan demonstrates the resident's comprehension of the required readings by how he utilizes them to strengthen his plan.					
Vision					
The strategy plan has a well-developed vision statement.					
The five-year strategy remains focused on accomplishing the stated vision.					
Church Health					
The reasons for the church's decline have been identified and outlined.					
The resident identifies the spiritual and practical requirements the church must accept prior to beginning the process of being revitalized. Each requirement is based on Scripture and the required readings.					

52 Week Preaching Calendar				
The strategy plan includes a 52-week preaching calendar that includes the book of the Bible, passage, and theme.				
The calendar includes at-least four book series and a half-page rationale for each series that explains how each contributes to the personal spiritual growth of church members.				
Spiritual Growth Plan				
The strategy plan includes a model for discipling new believers through long-time Christians. The plan relies on the marks of a disciple as outlined in the Scriptures and demonstrates comprehension of the required readings.				
Mission and Evangelism Strategy				
The strategy plan includes evangelism training utilizing the 3 Circles Evangelism tool.				
The strategy includes a plan for intentional community involvement and lists potential mission projects for church members to be engaged in.				
The strategy includes a plan for engaging church members in domestic and international kingdom work.				

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 4

CENTER FOR CHURCH REVITALIZATION RESIDENCY SYLLABUS

COURSE DIRECTOR

Thomas R. Holtzclaw
ryan@mbcgreenville.com
864-360-7165 (cell)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to the models and methods of revitalizing plateaued or at-risk churches. The course will provide Biblical and academic foundations, along with practical experience, to equip aspiring pastors with the essential tools for church revitalization. All aspects of the course are evaluated by the Greenville Baptist Association Church Revitalization team and supervised by Ryan Holtzclaw. Under the supervision of the course director, current and retired pastors, students will receive training in the following five areas:

1. Pastoral Care
2. Church Revitalization (including the concepts of church restarts and church mergers)
3. Biblical Church Ecclesiology
4. Personal Spiritual Development
5. Shepherding and Leadership Development

COURSE PURPOSE

The purpose of this course is to instill in students a Biblical approach for pursuing church revitalization in local churches.

COURSE GOALS

Upon successful completion of the requirements for this course, resident students should:

1. Comprehend the Biblical definition and mandates concerning pastoring the Church, with special attention being paid to shepherding the flock, prayer, preaching God's Word, and personal and churchwide evangelism.
2. Know the significance of personal soul and family care by learning and applying strategies to protect themselves and their families from Satan's attempts to harm them while leading the revitalization of a struggling church.
3. Develop a Biblically focused, multi-year strategy for leading a plateaued or at-risk church through the process of revitalization.

4. Comprehend the Biblical characteristics of a healthy church.
5. Receive personal training from pastors and church leaders in the areas of preaching development, pastoral care, administration, and leadership development.
6. Be exposed to applying leadership development skills by rotating through the following areas:
 - a. Children and Preschool Ministry
 - b. Student Ministry
 - c. Worship Ministry
 - d. Discipleship Ministry

REQUIRED READING

Bickford, Bob, and Mark Hallock. *Am I a Replanter? 30 Days of Discerning God's Call*. The Replant Series. Littleton, CO: Acoma Press, 2017.

Chapell, Bryan. *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018.

Clifton, John Mark. *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches*. Nashville: B & H, 2016.

Croft, Brian. *Biblical Church Revitalization*. Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016.

Dever, Mark. *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

Hallock, Mark. *The Posture of a Godly Leader*. Starting Right in Church Revitalization Series. Littleton, CO: Acoma Press, 2019.

Piper, John. *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*. Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2011.

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

Whitney, Donald S. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014.

Witmer, Timothy Z. *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010.

Witmer, Timothy Z. *The Shepherd Leader at Home: Knowing, Leading, Protecting, and Providing for Your Family*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

To receive full credit for this course, students must adhere to the following standards:

1. Live and serve in a manner worthy of the gospel (Phil. 1:27), seeking to fulfill the two great commandments to love God with all they are (Mark 12:30) and sacrificially love their neighbors (Mark 12:31), and fulfilling the Great Commission assigned to all believers by the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:18-20).
2. Residents are expected to log a total of **600 hours** to complete the Revitalization Residency.

*See the breakdown of the total hours under the **Shepherding and Leadership Development Assignment**.

***The GBA Church Revitalization team understands there may be some scheduling conflicts due to other courses, family obligations, and/or, job schedules. Therefore, the team will be flexible by working with the resident student to organize a schedule that works for both parties.)*

3. Complete all required assignments – **(Due dates can be found in the course schedule section.)**

Required Assignment Summary –

- Book Summary Reports – 5%
- Shepherding and Leadership Development – 35%
- Five-Year Vision and Strategy Plan for Revitalization – 35%
- Preaching Plan & Practicum – 20%
- Required Readings – 5%

Book Summary Reports – 5%

To help facilitate discussion as well as ensure accountability, the resident should complete a Book Summary Form for the three books listed below. Completed forms should be typed (single-spaced), *clearly* indicate thorough reading and analysis of the assigned texts, and not exceed two pages in length. Due dates for each summary are listed in the **Course Schedule and Due Dates section of this syllabus**.

- *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* by Bryan Chapell
- *Biblical Church Revitalization* by Brian Croft
- *Reclaiming Glory* by Mark Clifton

Shepherding and Leadership Development – 35%

Residents are expected to log a total of **600 hours** by completing the following:

- **150 hours** with a mentoring pastor learning about pastoral care
- **150 hours** with a mentoring pastor learning about administration and pastoral leadership

- **300 hours** applying leadership skills learned from the required readings and mentoring pastors in the ministry areas of preschool and children, students, worship, and discipleship.

Additionally, residents will be required to keep a weekly journal about their ministry involvement and lessons learned including reflections from one-on-one meetings with the residency supervisor, mentoring pastors, and other church leaders.

Students will be required keep a weekly journal reflecting upon their personal spiritual health, and the spiritual health of their family. This journal will include personal reflections on Donald S. Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, John Piper's *Desiring God*, and Timothy Witmer's *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church*.

***A Rubric will be provided to the Resident outlining the requirements for full credit.**

Five-Year Vision and Strategy Plan for Revitalization – 35%

Students will create a strategic church revitalization plan based upon the case study of a declining church. The case study is of an actual declining church; however, the name of the church has been changed. Consistently citing Scripture and required readings, the students will write a 12-15-page paper that outlines the first five years of ministry at a dying or plateaued church. The student will define the strategic process by which he will address various areas lacking health and the ways he will cultivate fresh vision and health in the church. Each plan must consist of a first-year preaching schedule, the design of a leadership team, the overall mission and evangelism strategy, a spiritual growth plan, and a clear vision of where the church will be in five years.

***A Rubric will be provided to the Resident outlining the requirements for full credit.**

Preaching Plan and Practicum – 20%

Based upon readings and the influence of supervising pastors and church leaders, students will develop three sermons, preach them in local churches, and receive feedback for each. Also, students will develop a 52-week preaching calendar that includes the book, theme, or topic being addressed and the Scripture passage. The plan will include at least four different book series and a half page rationale for each series that explains how each contributes to the personal spiritual growth of church members. Preaching times will be scheduled with the Lead Pastor.

Required Readings – 5%

Residents are expected to complete all reading assignments and submit a signed reading report detailing the total amount of pages read.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES

Each assignment must be submitted via email no later than 11:59PM on its due date.

July:

- 7/2– Orientation and Syllabus Review
- 7/10—**Foundation #1:** What is church revitalization?
- 7/16— **Foundation #2:** Why is church revitalization needed?
- 7/23— **Foundation #3:** Understanding God’s heart for revitalization?
 - **July Reading Assignments:**
 - Chapell—Chapters 1-2
 - Clifton—Chapters 1-2
 - Whitney—Chapters 1-2
 - Witmer (*The Shepherd Leader*)—Chapters 1-5

August:

- 8/13— **Foundation #4:** Counting the Cost: 11 Potential Disadvantages and Challenges in Revitalization
- 8/20— **Foundation #5:** Counting the Joy: Potential Advantages and Opportunities in Church Revitalization
- 8/27— **Foundation #6:** Is this church ready for revitalization?
 - **August Reading Assignments:**
 - Chapell—Chapters 3-5
 - Clifton—Chapters 3-5
 - Whitney—Chapters 3-5
 - Witmer (*The Shepherd Leader*)—Chapters 6-7

September:

- 9/3— The Role of the under-shepherd Pt.1
- 9/10-- **Foundation #7:** Am I ready for revitalization?
- 9/17— **Foundation #8:** Heart Posture #1: Humility
- 9/24—**Foundation #9:** Leading with Love
 - **Book Review #1 Due:** Clifton—*Reclaiming Glory*
 - **September Reading Assignments:**
 - Chapell—Chapters 6-8
 - Clifton—Chapters 6-8
 - Whitney—Chapters 6-8
 - Witmer (*The Shepherd Leader*)—Chapters 8-9

October:

- 10/1— **Foundation #10:** Leading with Patience
- 10/8— **Foundation #11:** Leading with Faith
- 10/15— **Foundation #12:** Leading with Passion
- 10/22— **Foundation #13:** Leading with Joy
- 10/29—The Role of the under-shepherd Pt. 2
 - **Book Review #2 Due:** Chapell—*Christ Centered Preaching*
 - **October Reading Assignments:**
 - Chapell—Chapters 9-11
 - Witmer (*The Shepherd Leader*)—Chapters 10-11
 - Whitney—Chapters 9-10

November:

- 11/5— **Foundation #14:** Humble, Dependent Prayer
- 11/12— **Foundation #15:** The Power and Necessity of Shepherd Preaching
- 11/19— **Foundation #16:** Knowing, Serving, and Networking in the Community
- 11/26—**No Meeting (Happy Thanksgiving)**
 - **November Reading Assignments:**
 - Whitney—Chapters 11-13
 - Hallock—Chapters 1-2
 - Croft – Chapters 1-3
 - Witmer (*The Shepherd Leader: Home*)—Chapters 1-3

December:

- 12/3—**Foundation #17:** Building Trust and Winning the Hearts of the Congregation
- 12/10—**Foundation #18:** Creating a Mission Strategy
- 12/17—**Foundation #19:** Leading Effective Change with the Word
 - **Preaching Plan Due**
- 12/24: Christmas Break
- 12/31: New Year's Break
 - **December Reading Assignments:**
 - Hallock—Chapters 3-4
 - Croft – Chapters 4-6
 - Witmer (*The Shepherd Leader: Home*)—Chapters 4-6
 - Dever—Chapters 1-3

January:

- 1/7—**Foundation #20:** Creating a Clear Shepherding Strategy
- 1/14—**Foundation #21:** Leading and Shepherding Difficult People
- 1/21—**Foundation #22:** The Necessity of Biblical Leadership: Pastors and Deacons
- 1/28—**Foundation #23:** Membership matters: How to do membership well
 - **January Reading Assignments:**
 - Hallock—Chapters 5-6
 - Croft – Chapters 7-9
 - Witmer (*The Shepherd Leader: Home*)—Chapters 7-10
 - Dever—Chapters 4-6

February:

- 2/4—**Foundation #24:** Developing and Deploying Leaders
- 2/11—**Foundation #25:** Designing a Gospel-Centered Weekend Worship Experience
- 2/18—**Foundation #26:** Reimagining Adult Sunday School and Christian Education
- 2/25—**Foundation #27:** Ministering Strategically to Children and Teenagers
 - **Book Review #3 Due:** Croft—*Biblical Church Revitalization*
 - **February Reading Assignments:**
 - Croft – Chapters 10-13
 - Dever—Chapters 7-9
 - Rainer—Chapters 1-4

March:

- 3/4—**Foundation #28:** Creating Transformational, Biblical Community
- 3/11—**Foundation #29:** Making Disciples through Intergenerational Discipleship Groups
- 3/18—**Foundation #30:** Showing and Telling the Gospel through Strategic Relational Evangelism
- 3/25—**Foundation #31:** Redeeming Empty Space: Maximizing the Use of Your Church Building
 - **March Reading Assignments:**
 - Rainer—Chapters 5-9
 - Piper—Chapters 1-4

April:

- 4/1—**Foundation #32:** Rooting Your Life and Ministry in the Gospel
- 4/8—SPRING BREAK
- 4/15—**Foundation #33:** Cultivating A Heart for Long Haul Ministry
- 4/22—**Foundation #34:** Putting your Marriage and Family First
- 4/29—**Foundation #35:** Growing In Emotional Intelligence

- **April Reading Assignments:**

- Piper—Chapters 5-6

May:

- 5/6: **Foundation #36:** Facing Criticism in A Godly Manner
- 5/13: **Foundation #37:** Handling Conflict Biblically
- 5/20: **Foundation #38:** Caring for Your Soul through Spiritual Disciplines
- 5/27: **Foundation #39:** Managing Your Schedule

- **May Reading Assignments:**

- Piper—Chapters 7-10

June:

- 6/3: **Foundation #40:** Training Up and Sending Out Church Revitalizers and Replanters
- **Assignments Due:**
 - 6/3: Revitalization Plan
 - 6/10: Contextualized Ministry Experience
Personal Development Reflections

COURSE PRACTICES

Assignment Formatting

Each written assignment should include a properly formatted title page, page numbers, double-spacing, one-inch margins, and 12-point Time New Roman font throughout. A format template will be electronically communicated to each student the day of orientation.

Assignment Submission

All assignments will be submitted to the email listed at the top of this syllabus unless otherwise told.

Communication

Questions or communication concerning the course should be directed to my email address listed above. Any communication sent will be responded to within 24 hours unless otherwise noted. Additionally, I will make myself available for questions and/or meetings from 9:30AM – 5:00PM Monday – Thursday thru office visits and cell phone communications. Communications outside of these times should be scheduled in advance via text or email.

Late Assignment Policy

Late assignments will result in a full letter grade deduction every 3rd day it is late. No assignment will be accepted after the 12th day it is late.

Plagiarism

Taking credit for someone else's idea or work without proper citation will not be tolerated. Resident students that are caught plagiarizing will be immediately removed from the Revitalization Residency.

CHURCH REVITALIZATION RESIDENCY READING REPORT

Required Texts	Completed	Pages Read
Bickford and Hallock, <i>Am I a Replanter?</i>	Y N	_____
Chappell, <i>Christ Centered Preaching</i>	Y N	_____
Clifton, <i>Reclaiming Glory</i>	Y N	_____
Croft, <i>Biblical Church Revitalization</i>	Y N	_____
Dever, <i>Nine Marks of a Healthy Church</i>	Y N	_____
Hallock, <i>The Posture of a Godly Leader</i>	Y N	_____
Piper, <i>Desiring God</i>	Y N	_____
Rainer and Geiger, <i>Simple Church</i>	Y N	_____
Whitney, <i>Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life</i>	Y N	_____

Total Pages Read _____

*I affirm as a minister of the gospel that I have read all required readings carefully and thoroughly as expected for completion of the Revitalization Residency. **Yes or No (Circle One)***

*If you **have not** read the materials in the manner described above, what percentage of the materials have you read in this fashion? _____*

Print First and Last Name

Signature

APPENDIX 5

CENTER FOR CHURCH REVITALIZATION JOB DESCRIPTION AND APPLICATION

Description

The Greenville Baptist Association Revitalization Residency is a residency designed to help potential church revitalizers explore their vocational calling, be equipped for pastoral ministry, be exposed to church revitalization, and engage in missional living. The residency is a nine- or twelve-month program.

Expectations

Revitalization residents will be expected to live and serve in a manner worthy of the Gospel (Phil. 1:27), by God's grace, seeking to love God with all they are, love others sacrificially, and make joyful, passionate disciples of Jesus (Matt. 22:37-39; 28:18-20).

The Church revitalization resident will be expected to give no less than 15 hours per week to their mentoring pastor and church revitalization supervisor (***13 hours with mentoring pastor & 2 hours with the residency supervisor***) and five hours per week to their reading and homework assignments. In addition, the resident will be expected to participate in all Greenville Baptist Association Church Revitalization team meetings, assessments, and consultations as they arise. The total amount of hours required to complete the residency is 600 hours.

Residents will be expected to complete all assignments as detailed in the attached residency syllabus.

Evaluation

Residents will participate in ongoing evaluations by their mentoring pastors, the GBA Church Revitalization Team, and the Church Revitalization Residency Supervisor. No Greenville Baptist Association Church Revitalizer is guaranteed the endorsement of the Greenville Baptist Association Church Revitalization Team. However, pending the results of all evaluations, and upon the completion of all requirements, some residents will be endorsed and recommended in becoming a church revitalizing pastor.

RESIDENCY APPLICATION

Thank you for your interest in our revitalization residency program. Our hope and prayer for this residency program is to encourage, educate, equip, and unleash future pastors in their role of helping to lead revitalization in at-risk and declining churches for the glory

of God. Under supervision, residents will gain knowledge and experience in the areas of personal spiritual development, pastoral care, administration, and leadership development in the context of church revitalization. We are excited about the possibility of you joining us!

There are three main parts to this application process. Please send each of the following via email to both rholtzclaw@fifbc.org and aphillips@greenvillebaptist.org.

1. An updated resumé (Must include current contact information, education background, any current and previous ministry experience, and references).
2. Two letters of recommendation (One from a current or former pastor).

These letters should speak to your character, experience, skills, and should discuss both strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, ask your references to state how long and in what relational capacity they have known you. If you are married, one of your two recommendation letters should be a letter from a pastor who can describe your marriage and speak to its suitability for ministry.

3. On a separate form, please respond to the following:

THEOLOGICAL ALIGNMENT (Please keep responses to 2-5 sentences)

1. What do you believe about the authority of the Bible?
2. What do you believe about the triune God?
3. What do you believe about the doctrine of salvation?
4. What do you believe about the person of Jesus Christ?
5. What do you believe about the Holy Spirit?
6. What do you believe about human destiny?
7. What do you believe about the role of the Church in the Christian life?
8. What do you believe the Bible teaches about the consumption of alcoholic beverages? Do you drink alcoholic beverages?
9. What do you believe the Bible teaches about divorce and the pastorate? Have you or your spouse been divorced? If yes, please give details.

10. What do you believe the bible teaches about homosexuality and, in particular, same-sex marriage?

CALLING (Please answer the following in 2-3 short paragraphs)

1. Describe your conversion experience.
 - a. Include how God got your attention and some significant experiences and people that He used to reach you.
 - b. How has this journey prepared you for this position?
2. Describe your calling to ministry.
3. How has your past ministry experiences helped prepare you for this position?
4. How does this position fit into your short and long-term goals? What do you hope to gain from this experience? Why do you believe God is calling you to do this?

LEADERSHIP

1. In five sentences or less, define leadership.
2. What are your leadership strengths?
3. What are your leadership growth areas?
4. What leaders inspire you the most? Why?

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Briefly describe your typical quiet times.

PERSONAL STORY

1. What do you enjoy doing for fun?
2. What kind of music do you like? Favorite bands or artists?
3. What are some of your favorite podcasts?
4. Other than the Bible, what books have had the greatest impact on your life and why?

APPENDIX 6

APPROVAL STATEMENT FROM CALVARY FAMILY OF CHURCHES

From: Mark Hallock <mark@thecalvary.org>

Date: Thursday, July 18, 2019 at 3:21 PM

To: Ryan Holtzclaw <rholtzclaw@fifbc.org>

Subject: Re: Permission

I approve Ryan Holtzclaw using our CFC cohort materials for his project. Mark Hallock

Mark Hallock
Lead Pastor/Elder - Calvary Church
Englewood, CO
thecalvary.org

APPENDIX 7

TEACHER NOTES FOR FOUNDATIONAL VIDEOS 1–3

Foundation #1: What is church revitalization?

Defining terms: Church Plant vs. rePlant vs. Revitalization

1. Church Plant = You + New People + New Structure + No History

- 1) You and your family
- 2) New People – In Church Planting you basically get to start off with whoever you want
- 3) New Structure - bylaws, constitution, leadership structure, vision & mission
- 4) No History (This is both Good & Bad)

2. Church Replant

Al Mohler: *“One of our central tasks in the present generation is to be bold in our vision of replanting churches — helping existing churches to find new vision, new strategic focus, new passion for the gospel, new hunger for the preaching of the Word, new love for their communities, and new excitement about seeing people come to faith in Jesus. Replanting churches requires both courage and leadership skills. A passion for replanting a church must be matched by skills in ministry and a heart for helping a church to regain a vision.”*

*****rePlant:** *A church is identified as a rePlant when they humbly and honestly acknowledge they are at risk for death within 5 years if no changes are made.*

Church Replant = You + New People & Existing People + New Structure + History

- 1) You and your family
- 2) In a rePlant everyone knows that is what's happening
 - rePlant you get to pick some of who you want but others are fully on board.
- 3) New Structure – bylaws, constitution, leadership structure, vision & strategy
- 4) History of the church (This is both good and bad)

3 Primary rePlant paths:

Path #1: The church surrenders ALL day to day decision making and submits to an outside transition team, engages outside ministry partners and calls a trained rePlanting pastor.

Path #2: The church ceases to exist as a church and agrees to turn over the building and all assets to an outside approved ministry partner or church plant for the use of a church plant.

Path #3: The church agrees to merge with a new church plant and accept in its entirety the leadership, vision and strategy of that new plant.

2. Church Revitalization

Tom Cheyney: Church Revitalization is a movement within protestant evangelicalism, which emphasizes the missional work of turning a plateau or rapidly declining church around and moving it back towards growth. It is lead through a Church Revitalization Initiative, which is when a local church begins to work on the renewal of the church with a concerted effort to see the ministry revitalized and the church become healthy.

Brian Croft: 5 characteristics of church revitalization:

- 1) It is an effort to revive an established but struggling church.
- 2) It mandates a change in direction.
- 3) It requires patience and understanding with those there before you.
- 4) Its goal is to become a healthy, diverse, multi-ethnic, multi-generational church.
- 5) Its purpose is to display the glory of Christ to the world.

*****Revitalization:** the church is in steady decline and on its way toward death. The church knows it needs help but typically is unaware of just how drastic the situation is. The church has no intention of becoming a different church, but desires to hire a pastor that will help lead them back to health and vitality as a congregation.

Church Revitalization = You + Existing People + Old Structure + History

1) You and your family.

2) Existing people - As opposed to a replant, the pastor must seek to lead change and bring to the congregation with whoever is present in the existing congregation. You don't get to pick who you are doing this with---planting you basically get to start off with whoever you want...replant you get to pick some of who you want but others are fully on board...**revitalization: your team is whoever is there.**

- **Must lead change with the folks who are there.** This is why revitalization takes much longer as relationship and trust must be built over time. **Takes time!!!**

3) Old Structure – Old bylaws, constitution, leadership structure. Must work within the old structure in order to lead change.

4) History (This is both good and bad)

A few things to remember about a revitalization:

1) The thing about revitalization is that it is a marathon and not a sprint. Change is slower than with a replant. The amount of change we have seen at Calvary in a fairly short time is by far the exception when it comes to revitalization.

2) While some churches are ready to make significant changes, most declining churches in need of revitalization are unaware of just how sick they are. It takes time to help them see this reality and then begin leading them toward health.

--- Loving, servant-minded shepherding that leads to visionary leadership over time...in that order. You need to plan on this taking many years of loving and encouraging and serving the flock...earning trust and winning the hearts of the people in order to experience long-term health and growth.

3) This is why my biggest encouragement for you is to really press in to see how ready this church actually is for change. Every declining church will say they want to grow, reach young families, etc. few are actually willing to do what it takes...at least for several years. ---Some folks will be IN, other folks won't be. *Count the cost and the joy/potential.*

Discussion Questions:

1. Which of these planting, replanting or revitalizing options excites you the most?
2. Which of these planting, replanting or revitalizing options scares you the most?
3. How would you respond if someone said to you, “Church replanting sounds like church planting with baggage?”
4. In your opinion that are the biggest challenges of replanting and of revitalizing?
5. In your opinion what are the best features of replanting and of revitalizing?

Foundation #2: Why is church revitalization needed?
--

7 disturbing facts regarding the state of the North American Church:

1. According to the Hartford Institute of Religion Research, more than 40 percent of Americans "say" they go to church weekly. As it turns out, however, less than 20 percent are actually in church. In other words, more than 80 percent of Americans are finding other things (in CO...kid's sports, mountains) to do on weekends.¹
2. Between 4,000 and 7,000 churches close their doors every year.²
3. Thom Rainer, in a recent article entitled "13 Issues for Churches in 2013" puts the estimate higher. He says between 8,000 and 10,000 churches will likely close this year.³
4. Between the years 2010 and 2012, more than half of all churches in America added not one new member.⁴
5. Each year, nearly 3 million more previous churchgoers enter the ranks of the "religiously unaffiliated."⁵
6. Since 1950, there are 1/3rd fewer churches in the U.S.⁶

¹ Toni Ridgaway, “Statistics Don’t Tell the Whole Story When It Comes to Church Attendance,” accessed September 12, 2015, <http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/170739-statistics-don-t-tell-the-whole-story-when-it-comes-to-church-attendance.html>.

² Ridgaway, “Statistics Don’t Tell the Whole Story.”

³ Thom Rainer, “13 Issues for Churches in 2013,” accessed September 12, 2015, <http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/164787-thom-rainer-13-issues-churches-2013.html>.

⁴ Rainer, “13 Issues for Churches.”

⁵ Rainer, “13 Issues for Churches.”

⁶ Rainer, “13 Issues for Churches.”

7. The United States makes up the third largest mission field in the world.⁷

The state of SBC churches:⁸

According to statistics compiled by the North American Mission Board's Center for Missional Research using data from the Annual Church Profile, every year the Southern Baptist Convention adds more than 1,200 new churches through a combination of the planting of new churches and the acquiring of new affiliated churches. Unfortunately, the convention also loses more than 900 churches annually. The approximate 3 percent birth rate of new churches in the SBC, coupled with a 2 percent death rate, reveals a net increase of only 1 percent, which does not keep up with population growth in North America. Furthermore, of the more than 900 churches that ceased to exist, 90 percent were located in growing communities and 77 percent were located in metro settings.

Research also finds that only an estimated 15 percent of Southern Baptist churches are growing while a whopping 70 percent are plateaued or declining and in need of some sort of revitalization. Another 15 percent are at risk of death, meaning that if their current trend continues, they will cease to exist in their present form within two to five years. These at-risk churches (ARCs) currently number approximately 6,000.

⁷ Rainer, "13 Issues for Churches."

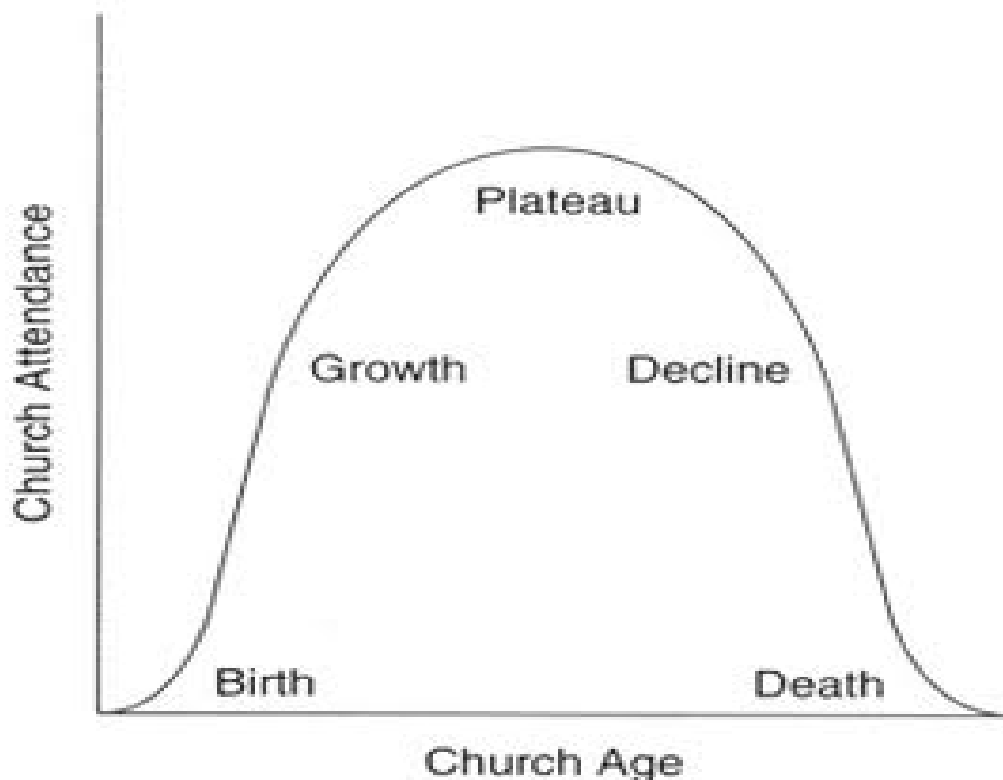
⁸ John Mark Clifton, "Dying Churches Matter to God . . . and to NAMB," *Send Network Blog*, January 2015, accessed July 16, 2016, <https://www.namb.net/send-network-blog/dying-churches-matter-to-god-and-to-namb>.

Why should we care about and pursue church revitalization and replanting? 8 Key Reasons.

1. *God's people in dying churches need _____, nourishment, and fresh vision.*
2. *The _____ in our communities need to see joyful, passionate, Gospel-centered congregations alive and on mission!*
3. *We must seek to be true to the biblical mandate to _____ who make disciples.*

Matthew 28:18-20 - 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

The Life Cycle of a Church



20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

4. *The God-honoring _____ of money, buildings, and other*

resources.

Matt Schmucker: Billions of dollars, donated by faithful Christians over many decades, have been invested in land and buildings. Today, those buildings are too often underutilized or even empty—mere monuments to the past. Church planters often shun these resources and don't think twice about pursuing the potentially life-consuming "mobile church" or "church on wheels" approach to ministry.

Why is this approach so consuming? Ask almost any planter. He'll probably tell you how much effort it takes from his best people in the church to re-set every week, let alone to relocate when a school auditorium or hotel ballroom is lost. So consider moving into an old neighborhood, revitalizing a church, and reclaiming resources that were originally given for gospel purposes.⁹

5. *Revitalized and replanted churches bring _____ to other dying churches and the Body of Christ as a whole.*
6. *Fresh vision, ideas and ministry strategies for _____ declining churches.*
7. *The _____ of new churches desperately needed in our communities and around the world.*
8. *The praise and glory of _____ throughout the earth.*

Isaiah 48:9-11: For my name's sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.

Matt Schmucker: *For the sake of God's name being rightly represented in the world, we need to be jealous for the witness of his church. Why? So that God's glory might be spread and magnified. His name is defamed when so-called Christian churches misrepresent him with tolerance of sin, their bad marriage practices, wrong views on sexuality, and a host of heresies from salvation to the authority of Scripture.*

I pray against those churches that would defame God's name. I pray they would die or at least be invisible to the neighborhood.

I positively pray for those true churches in my neighborhood that proclaim truth, that rightly gather those who have been born again, and whose ultimate purpose is God's glory. Consider revitalizing for the sake of God's name.¹⁰

⁹ Matt Schmucker. "Why Revitalize?" *9Marks Journal*, November-December 2011, accessed September 12, 2015, <https://9marks.org/article/journalwhy-revitalize/>.

¹⁰ Schmucker, "Why Revitalize?"

Mark Clifton: *“A dying church robs God of His Glory. The key to revitalization of a church near death is a passion for the Glory of God in all things. This alone must be the beginning and primary motivation for a Legacy replant, even over worthy objectives such as reaching the community, growing the church and meeting needs. The purpose of all creation is the glory of God. He created everything for His own glory. Romans 11:36 proclaims, “For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever.”¹¹*

Discussion Questions:

1. How do the stats about churches in general and churches in the SBC affect you? If you are not part of the SBC do you know how your denomination or tribe is fairing?
2. What does it take to derail a church off of its normal life cycle and avoid decline? When is the best time to do this?
3. What is your experience with churches that were in cycles of decline or dying? What caused it? What might have been done to prevent it?
4. How have you seen churches come back from decline or dying?
5. Why is the Biblical concept of shepherd important to revitalizing or replanting dying churches?

Foundation #3: Understanding God’s heart for revitalization.

Conviction #1: God desires to see dying and declining churches come back to life for His glory.

*****In our weakness, He is strong! *And He gets all the glory!!!* (God loves underdogs! David & Goliath, the Disciples, Paul...)**

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 - 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Charles Spurgeon’s on weakness and humility in ministry:

“A primary qualification for serving God with any amount of success, and for doing God’s work well and triumphantly, is a sense of our own weakness. When God’s warrior marches forth to battle, strong in his own might, when he boasts, “I know that I shall conquer, my own right arm and my conquering sword shall get unto me the victory,” defeat is not far distant. God will not go forth with that man who marches in his own strength. He who reckoneth on victory thus has reckoned wrongly, for “it is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” They who go forth to fight, boasting of their prowess, shall return with their banners trailed in the dust, and their armour stained with disgrace.”

¹¹ Clifton, “Dying Churches Matter to God.”

“Those who serve God must serve Him in His own way, and in His strength, or He will never accept their service. That which man doth, unaided by divine strength, God can never own. The mere fruits of the earth He casteth away; He will only reap that corn, the seed of which was sown from heaven, watered by grace, and ripened by the sun of divine love. God will empty out all that thou hast before He will put His own into thee; He will first clean out thy granaries before He will fill them with the finest of the wheat. The river of God is full of water; but not one drop of it flows from earthly springs. God will have no strength used in His battles but the strength which He Himself imparts. Are you mourning over your own weakness? Take courage, for there must be a consciousness of weakness before the Lord will give thee victory. Your emptiness is but the preparation for your being filled, and your casting down is but the making ready for your lifting up.”

John 7:37-39 - 37 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” 39 Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Psalms 51:10-12 - Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Conviction #2: God not only has the desire, but He has the power to bring dying and declining churches back to life for His glory.

- **Ezekiel 37**... Jerusalem and the temple have been destroyed. Judgment has come, but God reveals himself as the God of revitalization and resurrection.

*1 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones.
2 And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry.
3 And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know."
4 Then he said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.
5 Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.
6 And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD." - Ezekiel 37:1-6*

In this passage, I think we see two essential ingredients for revitalization in the church.

#1: The first essential ingredient is the faithful preaching of God's word.

Bill Henard:

In order for the church to be revived, it will demand a mighty work of God's Spirit. Following a particular methodology or program does not guarantee success. One might greatly desire for the church to revitalize and grow, but genuine church growth calls for more than personal passion. It requires the Spirit of God. Church revitalization begins with laying the foundation of God's Word as it is preached and followed through a movement of God's Spirit. The two are inseparably linked.

Can these bones live? Only God knows, yet He instills hope in those who desire to see the established church thrive and revive. Just as God miraculously returned Israel to her home, He can bring restoration to a declining, dying church.

#2: The second essential ingredient for revitalization is the power of God's Spirit.

Conviction #3: True church revitalization will not happen unless a congregation returns to their first love: Jesus.

The first requirement necessitates the preaching of God's Word. God tells Ezekiel, "Prophesy concerning these bones" (37:4). As Ezekiel obeys, the Scripture unveils this magnificent vision of bones taking on tendons and flesh. Note carefully that the bones described are dry bones. These soldiers who died in battle were not afforded the privilege of a proper burial. They experienced the great disgrace of open decay. Yet God intervenes, and Ezekiel speaks to the bones.

The second standard for revitalization set by God involves the work of the Spirit. The word *breath* occurs in a variety of ways in this passage. That issue causes the reader to remain somewhat in the dark concerning its meaning as God says that He "will cause breath to enter you, and you will live" (37:5). The word for *breath* in the Hebrew (*ruah*) is actually translated as three different words in English, namely, *breath*, *wind*, and *spirit*. The writer resolves this question as God declares, "I will put My Spirit in you, and you will live" (37:14).²

***The words of our Lord as He spoke to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:1-5:
Ephesians 2:1-5 - 1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. 2 "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear

with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. 3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

(From Clifton):

- 1) In this passage our Lord makes it clear that the pathway to new life for a dying church is repentance and remembering.
- 2) But not the self serving nostalgia of remembering the past for the sake of our own edification through control and a desire to return to a “better time”, but remembering the legacy of missions and ministry that first birthed this dying church and a brokenness to see that return once again.
- 3) This kind of remembering can only happen if repentance comes first. This kind of remembering can only happen with the Glory of God becomes primary rather than the glory of the past.

There is one reason a church dies.

- 1) The church in Ephesus loved doctrine, they believed the truth, they worked hard and they endured. **But they were doomed to die if they did not return to that which they did at first.**
- 2) When we see the birth of the church of Ephesus we see a church that so greatly impacted its community that it started a riot. It was a church that made disciples who made disciples that resulted in a transformed community.
- 3) When a church ceases over a period of time to make disciples who make disciples and realize community transformation, that church will die.

Conviction #4: When a church returns to its first love, Jesus, God begins to bring about revitalization through 5 types of Renewal (Adapted from Rick Warren):

#1: Personal Renewal

It starts with the heart. If God is going to renew your church, he'll begin it with you – and then it has to continue with the rest of your church. You might call it rededicating your life, being filled with the Spirit, or the “deeper life.” I don't care what you call it. Just get it! Pastor, the bottom line is this – you need to fall in love with Jesus again. Do that and all of a sudden it's not about religion and rituals; it's about a relationship with Jesus. You realize that Jesus doesn't just love you, but he likes you.

#2: Relational Renewal

After you get right with God, you've got to get right with others. Jesus told us this. He told us to love God with all of our heart and then love others as ourselves. When you have relational renewal in your church, the gossip goes down and the joy goes up.

How do you know when a church has been through relational renewal? People hang

around longer after the service. They want to spend time together. If people don't want to hang around after your services, you have a performance, not a church. The church is more than content; it's a community.

#3: Missional Renewal

This is when a church discovers what God wants it to do. We have a kingdom assignment. We're not here just to bless one another. God wants to bless the world through us. When your church gets personal, relational, and mission renewal, it can't help but begin to experience revitalization.

#4: Cultural Renewal

In this stage, God renews the culture of the church. I've known pastors who have tried to change the culture of the church without going through the other three renewals. There's a word for that – martyrdom. You cannot change the culture of the church. Only God can. But once the first three renewals have happened in the church, God will change the culture.

#5: Structural Renewal

After your church has been through the first four renewals, it's going to outgrow your current structure. No doubt about it. The structure that works for a church of 30 won't work for a church of 100 and so on. There is no perfect structure in Scripture. Why? Every situation is different. We've got to structure our churches differently depending on our circumstances. You can't put new wine in old wineskins. As your church begins to get healthier and healthier, the structure has to change.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is relying on God's strength so crucial in a replant or revitalization situation?
2. How does replanting and revitalization reflect the Gospel?
3. How do preaching and relying on the Holy Spirit go hand in hand in a replant or revitalization?
4. What does a church's legacy have to do with its ability or readiness to be replanted or revitalized?
5. How have you seen any of the five types of renewal begin to change the culture of a church? Or, if you have not seen any which of these would make biggest difference for the church you are in now or one you have worked with in the past?

APPENDIX 8

TEACHER NOTES FOR FOUNDATIONAL VIDEOS 4–6

Foundation #4: Counting the Cost: 11 Potential Disadvantages and Challenges in Revitalization

INTRO:

11 Potential Disadvantages and Challenges in Revitalization

#1: You're changing not creating culture...this takes time.

#2: No team of pastors & no core team (your family and whoever is still at the church is your core team)

#3: Hidden sacred cows that you are unaware of (like hidden land mines, stepping on these can do major damage to your leadership fast!)

Mark Clifton - Dying churches tend to make their preferences paramount. Those preferences can include music, programs, preaching styles, uses of the building, resources shared with those outside the church compared to resources used for those within the church and a host of other things. The point is this: Most members of the congregation focus on their own desires in these decisions instead of what would meet the needs of people who don't know Jesus.

#4: There is always a reason that a church has declined, and that reason is usually sin. There will be opposition.

Mike McKinley - There's usually a good reason why a church needs to be revitalized. Churches often dwindle in size and effectiveness because of a traumatic event or years of poor leadership. As a result, church facilities and programs may be in ruins—not to mention the spiritual state of the congregation itself. In these cases, there will be much to overcome and tear down in order to move the church forward. This process is often very painful. If a church was already inclined to do the things that healthy churches do, it probably wouldn't be dying. Finding a struggling church isn't a problem. Finding a struggling church that wants to change and grow is much more difficult.

#5: Helping the remaining folks fall in love with the surrounding community that has probably changed drastically over the years of the church's decline.

- They confuse caring for the “building” with caring for the church and the community...it has become an idol.
- Building is often in disrepair and in need of major work and updating.

#6: Lack of spiritual health and vibrancy.

#7: The church has grown dependent upon programs or personalities for growth or stability.

- An overabundance of purposeless programs and activities.

Mark Clifton - Declining churches reach for programs and personalities they believe will turn the church around without embracing the changes needed to become healthy again. And it's hard to blame them for this predisposition since many past church-growth methodologies relied heavily on both. No doubt, as a dying church reflects on its heyday of growth, they recall a particular pastor or two who, by sheer force of personal charisma and leadership, moved the church to a new level. Or they recall a program or series of programs that once attracted all ages of people to become involved in the life of the church.

With that history in mind, dying churches often think that applying programs and hiring personalities will be easy fixes to their problems. They quickly discover that neither fixes anything. In fact their desire for a "silver bullet" program or personality reinforces their belief that they don't have to make major changes or repent of past mistakes or sacrifice their preferences for the needs of the unchurched, but they just have to add one more program or hire one more professional to fix the problem. In essence they are still trying to use primarily attractional methods in a community that no longer responds to those methods. It is frustrating and confusing for a dying church to accept that what worked so well in the past may in fact be hastening its demise.

#8: Inability or unwillingness to pass leadership on to the next generation.

#9: By-laws and constitution that need to be updated.

#10: Large membership roll that has never been managed.

#11: Reputation of the church may be damaged in the community.

- The sad reality is that sometimes the reputation of dying churches often works against their revitalization.
- They may have a reputation in the community for some past moral scandal or known as the church with the "mean pastor" from back in the day, or maybe its reputation is one of being unfriendly.
- If that's the case, it will take hard work and intentionality to change the impression in the community.

The crazy thing is that often declining churches tend to **blame the community** for a lack of response! It is "their" fault, not ours. The church has probably grown resentful toward their surrounding community because folks in the community not responding as they once did to the church and the church's programs.

Discussion Questions:

1. For you, what stands out as the most challenging disadvantages you may deal with in revitalization or replanting?
2. In your experience which of these disadvantages seem the most common? How will you deal with a few of them?
3. Are there any other disadvantages you can think of that were not outlined in today's foundation?
4. How does the Gospel affect these disadvantages?

Foundation #5: Counting the Joy: 11 Potential Advantages and Opportunities in Church Revitalization

#1: Revitalization exchanges a negative church witness with a positive one in a community.

- Healthy, biblical revitalization establishes a new gospel presence in a community, while at the same time removing a bad witness.
- If healthy churches make a positive statement about the gospel to the surrounding community, dying churches send out the negative message that “Jesus and his people are irrelevant.”
- When a community sees a dying church come back to life, the watching world sees a vibrant and dynamic witness for Christ where formerly there was an anti-witness.

#2: You have a building!

When you have your own building, you can use it for whatever purposes you need. Many church plants rent space (like a school or theater), and in many of those spaces, they only get them for one day a week, Sunday. If you want to do something during the week (not at someone's home), then it becomes really difficult to borrow space for a day somewhere else. And, if you're able to do that, it's not at the same place you meet on Sundays. So, if someone new comes to an outreach event during the week, it may be confusing for them to find your Sunday location.

---Tool for community outreach ministries, after school clubs, etc.

#3: There are older Christians.

#4: Resources, Resources, Resources.

Justin Deeter: The amount of resources in established churches are astounding. The amount of financial assets, facilities, and people are overwhelming. The reason most of these churches have started declining is not because they lack resources, but because they lack vision. These established churches have the resources to do incredible things for God and his mission, the problem is they may need to be reprioritized.

#5: Revitalization encourages the saints in the dying congregation.

- Many of the members of struggling churches are faithful believers who are deeply committed to their congregation.
- They have hung in there and been faithful to hold this church together.
- Their faith is refreshed and they are encouraged anew as they serve the growing body.

#6: A surrounding community in need of the Gospel.

#7: Allows the leadership to do ministry on the cheap...have a building, the basics are already in place.

#8: More likely has a multi-generational congregational value.

#9: Most established churches have a system in place for their finances and legal issues.

- They have people who understand the system and keep everything in motion. Many times for a church plant, you're still trying to find people to write checks, look over legal contracts, and take care of your books.

#10: History and tradition of the church.

- Theology and denomination

#11: Redemption of a church for God's glory

John Piper's book, *Let the Nations be Glad*.

“Missions is not the ultimate goal of the Church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever. Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions. It's the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white hot enjoyment of God's glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God.”

Discussion Questions:

1. Which of these advantages stands out as a great motivator for you in potentially replanting or revitalizing a church?
2. What are the downsides of any of these advantages?
3. What is the connection between replanting or revitalizing and the Gospel?

Foundation #6: Is this church ready for revitalization?

Why is it vital to assess whether a church is ready for revitalization?

1. Helps to give an accurate picture of where this church actually is and what it needs to become healthy.
2. Helps you to count the cost and the joy of potentially leading this church.
3. Helps you to determine whether it is the right fit for you and your family.

What is the right posture when assessing a church's readiness for revitalization:

1. Humble heart
2. Honest evaluation (individually and with others)
3. Vision of what could be
4. Prayerful wisdom

Questions to ask outside of this church about this church to determine its readiness for revitalization:

Specific Groups of People to Ask:

1. Other pastors and church leaders in the community.
2. Other community leaders.
3. Former members and leaders/pastors.
4. Neighbors of the church.

Key Questions to Ask:

#1: What is the reputation of this church in its community? Positive? Negative? Forgotten? What does the community need from this church?

#2: What are the greatest strengths of this church? What are the greatest weaknesses?

#3: Tell me about the last pastor or pastors who have served this church. What were their strengths? Weaknesses?

#4: Have there been any divisive issues that you're aware of in this church? How were they handled?

#5: Who else should I talk to?

Questions to ask inside this church about this church to determine its readiness for revitalization:

***These Questions Assume you are already on board with the theology and doctrine of the church...also hand out Colin Adam's 41 questions.

3 Types of Questions to Ask:

Questions that lead to joyful celebration (Easy)

In your opinion, what are the 3 best things about the church?

What do you think the average person in the church would say is the best thing about the church?

What is your dream for how the church might look ten years from now?

Who is the favorite pastor in the history of the church and why?

What is your fondest memory of the church?

Questions that lead to honest reflection (Moderate)

How are decisions made in the church (both formally and informally)?

If a big decision needs to be made in the church, to whom do the members look for the blessing or approval?

What is the biggest mistake made by any of your previous pastors?

What is something I might say from the pulpit that would cause a number of members to cringe? In other words, what are some of the "hot button" issues for this congregation?

How does church membership work in this church? What are the expectations laid upon church members?

Do the church members generally (and happily) follow the lead of their pastors and leaders?

What items in the current services are non-negotiable? What other items are acceptable and have been featured in the past?

Would the congregation have any objection to the pastor working on sermons from outside the church? A coffee shop? My home study?

What is the policy and general understanding regarding the pastor's days off and holidays?

Do you think it would be relatively easy for a young family to settle into the church/town? What challenges might my wife and the children face?

Does this church network with other churches? Who? How?

What are the spoken and unspoken expectations for the pastor in this church?

What are the spoken and unspoken expectations for the pastor's wife and children in this church?

Questions that help produce necessary evaluation (Difficult)

*In your opinion, what are the 3 biggest challenges in the church right now?
What would the average person say is the biggest problem in the church right now?*

How would you sum up the spiritual health of the congregation in regards to prayer, a heart for evangelism, love for one another, etc.?

What portion of the church is most happy with direction the church has been going and why? What portion of the church is least happy with the direction the church has been going and why?

In your opinion, what was the best quality about the former pastor? What was the most difficult or challenging quality about the former pastor?

Why did your previous pastor leave? How long did he serve the church?

How long have pastors typically stayed in this congregation? Over the last 30 years of the church how long is the pastors average tenure?

What do you think he would say was the biggest difficulty in pastoring this church?

What are some of the “sacred cows” I need to be aware of?

How well does this congregation do with change? Can you share some of the changes that have been made (big or small) in this congregation in the past few years? How has that been received?

If I was your pastor, what advice would you give me in order to lead a change of some kind most effectively for everyone? What would be the appropriate process to do so, in your opinion?

What has been the biggest conflict in the church in the past 5, 10, 20 years? What is the biggest conflict in the history of the church? Has there ever been a church split? What were the issues involved?

What was the topic of your last contentious business meeting? What was the disagreement about? How was the issue settled?

How well does this church handle conflict? Can you share an example of a conflict and how it was handled in the past 2 years?

What is potentially the most divisive issue in the church (practical, doctrinal, personal)?

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the potential difficulties with assessing a church’s readiness?
2. How can assessing a church prepare it for new growth?
3. Are there any other questions you think would be helpful in the assessment process?
Are there other people you think would be helpful to talk to?

APPENDIX 9

TEACHER NOTES FOR FOUNDATIONAL VIDEOS 7–9

Foundation #7: Am I ready for revitalization?

Is Revitalization for you? 8 Essentials of a Revitalizer

#1: Visionary Shepherd

- The ability to sense and see God’s next steps for a congregation and the capacity to lead the church forward as a loving Shepherd.
- He is patient, wise, strategic and relational.

#2: Capacity for Suffering

- The ups and downs of revitalization take a toll on the Revitalizer, spiritually, physically, emotionally, relationally and financially.
- The pain of revitalization necessitates an ability to persevere and endure the high cost of turning a nearly dead or significantly declined church around.

#3: Affinity for Legacy/History

- Most churches have bright spots in their history, a time when they were impacting their communities for Christ.
- A Revitalizer understands and acknowledges and even values a Church’s history, he seeks to remind the church of it, honor it when and where possible and build upon the legacy of those who were there before him.

#4: Multi-Generational Capacity

- The Revitalizer operates with ease among the young and old in his congregation.
- Each group knows they are loved, valued and heard and that they will be Pastored well.

#5: Resourceful Generalist

- Scant resources, limited budgets, small or non-existent staff and absent or out of date technology are standard features in a dying and declined church.

- Revitalizers wear many hats, they know how to get things done, gather resources and do the best with what they have in front of them.
- The lack of available resources doesn't reduce their efforts, energy or impact.

#6: Tactical Patience

- Progress and pace are different in a revitalization. Some things can be addressed immediately; others have to wait—either for the congregation to be ready to move or for the resources to be present.
- A Revitalizer is continually looking toward progress and is seeking to help the congregation move forward, yet they know that timing and patience are key in bringing the church along.
- Tactical patience understands that waiting is not wasted time.

#7: Emotional Intelligence

- A Revitalizer is able to read people while being self-aware.
- He understands the emotional climate of those in the congregation, committee room, deacon board or living room during a pastoral call.
- He senses when he needs to back off, press in or listen and reflect. He is in touch with his own emotions and understand how he is being received.

#8: Spousal Support

- A Revitalizer isn't alone in his calling. He understands that his spouse will serve an important role in supporting him as well as the family while he is leading the Church.
- The Revitalizer's wife possesses a love for Jesus and the Church, she is committed for the long haul and understands that the road will be full of ups and downs.
- The Revitalizer's spouse is emotionally and spiritually prepared for the challenges that come with revitalization.

10 Questions you should ask before leading a church revitalization

Do I see this opportunity as a mission field?

Am I emotionally mature enough to take upon myself the rigors of taking the lead role in a church?

Am I theologically competent enough to lead this congregation?

Am I organizationally competent?

How will I respond to and love my critics?

Will I make a commitment for the long haul, through good and bad?

Will I be a continuous learner about church revitalization and pastoral leadership?

*Am I committed to be a positive example and encourager for my family on this journey?
Do I have pastoral mentors who can coach and encourage me?*

Do I have a sufficient support system of peer relationships and friends?

Discussion Questions:

1. Which of these 8 essentials is an absolute fit for you? How can you put time and energy into strengthening this one and getting better at what you are already good at?
2. Which of these 8 essentials is more of a challenge for you? How can you put time and energy into strengthening this weaker area?
3. What areas of general ministry are you weak in? How will you find people to fill in the specific ministry gaps that exist because none of us are perfect?
4. Spousal support is important, are there any of these areas your spouse is weaker in that may cause problems in ministry down the road?

Foundation 8: Heart Posture #1: Humility

- When revitalizing a church, the pastor must seek to lead change and bring hope and health to the congregation with whoever is present in the existing congregation.
- This takes a humble, servant heart.

Most important attribute in the heart of a revitalizer: Humility before God and people.

What is humility?

“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6)

“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:11).

In Mark 9:33-35, we see Jesus lovingly confront his disciples on what it means to truly be great...

33 *And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?”* **34** *But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.* **35** *And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”*

***Though the world conceives of greatness in terms of “being served,” true greatness is, counter-intuitively, “serving others for the glory of God.”

Andrew Murray - "Humility is nothing but the disappearance of self in the vision that God is all. Humility is the displacement of self by the enthronement of God."

C.J. Mahaney – "Humility is honestly assessing ourselves in the light of God's holiness and our sinfulness".

15 Marks of Humble Revitalizers:

1. Humble Revitalizers don't wear a title as a way to show who's in charge (they don't think they're better than everyone else).
2. Humble Revitalizers don't do everything.
3. Humble Revitalizers intentionally give others a platform to lead and influence.
4. Humble Revitalizers are quick to give credit to others and just as quick to take the blame.
5. Humble Revitalizers are willing to do the things no one else wants to do (and does them joyfully, with a servant's heart).
6. Humble Revitalizers see the value of every person in the congregation.
7. Humble Revitalizers listen deeply to understand others' viewpoints because they know that they have much to learn.
8. Humble Revitalizers are always looking for ways to improve their leadership.
9. Humble Revitalizers don't overreact when errors are made or ministry ideas and programs fall flat.
10. Humble Revitalizers pursue gentleness while remaining strong and courageous.
11. Humble Revitalizers forgives quickly, remembering how many times he has been forgiven.
12. Humble Revitalizers are thankful leaders.
13. Humble Revitalizers believe in and practice team leadership and decision making.
14. Humble Revitalizers intentionally develop and deploy other leaders.
15. Humble Revitalizers embrace uncertainty and trust the Lord in the midst of it.

How to Cultivate Humility in your Heart (From C.J. Mahaney):

Reflect on the wonder of the cross. To paraphrase John Owens, if our affections are captivated by the cross of Christ, there will be no room for sin.

Rest in God. Receive the gift of sleep from God and acknowledge His purpose for sleep.

Study God. Theology is transformative because it transforms your self-image and enlarges your understanding of God.

Laugh. Proud men cannot laugh at themselves. Make sure you can.

Identify evidences of grace in others. Open your eyes to see God's great work in others, not their failures.

Speak encouragement. Edify the saints. It will take your attention off yourself and place it on others.

Invite correction in your own life. Desire correction. Accept the nuggets of truth in criticism no matter the source, but especially seek out godly correction.

Discussion Questions:

1. How have you seen a lack of humility damage yourself or others close to you in ministry?
2. Which of the 15 marks of humble revitalizers are the biggest challenge for you?
3. Keeping in mind the suggestions for cultivating humility, how have you cultivated humility in your own life over the years?

Foundation #9: Leading with Love

Mark 12:28-31 - 28 *And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?"* **29** *Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.*

1) When we die, if there are **two things** that we should hope people would say about us it is that they loved God and they loved people. *If they don't, we missed the center of the mark according to Jesus.*

- **This must be true of our lives, which means this must be true of our leadership...**that those who we lead would say of us, "they loved God and they loved people."

2) This kind of love must be the defining mark of our lives and our leadership!!!!

Ministry is all about people. Leadership is all about people. Revitalization is all about people.

If we are going to be effective revitalizers
we must love people well!

Jesus told us to love others like he loved us, by laying down his life for the sheep.

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. (1 John 3:16)

“There’s no use in trying to do church work without love. A doctor, a lawyer may do good work without love, but God’s work cannot be done without love.” D.L. Moody

Moody

“No amount of good works, wisdom, discernment in matters of church discipline, patient endurance and hardship, hatred of sin, or disciplined doctrine can ever make up for lovelessness.” – D. A. Carson

In 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, Paul writes: *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

- If the ingredient of love is missing in our lives and our leadership, then we are **NOTHING!**

Why should love be the defining mark of our leadership as revitalizers?

1. It pleases and glorifies God.
 - It’s what God wants in His leaders
 - It is right and good
2. It is biblical
 - Love is the most often repeated command in the New Testament.
 - The New Testament commands us to love. Over 50 times we are told to love.
3. It is who we are if we are in Christ.
4. It is what our people need.
5. It is effective.

What does leading with love look like?

#1: Pursuing those you lead with your words of encouragement.

1. Encouragement is vital to the church community.
2. “There is a broken heart in every pew.”
3. Many people are discouraged, feel unappreciated.
4. Everyone needs and encouraging or uplifting word

5. Leaders can create an encouraging environment in our local churches
6. Words carry energy for good or for bad.

#2: Investing in the growth of those we lead.

- Loving leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. As such, the loving leader is deeply committed to the growth of each and every individual within his or her institution.
- Loving leaders recognize the tremendous responsibility to do everything within his or her power to nurture the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of employees.

#3: Unleashing people to do ministry.

- 1) Making people fit in a box vs. creating a box with them and for them.
- 2) Tasking (what to do) & Telling (how to do it) vs. Inviting and Unleashing

#4: Being available to people.

- We as leaders must be *with* people if we are to love people well.

#5: Valuing different opinions.

- A loving leader values everyone's contributions and regularly seeks out other's opinions and ideas regularly.
- Don't Confuse Disagreement with Conflict. "*Conflict develops when people take the disagreement personally.*"

#6: Cultivating trust.

- 1) Consistency + Time + Grace & Truth = A Culture of Trust
- 2) THE LONG HAUL.

#7: Forgiving those who hurt us.

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." (Eph. 4:32)

#8: Demonstrating Gentleness.

"He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young." (Isa. 40:11)

"Therefore an overseer must be ... gentle" (1 Tim. 3:3)

"And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth." (2 Tim. 2:24-25)

Therefore, it is a big deal to God who takes care of his people. Imagine the immense price paid to purchase us, the price of divine blood. God doesn't want them roughed up, he doesn't want us to drive the sheep, to neglect them, or be bullying them. Remember when your children were little, you were very careful about who you got to babysit them. Think of the shepherd out in the field with the sheep and a rod in his hand. That rod is for the wolf or the bear. Never for the sheep. The shepherd leads the sheep out gently. – Kevin Fitzgerald

#9: Practicing Patience with others.

“And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.” (1 Thess 5:14 emphasis added)

#10: Avoiding rudeness.

What are some examples of rudeness?

- 1) Inconsiderate talk
 - 2) Disregard for other people's time, or moral conscience.
 - 3) Taking advantage of people.
 - 4) Ignoring the contributions of others. Only talking about our own contributions.
- ***All these are evidence of a lack of love, and they have no place in the local church, and certainly not a place in leadership.

#11: Insisting not on your own way.

Daily remember: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

#12: Persevering through tough seasons.

Loving the Lord's people is not always a pleasant experience.

Loving people is a tough.

- a) 1,500 pastors leave the ministry every month in America
- b) Over 50% of pastors would leave the ministry if they could find another way to support their families.
- c) Over 50% of pastors wives feel that their husbands entering the ministry was the most destructive thing that ever happened to their families.
- d) 71% of pastors stated that they were burnt out and they battled depression beyond fatigue on a weekly or daily basis.
- e) Only 1 out of 10 ministers will retire as a minister.

1. Sheep kick. The people we serve are imperfect people.
2. You can pour years into another person's life, and then they can turn on you.
3. Think of Moses and David – they were men of grace and patience. In their ministries, there were times when they had people who complained against them, and even wanted to kill them. If it can happen to great leaders in the Bible, it can happen to us.

How does persevering through tough seasons affect the culture of my church?

******Only through the power of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit.***

Sources:

Kevin Fitzgerald, “People Skills” Teaching on BiblicalEldership.com
Joel Manby. *Love Works: Seven Timeless Principles for Effective Leaders*.

Discussion Questions:

1. What stands out to you the most in Jesus’ love for people that we read about in the Bible?
2. How have you struggled to love people in your life?
3. What kinds of people are the hardest for you to love?
4. What kinds of people do you find it the easiest to love?
5. Which of these ways to love our church are the most exciting to you?

APPENDIX 10

TEACHER NOTES FOR FOUNDATIONAL VIDEOS 10–13

Foundation #10: Leading with Patience

Introduction:

1. Patience is a critical ingredient in church revitalization. As we come alongside churches that are need of major change, in all different kinds of areas, it takes **great patience.**
2. **Patience is not something we get in our culture. Think about it:** 1) We can fly anywhere we want to whenever we want. 2) We can download music whenever we want. 3) TiVo, 4) Get a hold of people whenever you want...text, fb, cell phone...other examples?

Impatience in my life...I struggle with patience! My guess is many of you are really impatient to. Well the reality is that patience is something we must learn and pursue if we are to effectively lead a congregation back to health and vitality. ...and this takes a lot of patience because people take a lot of patience don't they? In ministry, people take time. **(III. Guy meeting with the same dude for 18 years and just beginning to see fruit).**

What is Biblical Patience?

Galatians 5:22-23 - "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.."

- 1) Notice, please, the fourth on the list. Patience. The original Greek term unloads a lot of meaning upon us. **MAKROTHUMIA** is the term, and it's a compound word.
- 2) MAKROS means "long or far," and THUMOS means "hot, anger, or wrath." Putting it together, we come up with "long-anger." This is the opposite of the expression we use in our culture: "short-tempered"? Literally, patience means *long-tempered*.

If one attempts to lead revitalization without this Spirit-given virtue, he is driven to anger, frustration, lack of love and care for the flock. God encourages us to be "long-tempered."

Biblical patience takes: love + humility

Specific types of people we must learn to lead with patience in church revitalization:

In every church, there are different kinds of people. As revitalizers, there are 5 specific types of people we must learn to lead with patience:

- #1: Those who resist and even oppose change.
- #2: Those who are slow to learn.
- #3: Those who are weak in the faith.
- #4: Those who are quick to complain and slow to encourage.
- #5: Those who are forgetful or “flaky” in their responsibilities.

“And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.” (1 Thes 5:14)

“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” (2 Tim 4:2)

9 Reasons why we as revitalizers must practice patience if we are to be effective leaders in the church:

#1: People process change at different rates of speed.

- Some love change and can process change quickly. Others despise change and so it takes time and patience.

#2: Developing a leadership culture in the church takes time and a great deal of patience.

Remember: People develop at their speed, not ours.

- Impatience in those you are developing brings discouragement.

#3: Many conflicts can often be avoided when we seek to patiently understand a situation and establish the facts before jumping to conclusions or taking unwise actions.

#4: Patience helps us to be better listeners.

- Revitalizers must learn to 1) regularly ask good questions...and 2) then listen carefully before 3) taking action.

#5: Impatience often causes leaders to make bad leadership decisions that can often hurt the church and hurt people.

- **Remember:** Sometimes, speed kills.

#6: Leading with patience allows revitalizers to build support and get the right backing.

- Patience helps earn trust.

#7: Leading with patience can help us manage stress in the church and in our own lives.

- **Tip:** Know the triggers that cause you to grow impatient with others. What makes you snap? Be aware of this and be prepared ahead of time.

#8: Leading with patience helps us to manage our “gut instincts” which can often mislead us in ministry.

- Key area where this is true: Too quickly putting people in leadership positions.

#9: Leading with patience helps us to keep the long-haul vision in mind.

- 1) Revitalization takes TIME! It is a marathon and not a sprint.
- 2) Patience helps us to remember this does not happen overnight.

3 Strategies to help revitalizers cultivate patience in their leadership:

#1: Constantly remember how patient God is with you.

Ps. 86:15 - ¹⁵ But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

2 Peter 3:9 - the Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you...

***Unless we constantly remind ourselves of the incredible patience God has shown us and continues to show us day in and day out, we will never be truly patient with others.

#2: Repent of impatience and plead with the Holy Spirit to change your heart.

#3: Trust in God’s sovereign power and perfect wisdom in and over all situations.

---EG. – Jesus crying out... “Lord, not my will, but your will be done.”

Discussion Questions:

1. How has God grown patience in your life?
2. Who do you tend to have the smallest amount of patience with?
3. What does the Gospel have to do with patience?
4. How have others been patient with you over the course of your life?

Foundation #11: Leading with Faith

Introduction:

One of my favorite chapters in the Bible is Hebrews 11. We are what it means to live by faith and to lead by faith...Noah, Moses, Abraham, Jacob, David and Samuel, and the Prophets...

Hebrews 11:6 - And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

What is Biblical Faith?

Biblical faith is trusting that God is who he says he is, did what he said he did, and will do what he says he'll do, in accordance with God's Word.

Biblical Faith:

- 1) Trusts God and God's Word (belief + action)
- 2) Moves forward with assurance and conviction banking on God's faithfulness.
 - *Hebrews 11:1 - Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*
- 3) Recognizes and affirms God's sovereignty over all things, past, present, and future.

*****In Revitalization, we are to lead with faith.** Faith that believes God can do what He says He can do.

---That He can bring a dying church back to life.

---That He can renew hope and passion in the hearts of those who have been there for years.

What does it look like to lead with faith in revitalization?

#1: Leading people to a future that only God can accomplish.

#2: Following God's vision, not people's opinion.

#3: Dreaming and leading in a way that is "dangerous" and forces people to not depend on themselves but on God.

#4: Continually trusting God with the "next" thing".

- *How will you trust God now?*

#5: Persevering even when we don't totally get what He's doing.

#6: Displaying boldness and courage according to God's leading, promises, etc.

- *Courage forces you to depend on the Lord rather than self.*

#7: Leading through the possibility of failure, recognizing risk, with no guarantee.

#8: Reminding people that anything we can accomplish by our own skills, talents, and strategies, isn't living with or leading with faith in God.

#9: Being willing to change directions as God leads.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does the faith of those listed in Hebrews 11 affect how you experience faith?
2. What specific lessons do we learn from Hebrews 11 about faith in our various circumstances?
3. What does leading in faith and visionary leadership have in common? How are they different?
4. What specific situations have tested and stretched your faith?

Foundation #12: Leading with Passion

Brandon Cox: Passion is a priceless aspect of leadership. It's something that can be faked, but only temporarily. We can only keep up the facade of passion for something for so long before people begin to realize we aren't quite as invested as we've acted. Real passion burns inside us. It flares up somewhat uncontrollably and makes us do crazy things, like go to new places with the gospel, get personally involved in the lives of hurting sinners, and push others around us forward even at the cost of our own comfort.¹

What is passion?

Romans 12:11 - Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

Galatians 6:9 - And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

2 Timothy 2:10 - Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

¹ Brandon Cox, "Passionate Leadership Is Highly Biblical," <http://brandonacox.com/leadership/passionate-leadership-is-highly-biblical/>.

2 Corinthians 12:10 - For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Colossians 1:28-29 - 28 Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. 29 For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 - 24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 26 Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. 27 No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

Why is passion important in revitalization?

1. *Passion will inspire hope in those who are tired and ready to throw in the towel.*
2. *Passion ignites passion that ignites passion in a congregation. - I know after I'm around a passionate leader their energy and passions off on me.*
3. *Passion is a catalyst for reaching and mobilizing new people to be part of the revitalization.*

John Wesley said, "When you set yourself on fire, people love to come and see you burn." This is what happens when a leader has passion.

4. *Passion is essential for leading the congregation with fresh vision over the long haul.*

What things must a revitalizer be passionate about?

1. *God.*
 - Your passion for God is what will fuel all other passions in ministry.
2. *Your Family.*
 - This is your #1 calling...if we fail at home, we fail at church.
 - Your family will be your refuge through the ups and downs of revitalization.
3. *The Bible.*
 - Personally
 - In their preaching and leadership
4. *The existing congregation.*
 - Must love those who are there like crazy.

5. *The community in which the church is located.*
 - You must love that community...it's history...its schools, etc.

6. *The lost in the community.*
 - Most dying congregations are no longer passionate about reaching the lost in their community.

7. *Raising up leaders to share the work of ministry.*
 - You can't do this on your own!

 - Raising up leaders takes a lot time and energy but it is essential.

8. *Seeing this congregation revitalized for God's glory, whatever it takes.*
 - Going "All in" with this revitalization...no turning back.

Something To Remember: Who you surround yourself with determines the level of passion in your life and ministry. Be intentional with these four types of people²:

1. People Who Fuel Our Passion:

These are our mentors, our models--people we can spend time with or those whose writing, thinking and speaking expands and deepens our passion and purpose in life. Someone has observed that what we are tomorrow will be a result of the people we meet and the books we read today. I believe that with all my heart.

2. People Who Catch Our Passion:

These are the teachable, the moldable--the people who are hungry for God, hungry to make their lives count. They want to grow, to learn, to see God at work in their lives. They will take what we give and pass it along to others, multiplying our investment many times over.

3. People Who Enjoy Our Passion:

Most people we probably know fall into this category. On the one hand they don't take a great deal, but then neither do they add a great deal. It would be easy to spend lots of time with these "nice people." They are fun and easy to be with.

4. People Who Drain Our Passion:

This is where the major energy leaks can occur. These are the needy people. The people that struggle. The people who demand hours and hours of our energy but often don't seem to profit from it. Yet, they keep returning with the same problems and want more of us. They often are the squeaky wheels that get most of the oil of our passion.

² Dave Kraft, "Does Your Passion Have a Slow Leak," January 15, 2020, <http://www.davekraft.org/posts/2014/1/19/does-your-passion-have-a-slow-leak>.

Dave Kraft: As a leader, I want to make sure that I am spending most of my time with those in categories one and two and to be careful and prayerful about allowing too much time with those in three and four. With His help, I want to be pro-active, not re-active. Those in three and four can and, more than likely will, take most of my time if I am not careful.

Discussion Questions:

1. How can you tell that someone is passionate about something?
2. What are you passionate about? How does this reflect your desire to see a church revitalized or replanted?
3. Thinking through the four types of people who fuel, catch, enjoy or drain our passion, can you think of someone who fits each other these people in your life and ministry? How did they affect your passion specifically?
4. What is your strategy for making sure you always have passion fuelers in your life?
5. What is your strategy for developing those who catch your passion?

Foundation #13: Leading with Joy

1) **Revitalization and Replanting is hard ministry!** And because it is hard, there are many things that can steal your joy in ministry. Let me just share a few of these “**joy stealers**”:

Thom Rainer has written about several of these³:

- 1) **Seeing the underbelly of Christian ministry.** Christian ministry means working with sinners just like you and me.
- 2) **Constant criticisms (“death by a thousand cuts”).** Criticism is crushing.
- 3) **Fighting among Christians.**
- 4) **Busyness that turns to prayerlessness.** We will always lose our joy when we neglect our time in prayer.
- 5) **Unreasonable work hours.** Becoming a workaholic in the church steals our joy in the Lord and hurts our family.
- 6) **Attacks on our family.** This is an especially difficult joy stealer because we sometimes feel powerless when it happens.
- 7) **Sour staff relations.** Sadly, this is true in most churches.

³ <http://thomrainer.com/2015/02/ten-joy-stealers-ministry-get-back/>.

- 8) **Inwardly focused church.** A church that focuses most ministries and activities on the members and not those beyond the church becomes stale and self-serving.
- 9) **Lack of respect in the community and culture.** Up until about 1990, most ministers were respected, if not revered, in their communities. That reality is shifting dramatically in most communities today.
- 10) **Entitlement mentality among some church members.** Those who see the church as a country club and the church exists for them.

There are all kinds of “joy stealers” in ministry and specifically in revitalization, so the question is: How do we cultivate in our hearts **GREATER JOY** in the Lord and in our ministries even in the face of real challenges?

Let's start by asking the question:

Question #1: What exactly is Joy?

- Being Joyful doesn't mean being “happy” all the time.
- It doesn't mean we don't have times where we are discouraged and get down.

Joy is deeper than “worldly happiness” and it is deeper than our circumstances.

So, what exactly is Joy? Here are some definitions of joy:

Joy is the inner attitude of rejoicing in one's salvation regardless of outward circumstances.

Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation.

Joy is one of the “fruits” of the Holy Spirit within us (Gal. 5:22-23). Joy is the natural reaction to the work of God, whether promised or fulfilled.

One of my favorite definitions of joy comes from James Boice. He says this about Joy: *Joy springs from the nature of God, and is intended to well up within those in whom God's Spirit dwells. It is not external; it is internal. It does not hinge upon circumstances. Things may happen to the Christian that no one, including the Christian, would be happy about. But there can still be joy.*

Question #2: Why should we pursue joy? (4 Reasons)

Reason #1: The Bible clearly commands joy.

*“Rejoice in the Lord.” - Phil 3:1 “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, rejoice” - Phil 4:4 ***It is a command.*

“Be joyful always.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16)

***God doesn't stutter – always means always – *In every situation we can and God wants us to experience joy!*

Reason #2: Our joy brings glory to God.

Some protest that the pursuit of joy seems self-centered:

1) It's NOT!! Pursuing joy and glorifying God are not in conflict. To pursue joy IN God with your whole life is to honor the One who has given you life.

2) Pursuing joy in God is very different from just enjoying His gifts. Most of us know how to enjoy His gifts, but the pursuit of joy IN God actually transforms us.

- God desires that we find our joy, happiness, peace and purpose in Him. When we have done so – HE is glorified!
- John Piper – “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”

John Piper – we must fight for joy. We must fight for the relationship that God has called us to. Fight to be filled with joy!

1) Fight our sin natures and temptation...2) we fight countless distractions...3) fight the enemy's lies.

- The pursuit of joy IN God must become our **TOP priority.**

Trip Lee:

I think one of the dangers for me is I want to fight for joy because I don't want to lead from a perpetually dry place. Then it just becomes hypocritical, because we don't really believe what we are saying. Maybe we just believe it kind of intellectually, but we don't believe it at a really deep heart level. So when we say to someone that Jesus satisfies your soul, we say that not from our own actual experience, but because we think it is what we are supposed to say. It can turn into hypocrisy very quickly. I think it can quickly turn into simply mimicking words.

At the heart of my ability to lead other people well is enjoying Jesus myself. Then I get to say, “Here is where I found that joy in the Scriptures in Jesus. Come along with me on this journey,” instead of saying, “Hey, I heard about this place way out there and I want to kind of tell you about what I think it is like.”

Reason #3: Joy is what sustains and strengthens our love for God and our love for others.

- Joy in the Lord is fuel in our pursuit of God and people.

Reason #4: Joy is evangelistic. Joy is Missional.

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14 – 16)

The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of the Father. (Matthew 13:43)

Question #3: How do we pursue and keep joy in revitalization?

Mark Altrogge: God promises his children joy, and many times he fills us with it without our asking. But at other times, especially when we go through trials, we must fight for it. Much of the battle lies in fighting to believe God's word.

For some the battle for joy is much harder than others. Some must deal with their own tendencies to being downcast. Depression and hard, long, sad afflictions can make Jesus' joy seem beyond reach. Yet God's word says it's his intent to give us his joy both in this life and especially in the next.

So here are 25 ways to pursue joy in Christ⁴:

1. Praise God for the cross: for his mercy and grace in saving you.
2. Thank him for all his spiritual benefits: forgiveness, adoption, the Word, spiritual gifts, the church.
3. Ask Jesus to fill you with his own joy (JN 15:11).
4. Thank him for his steadfast love that never ceases.
5. Thank God for your temporal blessings: for your spouse or for the blessings of being single, kids, health, sight, food, strength, home, computer and coffee.
6. Praise God for his attributes: his greatness, sovereignty, goodness, love, wisdom and power.
7. Praise Jesus for being a compassionate high priest who intercedes for you.
8. Thank him for all the specific good he is producing in you through trials: patience, perseverance, and faith.
9. Thank God for his past faithfulness.
10. Give to the kingdom.
11. Give to the poor.
12. Serve others (PHP 1:25).
13. Don't dwell on whether you are joyful or not. Try to forget yourself.
14. Thank the Lord that he is making you like Christ.
15. Seek God's presence in prayer (PS 16.11; PS 43.4).
16. Read the Word – it produces joy (PS 119.111; JE 15:16).

⁴ <http://theblazingcenter.com/2011/03/25-ways-to-pursue-joy-in-christ.html>.

17. Thank God that he will never turn away from doing good to you.
18. Ask others to pray for God to fill you with joy.
19. Ask the Holy Spirit to produce the fruit of joy in you.
20. Confess your sins to God and ask him to restore the joy of your salvation (PS 51:12).
21. Memorize God's promises to give you joy and ask him to fulfill them (JN 16:24; RO 14:17; 15:13; PS 4:7; 30:5; 68:3; 97:11; 126:6).
22. Consider others who have it much worse than you.
23. Pray for others who are suffering.
24. Contemplate the joys of heaven and the world to come.
25. Read John Piper's book, When I Don't Desire God: How to Fight for Joy

Discussion Questions:

1. In your personal life and ministry, what have been some joy-stealers that you have consistently had to battle against?
2. What have been some effective ways that you have learned to fight for joy in under these circumstances (from question 1)?
3. What role does Christian community play in fighting for joy?
4. How does our understanding of who God is affect our ability to be joyful in ministry?
5. How might the challenges of church revitalization specifically present obstacles to joy in the Lord?
6. What are some of the potential consequences of leading from a place that is not rooted in joy?
7. What are some "false idols" in ministry that you might be tempted to find joy and satisfaction in, rather finding it in Christ?

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ABSTRACT

CREATING A CHURCH REVITALIZATION RESIDENCY AT THE GREENVILLE BAPTIST ASSOCIATION IN GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. William D. Henard

This project is designed to create a church revitalization residency at the Greenville Baptist Association in Greenville, South Carolina. The goal for creating a residency such as this is to give a future revitalization pastor the necessary academic, practical, and spiritual training needed to help an unhealthy church once again become vibrant.

Chapter 1 introduces the context where the residency will be located, along with the rationale, purpose, goals, research methodologies, definitions, and delimitations of the project. Chapter 2 describes the biblically given paradigm for church revitalization (Rev 2) and how the restoration of a church exemplifies the power of the gospel (Ezek 37:1-14). Chapter 3 describes the requirements for successfully revitalizing dying churches, including refocusing the church on the spiritual disciplines, a multi-year strategy, gospel-centered ministries and missions, and a well-prepared under shepherd to lead them through the process. Chapter 4 describes the details of the project. Chapter 5 concludes with an evaluation of the project.

VITA

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EDUCATION

BA, Anderson University, 2004

MAR, Liberty Theological Seminary, 2013

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Student Ministry Intern, Seneca Baptist Church, Seneca, South Carolina, 2003-2005

Student Pastor, Grace Baptist Church, Seneca, South Carolina, 2005-2007

Associate Pastor, Children and Students, Woodlawn Baptist Church, Grovetown, Georgia, 2007-2009

Student Pastor, Barnwell First Baptist Church, Barnwell, South Carolina, 2009-2012

Associate Pastor, Students and Discipleship, Greer First Baptist Church, Greer, South Carolina, 2012-2015

Discipleship Pastor, Fountain Inn First Baptist Church, Fountain Inn, South Carolina, 2015-2020

Senior Pastor, Monaghan Baptist Church, Greenville, South Carolina, 2020-