

Copyright © 2023 Daniel Winski Wright Jr.

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including without limitation, preservation, or instruction.

LEADING REVITALIZATION THROUGH PRAYER AT
JEFFERSONVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH
IN JEFFERSONVILLE, GEORGIA

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
Daniel Winski Wright Jr.
December 2023

APPROVAL SHEET

LEADING REVITALIZATION THROUGH PRAYER AT
JEFFERSONVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH
IN JEFFERSONVILLE, GEORGIA

Daniel Winski Wright Jr.

Read and Approved by:

Faculty Supervisor: Dustin B. Bruce

Second Reader: Timothy K. Beougher

Defense Date: October 11, 2023

Dedicated to the people of Jeffersonville Baptist Church
and for the glory of Jesus Christ.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	viii
PREFACE	ix
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Context	1
Rationale	3
Purpose	6
Goals	6
Research Methodology	7
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations.....	9
Conclusion	11
2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR PASTORAL LEADERSHIP OF LOCAL CHURCH REVITALIZATION THROUGH PRAYER.....	12
Prayer Is Calling on the Name of the Lord	12
People Begin Publicly Worshiping the Lord through Prayer (Gen 4:1–26)	12
God Alone Has the Power to Bring Revitalization	19
The Lord Breathes New Life through an Outpouring of His Spirit (Ezek 37:1–14).....	19
God Graciously Welcomes His People to Come to Him in Prayer as Our Loving Father	25
Prayer Is Honoring the Lord’s Name in All Our Requests (Matt 6:5–12).....	26

Chapter	Page
Revitalization Is Dependent upon the Outpouring of God’s Spirit through Prayer.....	36
The Early Church Prioritized Prayer as They Boldly Fulfilled the Great Commission (Acts 4:23–31).....	36
Conclusion	43
3. THEOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL, AND PRACTICAL ARGUMENTS FOR LEADING LOCAL CHURCH REVITALIZATION THROUGH PRAYER.....	45
The Theological Argument for Revitalization through the Power of Prayer	45
Understanding the Need for Local Church Revitalization	46
Local Churches Need Revitalization through the Power of Prayer	50
The Historical Argument for Leading Revitalization through the Power of Prayer	57
There Is a Clear Distinction between Historical Revivals and Modern Revitalizations	58
Evidence for the Power of Prayer in Historical Revivals As a Model for Modern Revitalizations	60
The Practical Argument for Leading Revitalization through the Power of Prayer	72
Effective Pastoral Leadership through Prayer Is Needed for Revitalization.....	73
Local Churches Experience Spiritual Fruitfulness in Revitalization When Devoted to Corporate Prayer	78
Conclusion	87
4. DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT	89
Description of the Preparation Period	89
Preparation Period: Weeks 1–2	91
Description of the Implementation Period	95
Sermon Series Period: Weeks 3–6.....	96
Intercessory Prayer Period: Weeks 3–16.....	104

Chapter	Page
Description of the Follow-up Period: Weeks 17–18	120
Conclusion	121
5. PROJECT EVALUATION AND REFLECTIONS	122
Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose	122
Evaluation of the Goals	124
Goal 1: Assessment of the Church’s Prayer Practices and Knowledge	125
Goal 2: Analysis of the Sermon Series	139
Goal 3: Application of the Knowledge of Prayer	143
Goal 4: Prayerwalking Ministry	147
Strengths and Weaknesses of the Ministry Project	151
Strengths of the Ministry Project	152
Weaknesses of the Ministry Project	154
What I Would Do Differently	156
Theological Reflections	158
Personal Reflections	159
Conclusion	161
 Appendix	
1. PRAYER QUESTIONNAIRE	164
2. 7 FOR 7 PRAYER CARD	170
3. SERMON EVALUATION TOOL	171
4. SEVEN-PART SERMON SERIES OUTLINES	173
5. SERMON SERIES VISUAL	181
6. PASTOR’S WEEKLY SUNDAY BULLETIN BLOG	182
7. FLYER PROMOTING COMMUNITY EASTER EVENT	187
8. FLYER PROMOTING COMMUNITY MIDWEEK EASTER PRAYER SERVICE	188

Appendix	Page
9. COMMUNITY PRAYER SERVICE ORDER OF WORSHIP SERVICE.....	189
10. PRAYERWALKING JEFFERSONVILLE PRAYER CARD.....	190
11. FLYER PROMOTING PRAYERWALKING JEFFERSONVILLE STUDY	191
12. PRAYERWALKING TEACHING SERIES.....	192
13. PRAYERWALKING THE PARK COMMUNITY WORSHIP SERVICE.....	200
14. TWIGGS COUNTY FAMILY WEEKEND EVANGELISM EVENT	201
15. 7 FOR 7 PRAYER CARD SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONNAIRE	202
16. PRAYERWALKING SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONNAIRE	205
17. T-TEST RESULTS.....	209
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	212

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Data analysis of the Likert Scale questions	126
2. Data analysis of the multiple choice questions.....	129
3. Results of <i>t</i> -test dependent samples for pre- and post-assessment totals	134
4. Results of <i>t</i> -test dependent samples for knowledge questions	135
5. Results of <i>t</i> -test dependent samples for prayer practice questions	135
6. Results of <i>t</i> -test dependent samples for pre- and post-assessment totals (leadership).....	136
7. Results of <i>t</i> -test dependent samples for knowledge questions (leadership).....	137
8. Results of <i>t</i> -test dependent samples for prayer practice questions (leadership).....	138
9. Critique of the sermon series	140
10. 7 for 7 prayer card questionnaire responses.....	144
11. Prayerwalking questionnaire responses.....	148
A1. Results of <i>t</i> -test dependent samples for pre- and post-assessment totals	209
A2. Results of <i>t</i> -test dependent samples for knowledge questions.....	209
A3. Results of <i>t</i> -test dependent samples for prayer practice questions	210
A4. Results of <i>t</i> -test dependent samples for pre- and post-assessment questions (leadership).....	210
A5. Results of <i>t</i> -test dependent samples for knowledge questions (leadership).....	211
A6. Results of <i>t</i> -test dependent samples for prayer practice questions (leadership).....	211

PREFACE

This project will be completed in large part due to the loving support of many people God has placed in my path. First, I am thankful to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our salvation. It is because of Christ that we have newness of life and we live to serve, worship, and glorify his magnificent name. Equipping myself and my church to pray for revitalization has strengthened my prayer life and brought me even closer to the Lord.

Secondly, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to my family, especially my wife, Laura, and our children. I am thankful for their steadfast support during these years of completing this program. Laura's faithful service to the Lord through her years leading children's ministries has been a blessing and encouragement as we partner together to serve the local church.

Third, I want to thank the members of Jeffersonville Baptist Church for their prayers and support of my pastorate. It is a blessing to shepherd them, and I appreciate their desire as faithful servants of Christ and their desire to see our church become a praying church for the community of Jeffersonville.

Fourth, I want to thank The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the many professors, particularly Dr. Dustin Bruce and Dr. Timothy Beougher, who supported me in this endeavor.

Daniel Wright

Jeffersonville, Georgia

December 2023

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The mission statement of Jeffersonville Baptist Church (JBC) is “Because we love our community, we are praying for our community.”¹ As many churches throughout North America experience spiritual decline, church revitalization is vitally important. In the book of Isaiah, the prophet declared these words of the Lord: “My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations” (Isa 56:7).² God uses the prayers of his people as a catalyst to bring about spiritual revitalization, but too often churches struggle to pray. For this reason, the members of Jeffersonville Baptist Church will pursue revitalization through prayer that transforms the prayer life of the church and impacts the community of Jeffersonville for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Context

Jeffersonville Baptist Church is a rural, traditional church located in Jeffersonville, Twiggs County, Georgia. Established in November 1849, it is one of the oldest churches in the community and was once a thriving church.³ However, the church endured significant decline over recent decades. It is a church in need of revitalization that can only occur through an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and through the Lord using

¹ Jeffersonville Baptist Church, “Pray and Go for Twiggs County,” accessed September 7, 2023, <https://www.jeffersonvillebaptist.org/copy-of-contact-us>.

² Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations come from the CSB translation.

³ Kathleen J. Carswell published a historical record of the church entitled, “History of Jeffersonville Baptist Church, Jeffersonville, Georgia, 1849–1966.” On page 2, she wrote that her committee researched recorded church documents, conference minutes, court records, and historical records in order to write this historical account of the church. In addition to publishing this record, Carswell published two additional works about the history of Twiggs County, Georgia, and a genealogical record of her family. Carswell passed away in 1986.

prayerful Christians as a catalyst for revitalization. Statistics from the Southern Baptist Convention and the North American Mission Board reveal alarming trends in the decline and death of numerous local churches. Yet, biblical and church history demonstrates that the Spirit of God has moved upon individuals, churches, cities, and nations to bring about spiritual revival and local church revitalization. JBC is an example of an established, traditional church in need of revitalization that can only occur through the power of Spirit-driven prayer.

When I came to JBC in January 2020, I recognized some exciting strengths, but also some glaring weaknesses. One strength was the tremendous unity among the church members. This small congregation has been together for over forty years. The members who consistently attend the worship gatherings have a strong bond. Although this congregation is mostly older and very traditional, they desire to see their church thrive. However, one weakness was that the current members have remained inwardly focused, particularly when it comes to prayer. As their children and grandchildren have moved away from the declining town of Jeffersonville, they have struggled to actively reach the surrounding neighborhood and the community overall. In addition, a revolving door of pastors over the last several years has created two problems. First, there has been no consistent pastor shepherding the congregation and communicating the vision of the local church. Second, there has been a lack of pastoral leadership to model important spiritual disciplines, particularly corporate and individual prayer. These two problems have resulted in the congregation's prayer life remaining inwardly focused and lacking spiritual expectancy in God bringing about revitalization. The members have watched their church decline significantly over the last three decades, yet there has been little expectation in prayer for God to revitalize this church.

JBC currently has a traditional weekly worship schedule that includes Sunday morning and evening gatherings and Wednesday evening prayer meeting and Bible study. These worship services include regular times of corporate prayer, such as the invitation,

offertory, and benediction. The traditional Wednesday night service offers a time of corporate prayer. However, the individual and corporate prayer patterns of the church often lacks spiritual power and genuine expectancy that God will move in our church and community to bring about revitalization and reflects a lack of spiritual earnestness for unbelievers. Finally, the congregation's stale prayer life has created an apathetic spirit towards evangelization in the community. Leading the church in Spirit-led prayer can be the catalyst God uses to revitalize JBC. The Bible is clear that only God himself, through the power of the outpouring of his Spirit, can bring about true and sustaining revitalization. In addition, Scripture teaches, and church history confirms that God pours out his favor on those who fervently devote themselves to prayer.

The theologian John Stott described a typical prayer service as “village prayers to village gods.”⁴ These customary gatherings are spiritually superficial and inwardly focused. Praising God for his creation or praying for a member struggling with illness is important; however, there is a lack of urgent prayer for the spiritual lostness of the community. Even the lack of personal prayer in my own life has convicted me because as the pastor I feel spiritually deficient in leading my church towards revitalization. Recently, I began prayer walking the neighborhood surrounding our church, praying for the homes, and engaging with people in the neighborhood. In those conversations, it was apparent that JBC has struggled fulfilling the Great Commission and actively praying for the immediate neighborhood.

Rationale

Many local churches today desperately need revitalization, but often revitalization efforts lack the foundation of prayer. Thom Rainer stated, “I have yet to see

⁴ Bill Turpie, ed., *Ten Great Preachers, Messages, and Interviews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 117, quoted in Jon Onwuchekwa, *Prayer: How Praying Together Shapes the Church* (Wheaton: IL: Crossway, 2018), 14.

a sustained church revitalization that was not undergirded by a powerful movement of prayer.”⁵ The Southern Baptist Convention reported at its annual convention in June 2021 that church attendance, baptisms, giving to the Cooperative Program, and conversions continue to trend downward.⁶ These declining trends led the convention to adopt Vision 2025 in order to reverse these trends through a movement of Spirit-led prayer.⁷ Local church revitalization emerges when God’s people humbly seek him in steadfast prayer. Therefore, leading Jeffersonville Baptist Church to pray for revitalization is essential because this church can experience authentic revitalization and transform the community for Jesus Christ through prayer.

The Bible reveals how God alone brings about spiritual renewal, and he uses the prayers of his people as a catalyst for revitalization. In Ezekiel 37, the prophet received a vision where God powerfully raised to life dead, dry bones in a valley where death and decay transpired. Although the bones had decayed and recovery appeared impossible, Ezekiel understood that God alone possessed the power to raise decayed bones to life. This truth is a reminder to the people of Jeffersonville Baptist that God alone is able and willing to revive his people and will use our devotion to prayer as a catalyst for the revitalization. In surveying revitalized churches, Rainer concluded, “It is God who revitalizes churches. If we truly want to see His work in our churches, we must turn to Him in prayer.”⁸ Therefore, this underscores the spiritual implications of prayer.

Acts 6 unveils the significance of the church devoted to prayer. A dispute arose among the Hellenistic Jews and the Hebraic Jews because the widows were neglected.

⁵ Thom Rainer, *Anatomy of a Revived Church: Seven Findings of How Congregations Avoided Death* (Spring Hill, TN: Rainer, 2020), 71.

⁶ Southern Baptist Convention, “2021 Ministry Report,” accessed October 1, 2021, <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/ministry-reports/2021-ministry-report/>.

⁷ Southern Baptist Convention, “Vision 2025,” accessed October 22, 2021, <https://www.sbc.net/vision-2025/>.

⁸ Rainer, *Anatomy of a Revived Church*, 81.

After encouraging the selection of servants to care for the widows, the apostles responded, “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). This truth is critical because many declining churches like JBC have remained inwardly focused, distracted from fulfilling the Great Commission, and have lacked wholehearted devotion to Spirit-led prayer. Pastor and author Jon Onwuchekwa wrote, “It seems many churches simply don’t realize how little they pray together, or how little their prayers reflect the bigheartedness of God.”⁹ When the congregation of JBC commits to prayer corporately and individually, God can bring revitalization.

In his book on revival, Martyn Lloyd-Jones described the urgency of prayer Isaiah demonstrated towards the people of his day, which offers a spiritual application for the members of JBC to urgently pray for revitalization. Lloyd-Jones wrote, “Christian people . . . Do you not pray for revival? They are going to hell, they are going to be crushed beneath his feet. . . . Do you not think we should be praying without ceasing?”¹⁰ In Isaiah’s day, the Israelites rebelled and rejected God, ultimately leading to their oppression under the Babylonian Empire and exiled from their homeland. Likewise, there are many unbelievers throughout Twiggs County, Georgia. God can bring about a movement of spiritual renewal as the people of JBC commit to praying for revitalization.

Biblical and church history also demonstrates how God used faithful, Spirit-led disciples as a catalyst for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit to bring about revitalization in churches, communities, and entire nations. For example, several businessmen led by Jeremiah Lanphier devoted themselves to intercessory prayer, eventually experiencing God’s incredible blessing with an amazing spiritual awakening during the late 1850s.¹¹ It was a revival born out of prayer as Lanphier entered the third-story room of an old church

⁹ Onwuchekwa, *Prayer*, 14.

¹⁰ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Revival* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1987), 276.

¹¹ Collin Hansen and John Woodbridge, *God Sized Vision: Revival Stories That Stretch and Stir* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 77–94.

building in New York City to pray. He was joined by a small group of men and over time it rapidly grew into a movement God used to bring revival throughout the nation.

As the prayer life of the church deepens, God can bring forth an outpouring of his Spirit for revitalization. The vision of prayer for revitalization at Jeffersonville Baptist Church will be shaped by this mission statement: Because we love our community we are praying for our community. By leading the members and attendees of Jeffersonville Baptist to pray constantly to the Lord, this church will corporately and individually be transformed into a praying church, will be more outwardly focused on impacting Twiggs County for the gospel of Jesus Christ, and witness revitalization.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to lead local church revitalization through the power of prayer at Jeffersonville Baptist Church that transforms the corporate and individual prayer lives of its people and impacts the community.

Goals

In order to lead the members of Jeffersonville Baptist to pray for revitalization that transforms our corporate and individual prayer life, the following four goals were established to determine the completion of this project.

1. The first goal of this project was to assess the current knowledge and prayer practices of the congregation of Jeffersonville Baptist Church.
2. The second goal of this project was to develop and preach a seven-part sermon series over the course of four weeks during both the morning and evening worship gatherings focusing on the biblical truths about the purpose of prayer and its role in supporting local church revitalization.
3. The third goal of this project was to apply the knowledge and practice of intercessory prayer by more intentionally and actively praying both corporately and individually for God to bring about local church revitalization.
4. The fourth goal of this project was to implement a prayer-walking ministry in which the church actively prays for one hundred homes and other locations in the community.

Definitive research methodology was utilized to effectively measure the success of each of these four goals. All the research instruments used in this project was performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project. The methodology used to measure these goals is described in the following section.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the effective completion of these four goals. These four goals were designed to help the people of Jeffersonville Baptist Church not only increase their knowledge of biblical prayer, but to become more intentional and active in praying for the spiritual and physical needs of the community both in their personal and corporate prayer lives. Many local churches today are in a state of decline and/or dying because congregations have neglected devoting itself to Spirit-filled prayer, trusting in its power to bring about personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization. The goals of this project were designed to measure each individual's personal prayer life, assess the corporate prayer gatherings, and evaluate the church's active intercessory praying for the community.

The first goal of the project was to assess the current knowledge and prayer practices of the congregation. Utilizing a three-part assessment, the questionnaire consisted of questions designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative responses.¹² This goal was considered successfully met when 70 percent of the participants completed the pre-assessment questionnaire. The results of the survey were then analyzed in order to provide a snapshot of the current knowledge and prayer patterns among the congregation.

The second goal of the project was to develop and preach a seven-part sermon series on the biblical teaching of prayer. This goal was measured by a panel consisting of

¹² See appendix 1.

the five deacons and the pastor. Before the sermon series began, the deacons were provided outlines of each sermon.¹³ At the conclusion of the sermon series, a rubric was completed by the pastor and the deacons for the purpose of evaluating the biblical fidelity, understanding, and application of the entire sermon series.¹⁴ The discussion generated from this evaluation was shared with the congregation in order to help the church understand the significance of prayer for revitalization as outlined in the sermon series. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion reached a sufficient level of completion.

The third goal of this project was to apply the knowledge and practice of biblical intercessory prayer by more intentionally and actively praying corporately and individually for local church revitalization. One of the reasons that local churches are experiencing significant decline is because of a serious deficiency in corporate prayer. Too often when congregations do pray corporately, they are inwardly focused and lack a desire for the spiritual needs of the community. Inwardly focused needs are important, but for churches in serious decline, there must be a shift to corporate evangelistic prayer for the spiritual needs of the community. This goal was measured by administering the pre- and post-project prayer assessment to evaluate trends in the members' prayer practices and knowledge about prayer. The information gleaned particularly from the open-ended questions helped me to guide the congregation's growth in intercessory prayer. Finally, the congregation had opportunities to apply their knowledge and practice of intercessory prayer by participating in two prayer challenges, regular monthly prayer services, and various community outreach events. This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-assessment questions for knowledge and intercessory

¹³ See appendix 4.

¹⁴ See appendix 3.

prayer practices. I also wanted to see 70 percent of the participants affirm their commitment to pray at least twice per week for all the names on their “7 for 7” prayer cards during the seven weeks leading up to Easter Sunday 2023, intentionally invite at least three of their names to church on Easter Sunday, and complete the intercessory prayer questionnaire.¹⁵

The fourth goal of the project was to implement a prayerwalking ministry in which the members actively prayed for one hundred homes and other locations in the community. As the members begin to understand the importance of intercessory prayer and grow in their devotion to prayer, they will have a greater desire to actively pray throughout the community, leading to greater opportunities for evangelism. This prayerwalking ministry was designed to fulfill JBC’s vision of demonstrating its love for the community by actively engaging the community through intercessory prayer. This goal was considered successfully met when the participants prayed for one hundred homes and other locations in the community.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project.

Church revitalization. The process of leading a dying church back to a healthy state by restoring the church’s purpose of glorifying God and fulfilling its mission to reach the lost in their community.¹⁶

Prayer. Crying out or calling on the name of the Lord to fulfill his covenantal promises. J. Gary Millar’s biblical theology book on prayer simply answers the question: What is prayer? By examining every common thread of prayer from Genesis to Revelation, Millar’s definition is precise, yet comprehensive. Millar concludes that prayer

¹⁵ See appendices 2 and 15.

¹⁶ Rainer, *Anatomy of a Revived Church*, 138.

is calling on the name of the Lord to come through on his promises.¹⁷

Prayerwalking. A method of intercessory prayer that involves praying while walking at the location of the prayer journey. It is a way of being on the scene without making a scene.¹⁸

Three limitations are applied to this project. First, the church has experienced a significant decline in attendance, and the overwhelming majority of current members and attendees are over the age of seventy. Many of them have some physical limitations that required extended time for completing the survey. To alleviate this limitation and to obtain a sufficient number of responses, surveys were distributed and then collected over a period of two weeks. Second, the sermon series covered seven weeks. Although the sermon series was relatively short in terms of its scope, there were some members who would likely miss portions of the series due to various factors. To mitigate this limitation, sermon outlines were provided for the congregation and each sermon was recorded and uploaded to the church's Facebook page for viewing, or members could request a DVD. Third, the prayerwalking ministry was a significant aspect of the project because it was designed to get the members actively praying for the community, leading to opportunities to engage in personal prayer and evangelistic opportunities. However, many of the members have health reasons that limited their ability to prayerwalk; therefore, these members were encouraged to actively participate by driving in their vehicles and writing personal prayer cards to be distributed throughout the community.

Three delimitations also applied to this project. First, the project focused on the members and regular attendees of Jeffersonville Baptist Church. The purpose of this delimitation was to lead revitalization through prayer by deepening the corporate and

¹⁷ J. Gary Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Prayer*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 38 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 27.

¹⁸ Dan R. Crawford and Calvin Miller, *Prayer Walking: A Journey of Faith* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2002), 2.

individual prayer life of the congregation. Second, the sermon series focused on revealing the biblical truth and purpose of prayer in the Scripture. The purpose of this delimitation was to provide a biblical framework of prayer for revitalization. Third, the various intercessory prayer components of this project were designed to get the congregation to actively pray by engaging with the community through prayer, which should lead to evangelistic opportunities. The purpose of this delimitation was to provide members with opportunities to intentionally and actively pray by focusing much of their praying on the spiritual needs of the community.

Conclusion

Like many local churches across North America, Jeffersonville Baptist Church is an established and traditional rural church that was once a thriving church; however, over the recent decades, it has gradually experienced a slow erosion of decline and needs revitalization. The community at large has experienced significant economic and population decline, which has impacted the church. In leading JBC towards revitalization, prayer is foundational. God alone brings about an outpouring of his Spirit for personal and corporate revival, but when local congregations devote themselves to a movement of powerful prayer for revitalization, the Lord responds. Biblical and church history continually demonstrates how God responds favorably when his people devote themselves to prayer. Chapter 2 will address the biblical and theological support for pastoral leadership of local church revitalization through the power of prayer, why God invites his people to pray, and how God faithfully responds by using prayer as a catalyst to bring about local church revitalization.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR PASTORAL LEADERSHIP OF LOCAL CHURCH REVITALIZATION THROUGH PRAYER

The thesis of this chapter is that four passages from both Testaments reveal God alone has the power to bring about an outpouring of his Spirit for revitalization, yet the Lord graciously invites his people to pray, using Spirit-driven prayer as a catalyst for local church revitalization. By examining these passages, this chapter will address three important questions: what is biblical prayer, why do Christians pray, and how does God use the prayers of his faithful people as a catalyst for revitalization.

Prayer Is Calling on the Name of the Lord

Genesis 4:17–26 presents two distinct family lines descending from Adam. The first is the line of Cain, and the second is the line of Seth. The descendants of Cain, following his murderous act of Abel, continued down a spiraling path of sin. In contrast, the descendants of Seth began publicly worshiping the Lord by calling on his name in prayer. This section shows not only the contrasting genealogical lines descending from the family patriarch Adam but more importantly how, amid a world increasingly corrupted and consumed by sin, the roots of one family line stood apart in seeking out the Lord by invoking his name publicly in worship through prayer.

People Begin Publicly Worshiping the Lord through Prayer (Gen 4:1–26)

The opening chapters of Genesis begin with two distinct accounts of God's perfect creation. In chapter 1, the Lord created the world and declared that everything he made was good. To culminate his good and perfect creation, God created mankind in his

image (Gen 1:27). He gave them authority to create, cultivate, and rule over his perfect creation. Chapter 2 details a more intimate account of God’s creation, focusing primarily on the first human family. Adam is formed from the dust of the earth and placed in the garden of Eden. Then Eve is formed from the rib of Adam, and together they live in the garden, reflecting God’s glory throughout his creation.

However, in chapter 3, the disastrous consequences of sin permeate the world, as Satan—through the guise of a serpent—enters the garden and deceives Eve, which culminates in Adam’s disobedience of God’s command not to eat from the forbidden tree. Amid the guilt and shame of their sin, God banished them from the garden, but he proclaimed a promise, “I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head and you will strike his heel” (Gen 3:15).¹ Adam and Eve sinned against God, but the Lord preserved their lives. God promised to redeem his creation through a son, a son born of a woman who would crush the enemy, the son who would conquer sin and restore mankind to a perfectly righteous Father. God created mankind to worship and reflect his glory throughout all of creation; however, sin corrupted God’s perfect creation and distorted mankind’s worship of God.

Genesis 4 opens with a hopeful promise, as this first couple produced a family: “The man was intimate with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain. She said, ‘I have had a male child with the Lord’s help.’ She also gave birth to his brother Abel” (Gen 4:1–2). However, the excitement of building a family was soon replaced by the dreadful consequences of sin as Cain, out of jealousy towards Abel, murdered his younger brother. The story of Cain and Abel began with their first act of worship. Both sons entered into the Lord’s presence and presented a sacrifice; however, Cain’s

¹ Genesis 3:15 is referred to as the protoevangelium. Christian tradition has referred to this passage as the protoevangelium, or first gospel, because it is taken as a prototype for the Christian gospel. In the immediate context of this promise, there is great hope that the seed born from Eve will crush the serpent.

unacceptable sacrifice followed by his murderous sin led to his separation from the Lord's presence.²

After summarizing the relationship and eventual murder of Abel at the hands of his brother Cain, a genealogical account of the first human family commences in verse 17, beginning with the lineage of Cain and concluding with the establishment of the family line through the thirdborn son, Seth. Despite his sin and subsequent separation, God demonstrated mercy by preserving Cain's life (Gen 4:15–16). Cain established a remarkable lineage, whose descendants were remembered for their impressive cultural achievements such as cities, cultural arts, and metallurgy. However, the evil characteristics of Adam's firstborn son were not forgotten, as Cain's progeny testified to his villainy. Lamech, the seventh generation from Adam in the line of Cain, represented the epitome of Cain's corrupt family. Lamech's moral decline into polygamy and his arrogant gloating over a reputation more ruthless than his infamous forefather Cain exhibited the sinful lifestyle of the Cainites.

Although sin disqualified Cain's household as the lineage of blessing, the Lord blessed Cain by preserving his life and future offspring and allowing them to share in the blessing of those who bear God's image. However, it would be left to Adam's thirdborn son Seth and his lineage to perpetuate the blessing.³ The contrast of Cain's line is accentuated with the lineage of Seth, particularly his son Enosh. Interestingly, both Seth and his son Enosh appear to have no intrinsic significance to the unfolding narrative except that it is this genealogical line the begins to worship God through prayer. In light of the protoevangelium, there was a growing sense that the promise of salvation was not

² Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 110.

³ Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Scripture*, New American Commentary, vol. 1A (Grand Rapids: B&H, 1995), 279–80.

going to be fulfilled immediately through either Cain, Abel, Seth, or Enosh.⁴

Although Enosh is not the promised seed of redemption, his life marks the time when mankind began to publicly worship the Lord by calling on his name. Gordon Wenham notes the significance of calling on the name of the Lord is connected to the line of Seth, for from Seth comes Noah, and later the patriarchs, all of whom declare their worship to the Lord.⁵ This emphasis is intentionally highlighted and contrasted in the seventh generation from Adam. Lamech, a descendent of Cain, was a polygamist and a murderer, while Enoch, from the lineage of Seth, displayed righteousness by walking with the Lord and was carried up to heaven (Gen 5:22–24).

The focus of the genealogical contrast is emphasized by the declaration, “At that time people began to call on the name of the Lord” (Gen 4:26). The introduction of Seth’s birth marks a contrast from the earlier births of Cain and Abel. Following their sinful disobedience against God in the garden and the Lord’s subsequent banishment from Eden, Adam and Eve produced children. There was great expectation and hope especially in light of the protoevangelium, as Eve gave birth to her first two sons. Instead, her hopes turned to despair as Cain murdered his younger brother Abel. God placed a curse upon Cain; he would be a restless and alienated wanderer. A story that began with great promise—two brothers seeking favor from the Lord through sacrifice, a form of worship—ended with tragic repercussions. Cain’s reprehensible sin and subsequent separation from the Lord eventually played out, as the story of his descendants unfolded with the violent traits particularly displayed by Lamech (Gen 4:23).

In contrast, the birth of Seth is interpreted by Eve as God’s response to the death of Abel that a righteous lineage was made possible again through Adam: “Adam

⁴ J. Gary Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Prayer*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 38 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 22.

⁵ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 117.

was intimate with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, for she said, ‘God has given me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him.’” (Gen 4:25). Hope for this new seed lives with the announcement of Seth’s firstborn son, Enosh (Gen 4:26). Enosh’s birth marked a significant turning point in the development of the righteous lineage of Adam: “At that time people began to call on the name of the Lord” (Gen 4:26). Whereas the family line of Cain innovated city building, herding, music, and metallurgy, Seth’s descendants began to gather for corporate worship by invoking the name of the Lord in prayer and worship. As the world became more wicked and corrupt, Seth’s descendants, themselves fallen and sinful, stood apart by calling out to the Lord, invoking his name.

The Hebrew word קָרָא (qârâ’) is translated as “invoking” the Lord in prayer and worship.⁶ Up to this point in the narrative, no one invoked the name of the Lord. Although worship through sacrificial offerings was practiced by Cain and Abel, this invocation announced a new direction in formal worship. Later in the Genesis narrative, Abram, who was called out by God from his native homeland to be the father of a great nation and a divinely chosen people, arrived in the land of Canaan. He built an altar to worship the Lord and called on the name of Yahweh through prayer to praise and thank the Lord for faithfully delivering him into his new homeland (Gen 12:8). Generations of God’s people called on the name of the Lord to deliver on his covenant promise. At the time of Enosh’s birth, worshipping the Lord and using his name were not new to the family of Adam; yet invoking the name of the Lord in prayerful worship was taken up in a significant way beginning with the Sethite generations.⁷

In his book on prayer, J. Gary Millar examines how prayer is an important

⁶ James Strong, *Concise Dictionary of Words in the Greek New Testament and the Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software 9, 2009), 104.

⁷ Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 292.

biblical and theological “thread” woven throughout the entirety of the Bible. His argument is that prayer is calling on God’s name to come through on his promises.⁸ The early chapters of Genesis are critical to the foundational storyline of the Bible, so it is significant that people began calling on the name of the Lord at this time. Millar states, “Genesis 4:25–26 is not simply a historical note, but a ‘load-bearing’ verse, which establishes the trajectory for at least a significant strand of the Bible’s teaching on prayer.”⁹ There is a unique connection between prayer and the gospel because people begin to understand their helplessness and the need for God’s deliverance.

Wayne Grudem defines prayer as “personal communication with God.”¹⁰ This encompasses personal requests, intercession for others, confession of sin, forgiveness, praise, adoration, and thanksgiving. Grudem explains various ways God wants his people to pray.¹¹ First, praying to him is not just about expressing personal needs, but to proclaim his glory and power in the lives of believers. Second, God loves and desires fellowship with his people; therefore, prayer creates greater fellowship and love between God and his people. Lastly, prayer invites Christians to actively participate in the advancement of the kingdom of God. James Montgomery Boice states, “But prayer is even more than conversation. It is a privilege. We place ourselves in the will of God as best we know how.”¹² Boice further explains prayer is a response to Christ’s promise (John 14:13–14). R. C. Sproul writes, “God uses prayer to bring His secret counsel to pass. He gives us the unspeakable privilege of being part of the means He uses to bring

⁸ Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord*, 18–19.

⁹ Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord*, 27.

¹⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 376.

¹¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 376–77.

¹² James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensible and Readable Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 483.

about His saving grace in our lives.”¹³ God’s people call on his name in worship and the Lord responds faithfully by answering prayer according to his sovereign purposes.

For John Calvin, there is an unbreakable link between the gospel and prayer. Calvin states, “Just as faith is born from the gospel, so through it our hearts are trained to call upon God’s name.”¹⁴ God graciously welcomes his people to call on his name. Prayer is likened to a precious treasure God has offered to his people; therefore, to not go to the Lord in prayer is essentially rejecting this good gift. Furthermore, Calvin developed four rules of prayer.¹⁵ First, prayer is wholeheartedly reverential. Second, prayer reveals people’s heartfelt need for repentance. Third, prayer requires humility and trust in God. Lastly, believers pray with confident assurance that God hears and answers prayer. For prayer to be meaningful and profitable, Christians call upon the name of Lord, placing complete trust in God’s self-revealed character, faithfulness, and promises.

This passage unveils three critical truths about prayer and revitalization. First, the world is corrupted by sin, and the disastrous consequence of mankind’s sinfulness is eternal separation from God. However, when people call on the name of the Lord, reconciliation and eternal salvation are found in God’s immeasurable grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Second, there are many different ways Christians demonstrate corporate and individual worship to the Lord. Christians have the privilege of calling on the name of the Lord, engaging with the Lord daily, and worshiping the Creator of the universe through personal and corporate prayer. Prayer is more than coming to God with endless requests. Prayer is a lifelong pursuit inviting us to experience the awe and intimacy of delighting in the worship of God. Lastly, calling on the name of the Lord honors God by

¹³ R. C. Sproul, *Matthew: An Expository Commentary*, R. C. Sproul’s Expository Commentaries (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2019), 474.

¹⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 850–51, Logos Bible Software 9.

¹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 853–63.

humbly proclaiming complete dependency upon the Lord. In a church revitalization context, calling on the name of the Lord humbly declares that God alone accomplishes revitalization, yet he uses Spirit-led prayer as a catalyst for revitalization.

God Alone Has the Power to Bring Revitalization

The prophet Ezekiel experienced one of the most amazing prophecies in the Old Testament. God gave him a vision of a valley filled with human bones so decayed that any indication of restoration appeared preposterous. This passage reveals that God alone is powerful enough to bring about restoration. In a church revitalization context, ministry leaders oftentimes seek to bring about revitalization through programs; however, God is the creator of life, and he alone has the power to bring about revitalization. This passage also reveals God's gracious desire to use Spirit-led people as a catalyst for revitalization.

The Lord Breathes New Life through an Outpouring of His Spirit (Ezek 37:1–14)

Following the reign of King Solomon, the nation of Israel was divided into two separate kingdoms, the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. The years of division between these two kingdoms led to a significant decline that affected every area of national life, especially their spiritual devotion to God. The northern kingdom's fall to the Assyrians and later captivity under King Nebuchadnezzar's rising Babylonian Empire signaled an imminent threat to the southern kingdom of Judah. The ascension of a new young king named Josiah brought a glimmer of hope as he sought to bring about spiritual renewal throughout Judah, although his good intentions subsequently failed.¹⁶ The prophet Jeremiah spoke out against the people of Judah for their continual sin and failure to repent. With the death of Josiah, the kingdom

¹⁶ Lamar Eugene Cooper, *Ezekiel: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, New American Commentary, vol. 17 (Grand Rapids: B&H, 1994), 20–24.

eventually came under Babylonian control, ultimately leading to their defeat, exile, and captivity at the hands of the Babylonians by the sovereign purposes of the Lord.¹⁷

The prophet Ezekiel lived among the Jewish exiles in Babylon, received his prophetic call from God, and proclaimed the Lord's message among the exiles in the settlement of Tel-abib, located along the Chebar River south of Babylon (Ezek 3:15). Much like his contemporaries, Ezekiel denounced the Israelites for their sin, which brought about God's severe judgment upon them, but Ezekiel also proclaimed a message of hopeful restoration.¹⁸ After centuries of prophetic warnings and invasions, God exiled his people because of their continuous sin and rebellion. Severe devastation and humiliation came upon the people; however, God intended this judgment to call his people to repentance in order to bring spiritual restoration.

Lamar Cooper highlights several theological themes within the book that are significant for local church revitalization.¹⁹ First, the holiness and transcendence of God is revealed as Ezekiel saw God, despite his severe divine judgment upon the people, still seated on the throne, reigning over his creation, and concerned with the sinfulness of humanity (Ezek 44:23). Next, Ezekiel demonstrated the continual rebellion and sinfulness of the people towards their perfectly righteous Lord. Their continued wickedness inevitably led to God's judgment, causing them to come under the subjugation and captivity of the Babylonian Empire. Instead of praying for the spiritual needs of the nation, false prophets encouraged the misguided expectations that Nebuchadnezzar's oppression would be temporary (Ezek 13:1–14:23). Ezekiel's message contrasted that of the false prophets. Within the context of the people's sinfulness, Ezekiel delivered a message of personal responsibility as he declared that the nation bore responsibility for

¹⁷ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 20–24.

¹⁸ Robert B. Chisholm, "The Major Prophets," in *Holman Concise Bible Commentary*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: B&H, 1998), 314, Logos Bible Software 9.

¹⁹ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 40–44.

their wickedness and would be judged accordingly by God (Ezek 33:8–20).

Like his contemporaries, Ezekiel announced hopeful news of restoration through God’s redemptive purposes. Cooper states, “The motive for God’s actions always was redemptive even when he brought acts of judgment against his own people. Whenever God acts in judgment, he does so with the desire that redemption will be the result.”²⁰ With the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the subsequent humiliating exile, the Israelites certainly felt hopelessness. In Ezekiel 37, God supernaturally took his prophet to a boneyard and gave him a message of hope for the suffering Israelites that God alone has the power to bring about restoration in a hopeless situation and desires to display his immeasurable grace.²¹ Within a revitalization context, for a church to experience an outpouring of the Holy Spirit through renewal, revival, and revitalization, God calls his people to repentance.

Ezekiel’s spiritual vision began with the prophet supernaturally taken to a valley “full of bones” (Ezek 37:1–3). Ezekiel had some breathtaking visionary encounters; however, this vision stood in stark contrast to an image previously given to him: a desolate land would become like the garden of Eden with vibrantly alive people (Ezek 36:33–36). He is confronted with a scene of total death. The prophet does not merely see bones scattered on the ground. God leads Ezekiel through the grotesque boneyard filled not with slain corpses, but with dry skeletal remains.²² Douglas Stuart described this visionary scene through the symbolism of ancient Israel’s burial practices and expectations of the resurrection of the dead.²³ Stuart compared this image of a valley

²⁰ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 44.

²¹ Landon Dowden, *Exalting Jesus in Ezekiel*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville: Holman, 2015), chap. 19, “Alive and United,” para. 3, Logos Bible Software 9.

²² Ian M. Duguid, *Ezekiel*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 426.

²³ Douglas Stuart and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Ezekiel*, Preacher’s Commentary, vol. 20 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 333–34, Logos Bible Software 9.

full of bones as equivalent to a giant outdoor ossuary, full of dead people's bones, buried together like a family, and awaiting the time of resurrection.²⁴ In the midst of his people's suffering and exile, Ezekiel, through a supernatural vision, stood in a valley of death full of dried out, grotesque, fleshless bones and sensed the hopelessness his people felt without some divine intervention from God.

The scene before Ezekiel was one of hopelessness. Similarly, numerous local churches experience a point at which the members feel hopelessness. Churches like Jeffersonville Baptist have experienced significant decline both physically and spiritually. As the decline continues, church revitalizations become a daunting task, seeking to bring about life in the face of impending death. Then the Lord asked Ezekiel a question, "Son of man, can these bones live?" (Ezek 37:3). Upon inspecting the bones, Ezekiel concluded the bones had so decayed that resuscitation was preposterous. The prophet's answer to the Lord's question is intriguing considering the current circumstances facing his exiled and suffering people.

In light of Ezekiel's prophetic context, these decayed, dried bones symbolically represent the exiled nation of Israel. Due to their constant sin, their civilization was decimated by a foreign empire through the sovereign purpose of the Lord. God obviously has the power and ability to bring about resurrection, both physically and more importantly spiritually, but Ezekiel must be careful in his response. In view of the overwhelming outpouring of God's wrath upon his people, Ezekiel is guarded. There is absolutely no doubt God has the supernatural power to resurrect these decayed bones; ultimately the question is whether the Lord's sovereign will is to bring about resurrection.²⁵ Ezekiel's response to this divine question reflects his humble acknowledgment that God alone has the power to bring about the resurrection of these

²⁴ Stuart and Ogilvie, *Ezekiel*, 333.

²⁵ Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 426–27.

dry bones: “Lord God, only you know” (Ezek 37:3).

Ezekiel understands that God alone, if he chooses, brings about restoration. The question to be answered is the means by which the Lord will accomplish restoration. The Lord commanded Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones, and in response the Lord breathed life, causing the bones to regenerate and live (Ezek 37:4–10). Ezekiel obeyed the command of the Lord, speaking his life-giving word, and the Lord uses Ezekiel’s obedience as a catalyst to bring about restoration. Leslie Allen states, “Yahweh is portrayed as the creator of the individual, the giver of personal life, but now in a context of restoring life rather than initially bestowing it.”²⁶ God not only physically created mankind in his image; God breathes spiritual life into his people through the work of his divine Son on the cross and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

In verses 4–8, Ezekiel immediately obeyed God’s command and spoke his Word to the bones. The bones immediately responded by noisily rejoining and becoming clothed in flesh. However, Ezekiel pointed out that although the bones came together and skin covered them, they were still lifeless (Ezek 37:8). In verse 9, the Lord commanded Ezekiel to prophesy to the “breath” and the “breath” would give life to the bones. The Hebrew word רוּחַ (rûwach), translated as breath, wind, or spirit, is used thirteen times in verses 5–14.²⁷ The richness of this word throughout the Scriptures and the skillful artistry used in the context of Ezekiel’s visionary experience of this death valley of bones coming to life provide an incredible realization of God’s character, power, and purposes.

John Taylor explained the various uses of this word throughout the context of Ezekiel’s vision.²⁸ The root of the word indicates the sense of “air in motion,” such as

²⁶ Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 29 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 185.

²⁷ Strong, *Concise Dictionary of Words in the Greek New Testament and the Hebrew Bible*, 107.

²⁸ John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 22 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1969), 231.

wind or breath, which can range from a gentle breeze to a stormy wind, or from a breath that is breathed to a raging passion. In addition, this word describes man's spirit, disposition, or emotional qualities. Finally, this word not only describes man's breath given to him at birth and leaving his body at death, but also the Spirit of God who imparts that breath. Ezekiel obediently speaks the Word of God and instantly the power of the Lord is unleashed, beginning with the regeneration of the dried bones and then the breathing of the Spirit into their lifeless bodies, demonstrating the central role the Spirit has in bringing about restoration.²⁹ As Cooper states, "It clearly was God's Spirit who was to give breath to these corpses, and Ezekiel was given the extraordinary task of summoning him."³⁰

In bringing the dry bones to life, a two-fold process involving God's Word and his Spirit was involved, which demonstrates that God alone brings about revitalization through an outpouring of his Spirit, yet he graciously uses Spirit-led people as a catalyst for the revitalization. As Duguid explained, Ezekiel was the channel through whom God's power was brought to bear, as the prophet himself experienced an outpouring of the Spirit upon his ministry.³¹ Ezekiel was confronted with the majesty of God and he was spiritual transformed, renewed, and empowered. Church revitalizations oftentimes must begin with personal repentance and renewal by the ministry leaders.

Finally, God interpreted this vision for Ezekiel, demonstrating his response to the people's expression of hopelessness (Ezek 37:11–14). The dried bones represented the entire nation of Israel, both the northern and southern kingdoms. The purpose of the question posed to Ezekiel from verse 3, "Can these bones live?" was designed to show the helplessness of Israel during the exile. Sin ultimately brought God's severe judgment

²⁹ Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 427.

³⁰ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 234.

³¹ Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 428.

upon the people, yet the Lord made marvelous promises of restoration and redemption. God displayed his power and love for his people by providing a picture of his divine character through this vision of reviving the dry bones. The Lord makes it clear that it is he alone who has the power and will to open their graves, put his Spirit in them, and restore them to their land (Ezek 37:12–14). As Cooper states, “Stress was given in this promise to the revival of the nation as the manifestation of divine, not human, power.”³² God gave Ezekiel the significant role of proclaiming the divine Word, yet it was God’s role to produce the results of restoration.³³

God has the power to bring spiritually dead individuals and local churches to life. He uses prayer and the proclamation of his Word, just as he did through Ezekiel, as a means to accomplish his purposes. Church revitalizations are difficult work, and oftentimes leaders sense discouragement when they do not see immediate results. However, the revitalization of a church first begins with the individual renewal of the leader and the corporate renewal of the church members. God can and will graciously bring about spiritual life from death, yet he calls on his people to faithfully pray and trust in his Word. This passage demonstrates how God alone possesses the power and the gracious will to bring about local church revitalization. He does this through the outpouring of his Spirit, but he graciously uses obedient, faithful, and Spirit-led people as a catalyst to accomplish revitalization.

God Graciously Welcomes His People to Come to Him in Prayer as Our Loving Father

Having established a framework that prayer is calling upon the name of the Lord to fulfill his promises and that God alone brings about revitalization using Spirit-led prayer as a catalyst for the revitalization, this passage in Matthew demonstrates how

³² Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 325.

³³ Dowden, *Ezekiel*, chap. 19, para. 20.

God's people have the privilege to pray to him by honoring his name in all their requests. Often referenced as "The Lord's Prayer," Jesus taught that God's people seek the Lord and call on his name in a way that honors his name by giving him all glory for the progression of his kingdom. In a revitalization context, Christians humbly pray to the Father in the name of Jesus through the working of the Holy Spirit to bring about revitalization in the local church ultimately for the honoring of his name.

Prayer Is Honoring the Lord's Name in All Our Requests (Matt 6:5–12)

Genesis 4:26 establishes the foundational argument that prayer is calling upon or invoking the name of God. Throughout the Old Testament, God's appointed leaders prayed to him in times of petition, praise, complaint, and confession. Ezekiel's supernatural vision of God resurrecting the dry bones reveals that God alone has the power to bring revitalization, yet he graciously uses prayerful Christians as a catalyst for accomplishing revitalization. However, one significant reason local churches today are plateaued, declining, and closing is a failure of prayer. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ taught his disciples how to pray, giving Christians a framework for prayer.

John Nolland states, "Prayer is not to be used to build a reputation for piety, but solely for engagement with God."³⁴ Churches traditionally hold established meetings for corporate prayer, and individual Christians spend time personally praying. However, the corporate and personal prayer lives of Christians are oftentimes inwardly focused, lack genuine expectancy for revitalization, and are apathetic towards evangelism in the community. Furthermore, many Christians miss the purpose of prayer, so in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches believers about prayer by way of contrasts and by providing

³⁴ John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 277.

a model prayer.³⁵ Jesus directs our hearts toward prayer that honors God’s name in all our requests.

J. Knox Chamblin highlights four significant theological motifs in Matthew’s Gospel.³⁶ First, Jesus is the eternally divine and incarnate Son of God who came into the world to fulfill God the Father’s purpose of salvation (Matt 1:21). Second, Jesus has inaugurated a new kingdom, one that will be consummated in its fullest when he gloriously returns (Matt 4:17). Next, Jesus fulfills his Father’s plan of salvation. Matthew recorded many examples of Jesus fulfilling people’s physical needs; however, Jesus came to accomplish mankind’s most urgent spiritual need—atonement for sin by suffering death on the cross (Matt 16:21). Lastly, Jesus reconstitutes a new covenant with his people, establishing his church and commissioning them into the world to proclaim the gospel (Matt 28:18–20). Patrick Schreiner argues that Matthew is the disciplined scribe who narrates Jesus’s life as bringing about a new covenant by “fulfilling” the old.³⁷

The Sermon on the Mount is likely the most familiar discourse within Matthew’s Gospel. The sermon has also attracted admiration and devotion from philosophers and activists from many non-Christian perspectives, including Mohandas Gandhi, the twentieth-century Indian revolutionary who implemented non-violent resistance.³⁸ John Stott considered that the sermon is Jesus’s manifesto to his disciples, describing the Christian character and lifestyle. Utilizing the expression, “Christian counter-culture,” Stott emphasized the purpose of the sermon.³⁹ Citing Matthew 6:8 as

³⁵ Daniel M. Doriani, *Matthew*, Vol. 1, *Matthew 1–13*. Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 207–30.

³⁶ J. Knox Chamblin, “Matthew,” in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 723.

³⁷ Patrick Schreiner, *Matthew, Disciple, and Scribe: The First Gospel and Its Portrait of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 7–62.

³⁸ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 93–94.

³⁹ John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7): Christian Counter-*

the key text of the entire sermon, “Don’t be like them,” Stott argued that Jesus called his followers in the first century to a greater righteousness than the scribes and Pharisees reflected in their ethical behavior and religious devotion, while also displaying a love greater than their pagan neighbors.⁴⁰ Jesus did not call his followers to higher standard of morality nor a superficial love; he called his followers to live a completely transformed life through the power of the Holy Spirit. In addition, Craig Blomberg supports the idea of this sermon forming a manifesto for Christian living, but the church must seek to permeate society with these ideals in a persuasive manner.⁴¹ Christians not only personally surrender in obedience to the lordship of Christ, but as citizens of the kingdom of heaven, they work to spread God’s kingdom throughout this world, which is rooted in the Christian’s prayer life.

Most world religions regard prayer as an essential expression of worship. Whether it is the muezzin call to prayer summoning Muslims to bow towards Mecca, the formal liturgical prayers at the Wailing Wall by Orthodox Jews, the Roman Catholic practices of prayer beads and formulaic prayers to Mary, deep meditation by Buddhists, or the traditional evangelical prayer meetings, something like prayer is incorporated by religious adherents throughout the world. In Luke 1:1, Jesus finished praying and one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray.” In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of religious piety: “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward with your Father in heaven” (Matt 6:1). The motives of religious worship are brought into question. In teaching his disciples about prayer, Jesus revealed the wrong way to pray; then he taught them how to pray. In his book about the Lord’s Prayer, Al Mohler articulated how this

Culture, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1978), 14–19.

⁴⁰ Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 18–19.

⁴¹ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 95.

prayer is likened to a revolution that turned the world upside down.⁴² For most Christians, the words of the Lord’s Prayer are very familiar; however, the meaning and purpose of the prayer are misunderstood. Understanding Jesus’s intent for this prayer helps local church revitalization recapture the powerful devotion to pray rightly.

Beginning in chapter 6, Jesus made it clear he did not think highly of routine religious piety. Three times he commanded his disciples not to be like hypocrites in their acts of righteousness—giving, praying, and fasting (Matt 6:1–18). As R. T. France summarizes, the Christian life is inevitably public, but the Christian’s motive is not man-centered worship; instead, it is Christ-exalted worship.⁴³ When Jesus began instructing his disciples about prayer, he clearly commanded and expected his disciples to pray (Matt 6:5). Prayer is essential to the Christian life. As Mohler states, “A failure to pray is therefore not only a sign of anemic spiritual life, it is disobedience to Christ.”⁴⁴ Prayerlessness is oftentimes a root cause of spiritual decline within the local church.

After establishing the expectation to pray, Jesus described how to pray by using two contrasting examples (Matt 6:5–8). First, he said to not pray like the hypocrites. The Greek word for hypocrite, ὑποκριτής, describes a playactor or pretender, such as the Greek theatrical actors who wore masks and pretended to be a character.⁴⁵ Many times throughout the Gospels, Jesus used this term to describe the religious elites. In this sermon alone, Jesus used the term four times to denounce man-centered worship. Christ attacks how the religious leaders love to stand before the crowds both in the synagogue and on the street corners so they can be seen by the people for their praying.

⁴² R. Albert Mohler Jr., *The Prayer That Turns the World Upside Down: The Lord’s Prayer as a Manifesto for Revolution* (Nashville: Nelson, 2018), xvi–xvii.

⁴³ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 135–37.

⁴⁴ Mohler, *The Prayer That Turns the World Upside Down*, 28.

⁴⁵ Strong, *Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek New Testament and the Hebrew Bible*, 74.

Therefore, Jesus contrasted this by telling his followers to pray to the Father in secret (Matt 6:6). Jesus prayed at times in public, yet he also spent considerable time alone privately praying to the Father. The posture and the place are not the main concern; the issue is man-exalting motive by seeking admiration for religious devotion.⁴⁶ As Knox Chamblin states, “The reward for seeking him is finding him. . . unceasing fellowship between God and his covenant people.”⁴⁷ In leading local church revitalization through prayer, Christians must devote themselves to prayer that does not seek to impress people; instead they should consider prayer a time of communion with God.

In verses 7–8, Jesus offers a second contrasting attitude of prayer. Using the similar statement that his followers are expected to pray, he commands them, “Don’t babble like the Gentiles” (Matt 6:7). The first example was to not impress people as the hypocrites do; this second example is a command to not be like the Gentiles who try to impress God. Jesus does not criticize Jewish praying, but the heart of pagan praying that heaps vain repetitions in order to impress their gods. Jesus does not denounce long prayers or repetitions; instead, he is criticizing mindless praying that seeks to impress God.⁴⁸ Jesus gives the reason not to pray this way, “because your Father knows the things you need before you ask them” (Matt 6:8). The Lord already knows our needs; therefore, we do not need to impress him with fancy theological words to compel him to act. As France states, “It is not *many words* that God responds to, but an attitude of prayerful dependence.”⁴⁹ In leading local church revitalization through prayer, Christians are called to pray with a heart that seeks not to impress God, but to come before him humbly. Jesus

⁴⁶ Douglas Sean O’Donnell, *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 158–60.

⁴⁷ J. Knox Chamblin, *Matthew*, Mentor Commentaries (Ross-Shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2010), 400.

⁴⁸ O’Donnell, *Matthew*, 160–63.

⁴⁹ France, *Matthew*, 137.

commanded his people to pray, so he gives instruction because left to themselves, Christians will pray wrongly. After instructing his disciples how not to pray, Jesus gave his followers guidance for proper prayer (Matt 6:9–12).

Following a similar pattern from verses 5–7, Jesus expected his followers to pray, but in a proper way, “Therefore, you should pray like this” (Matt 6:9). In reference to verses 5–8, Blomberg points out that though this prayer is a model for how disciples are to pray, the irony is that some Christian traditions mechanically and frequently repeat this prayer as a means of developing spirituality, and some traditions have carefully avoided using this prayer.⁵⁰ Again, the issue is the motive of our hearts in praying. Jesus does not require his followers to recite these exact words; instead, he gives Christians a framework for proper prayer. Mohler states, “Our prayers reveal our deepest convictions about God, about ourselves, and about the world around us.”⁵¹ For the Christian, prayer does not begin with personal needs, but humbly coming before the Father and honoring his name.

Jesus commanded his disciples to pray in this way, beginning with “Our Father in heaven, you name be honored as holy (Matt 6:9). There are three significant parts to the opening of this prayer. First, Jesus began with a seemingly insignificant pronoun, but it makes a tremendously powerful theological point. The first-person plural pronoun (our/us) is used throughout the prayer. Each Christian has a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, as every Christian engages in personal prayer, but the Christian is also saved into the body of Christ, the church. As Chamblin points out, the disciples are reminded that when they independently pray they are members of a community, “There is no room for

⁵⁰ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 118.

⁵¹ Mohler, *The Prayer That Turns the World Upside Down*, 40.

individualism or isolation in the church of Christ the King.”⁵² Mohler supports this concept by explaining how the model prayer contrasts with “evangelicalism’s obsession with individualism.”⁵³ For local churches in need of revitalization, this model prayer shows that Christians are joined together as the body of Christ, praying personally and corporately in the name of Jesus Christ to “Our Father.”

Secondly, Jesus taught his disciples to pray specifically to God the Father who is in heaven. Throughout the Bible, God is identified by various titles, but in this prayer Jesus addressed him as our Father who is in heaven. The immanence of God the Father is displayed because he is a personal and caring being who invites his people to pray to him through Jesus Christ. It is an intimate term for God because he is as accessible to his children as the most loving parent. Furthermore, the transcendence of God is displayed as he rules and reigns over all creation in heaven. God is distinct from his creation, yet he is not absent. This appeal points to his divine majesty as a complement to his divine fatherhood. W. D. Davies and Dale Allison also point to the eschatological nature of this prayer, as believers in Jesus Christ are adopted into the family of God and this sonship anticipates the future hope realized in the eternal kingdom of God.⁵⁴ As Mohler explained, God’s disposition of wrath towards his people, who were once enemies, has changed because they are now in Christ; therefore, he graciously welcomes their prayers.⁵⁵ In leading revitalization of the local church through prayer, Christians pray to the loving Father who has the power and authority to bring about revitalization.

Lastly, Jesus taught his disciples specific petitions to pray, beginning with

⁵² Chamblin, *Matthew*, 407.

⁵³ Mohler, *The Prayer That Turns the World Upside Down*, 42–47.

⁵⁴ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *Matthew 1–7*, Vol. 1 of *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 601.

⁵⁵ Mohler, *The Prayer That Turns the World Upside Down*, 47–54.

honoring God’s name as holy. The older translations read, “Hallowed be your name.” The Greek verb, ἁγιάζω (hagiazō), means “to make holy” or “to sanctify.”⁵⁶ This is also the first of six petitions listed in the prayer, and it begins with a God-centered focus. The first petition for the Christian is to pray for God’s name—the embodiment of his essence and character—to be revered and glorified. John Piper states, “God’s holiness—his holy name—is the supreme and absolute treasure *in* the universe and *over* the universe.”⁵⁷ As Blomberg states, “All that God stands for should be treated as holy and honored because of his utter perfection and goodness.”⁵⁸ Hallowing the name of God also invites Christians to pray evangelistically that God would save sinners for the glory of his name. Oftentimes, declining churches mostly pray with an inward focus; however, leading local church revitalization through prayer causes Christians to pray with an outward focus that hallows the name of the Lord in all requests.

O’Donnell determines that, structurally, the Lord’s Prayer is divided into six petitions, three divine petitions focusing on God, and three petitions for human needs.⁵⁹ In verses 10–11, Jesus provided the next two petitions: “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” These two petitions flow out of the first because in honoring God’s majestic name, Christians pray for the establishment and advancement of his kingdom throughout communities and ultimately the entire world. The Greek word, βασιλεία (basilēia), means “kingdom” or “reign,” referring to the domain of a king’s rule.⁶⁰ Throughout the Bible, God’s divine sovereignty is a constant theme, and he

⁵⁶ Strong, *Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and the Hebrew Bible*, 7.

⁵⁷ John Piper, “Hallowed Be Your Name: The Greatest Prayer in All the Earth,” (sermon preached at CROSS 2020, Louisville, February 21, 2020).

⁵⁸ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 119.

⁵⁹ O’Donnell, *Matthew*, 165–74.

⁶⁰ Joshua A. Crutchfield, “Divine Sovereignty,” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum, Lexham Bible Reference (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014), chap. 41, para. 15. Logos Bible Software 9.

delegates authority, establishing kings and kingdoms. In 2 Samuel 7:12–16, God promised to establish David’s kingship forever. In Matthew 4:17, Jesus began his public ministry by proclaiming, “Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near.” The Lord not only rules over a place and a people, but his kingdom refers to his sovereign reign over all creation.

Mohler states, “The Lord’s Prayer is for revolutionaries, for men and women who want to see the temporary kingdoms of this world give way to the eternal kingdom of our Lord.”⁶¹ With the incarnation of Christ, he has inaugurated the kingdom of God, and the kingdom will be consummated in its fullness with Christ’s second coming (Rev 21:1–7). This prayer is evangelistic in nature because the kingdom Jesus establishes and fulfills is chiefly a spiritual kingdom and salvific in nature. Piper states, “God decided the kingdom of God would be most gloriously revealed in a crucified and risen king.”⁶² Davies and Allison explain these three petitions are enjoined as one: each looks at the telos of human history, each refers to the consummation of God’s work of salvation, and each is eschatological in nature by looking to the fulfillment of God’s kingdom.⁶³ In leading church revitalization through prayer, Christians pray to God the Father to fulfill his redemptive purposes, to bring about the consummation of his kingdom, and redeem people from their sins through the work of Jesus Christ.

The first half of the prayer is God-centered; in the second half, Jesus commanded his disciples to bring personal petitions to God, though there is a God-exalting priority and pattern for those needs (Matt 6:11–13). Oftentimes, Christians fall into two extremes when petitioning the Lord: either hesitation or manipulation. Christians may find their requests unworthy or selfish in light of others’ needs, or they doubt that

⁶¹ Mohler, *The Prayer That Turns the World Upside Down*, 74.

⁶² John Piper, “What is the Kingdom of God?,” *Desiring God* (interview), September 8, 2017, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-the-kingdom-of-god>.

⁶³ Davies and Allison Jr., *Matthew 1–7*, 600–07.

God will act. Furthermore, Christians can sinfully seek to use prayer by manipulating God into fulfilling their desires. Doriani explains a three-fold process in these personal requests.⁶⁴ It is important to remember that Jesus also declared that the Father knows our hearts, and he knows the things we need before we ask him, yet he invites Christians to pray for personal needs.

First, Christians confess their physical dependency upon God by providing for their most basic physical needs, such as food (Matt 6:11). Second, Christians petition the Lord to meet their most urgent spiritual need, the forgiveness of sin both personally and corporately (Matt 6:12). This petition is two-fold: first praying for personal forgiveness, then praying for the forgiveness of others. Just as Christians desire mercy from God, we petition the Lord to show to mercy towards others. Lastly, Christians petition the Lord for protection from powerful and corrupt temptations of a sinful world and from the evil one who rules this broken world (Matt 6:13). As Doriani concludes, “We pour out our needs to God because we trust him, and he answers us because he loves us.”⁶⁵ In the context of church revitalization, these three personal petitions broadly reveal the Christian’s complete trust and total dependency upon God in every need and request.

One of the most urgent needs in a revitalization context is to pray humbly, expectedly, and rightly. Throughout the Bible, God’s people prayed to him, calling on his name to fulfill their most urgent physical and spiritual needs. God’s people also prayed to God to bring about spiritual renewal, and he used the prayers of his people as a catalyst for revitalization. Furthermore, church history also demonstrates that God uses the persistent and faithful prayers of Spirit-led Christians as a catalyst for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit to bring about spiritual revitalization in churches, communities, and entire nations. In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus taught his disciples how to pray and provided a

⁶⁴ Doriani, *Matthew*, 224–30.

⁶⁵ Doriani, *Matthew*, 230.

framework for praying. In both the personal and corporate setting, God the Father welcomes his people to pray to him in the name of his Son and through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

Revitalization Is Dependent upon the Outpouring of God's Spirit through Prayer

The book of Acts reveals that following the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the early church rapidly grew and spread because they depended on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon their lives through prayer. Jesus Christ taught his followers how to properly pray by giving them a framework. Therefore, the disciples boldly proclaimed the good news of Christ's death and resurrection even under intense hostility and persecution. The early church devoted themselves to prayer, giving them the boldness to trust in the power of the Holy Spirit. Churches in need of revitalization must prioritize prayer in a meaningful and committed way because Spirit-driven prayer is a catalyst by which God chooses to bring about revitalization.

The Early Church Prioritized Prayer as They Boldly Fulfilled the Great Commission (Acts 4:23–31)

The book of Acts is a testimony about the early church's witness and God's sovereign role in bringing about the advancement of the gospel. Luke, the author of his Gospel account of the life and ministry of Jesus, also wrote this narrative of the early church (Acts 1:1–3). Acts is the story of how God, through the outpouring of his Spirit upon the followers of Jesus Christ, led this new community of Christ-followers to rapidly spread the gospel message even as they encountered much opposition. As the story unfolded, the apostles boldly began to fulfill the Great Commission commanded to them by Jesus Christ before he ascended to heaven (Acts 1:4–11). However, they were united in prayer before they initiated their apostolic ministry (Acts 1:12–14). Prayer and gospel proclamation are essential to the church's mission, which is advanced when God's people

faithfully and boldly pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

One of the dominant themes throughout Acts is the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the growing church. Luke provided an explicit purpose for recording the events in Acts by pointing to the fulfillment of Jesus's promise to send the Holy Spirit: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). John B. Polhill states, "So central was the work of the Spirit in Acts that some have suggested that a more appropriate title for the book would be 'The Acts of the Holy Spirit.'"⁶⁶ As the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit possesses divine supernatural power to carry out the plans and purposes of the Godhead.

Just as the infancy narrative revealed the supernatural virgin birth of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 2:1–20), the church was birthed at Pentecost through the power of the Spirit (Acts 2). After Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus, anointed his ministry, sent him into the wilderness where he was be tempted by Satan, and continued to abide with Jesus throughout his ministry (Matt 3–4). Similarly, the Holy Spirit empowered the rapidly growing church to carry forth the Great Commission, indwelling every believer to be a bold witness (Acts 4:1–22). This provides encouragement for church revitalizations because it is through the power of the Holy Spirit, that believers in Jesus Christ carry forth the gospel and the Great Commission is fulfilled (Matthew 28:18–20).

As Darrell L. Bock states in his commentary, "The subject of Acts is God in his actions through Jesus and the Spirit."⁶⁷ The Holy Spirit's presence is evident throughout the narrative in many distinctive ways as the church carries out the Great

⁶⁶ John B. Polhill, *Acts: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 64.

⁶⁷ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Evangelical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 33.

Commission. Wayne Grudem defines the Holy Spirit's work in this way, "The work of the Holy Spirit is to manifest the active presence of God in the world, and especially in the church."⁶⁸ In addition, Michael Reeves articulates in his book, *Delighting in the Trinity*, "It is the Spirit that gives new life and power, and it is through the Trinity that people live the Christian life, accomplishing the mission of God."⁶⁹ When it comes to faithful and bold prayer, the Spirit's power is evident, as displayed in the lives of the apostles who proclaimed the gospel despite the danger of intense opposition. The Holy Spirit birthed the church at Pentecost, and the apostles boldly proclaimed the Gospel, calling people to repent and believe (Acts 2:38–41). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter and John healed a lame man as they entered the temple to pray and preach. (Acts 3). Because of the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples steadfastly stood against the threats of the Sanhedrin for speaking the name of Jesus (Acts 4:1–21). Finally, it was by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit that the disciples could boldly pray, and God faithfully responded (Acts 4:23–31).

Chapter 4 began with Peter and John arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin for interrogation. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter and John responded to the council's questioning that salvation comes from the risen Christ (Acts 4:8–12). Next, the council threatened Peter and John to never again preach the name of Jesus anymore, but the disciples refused. The apostles answered that they were compelled by faith to proclaim the good news of salvation in the risen Jesus (Acts 4:13–22). Three times in Acts 4, the Greek word *παρρησία* (*parrhesia*) is used to describe this boldness and

⁶⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 634.

⁶⁹ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 85–107. In the introduction, Reeves states that the purpose of his book is to show that God is love because God is a Trinity. Because God is triune in his nature, he is good and desirable. For Christians this is life-changing because the triune nature of God affects every aspect of our lives, it causes us to know and desire him more, and it is fundamental to our salvation.

assurance of the followers of Christ.⁷⁰ Because of the assurance of their message and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit in their lives, followers of Christ could boldly and faithfully pray and proclaim the gospel. Luke makes the connection between prayer and power (Acts 4:31). In the context of local church revitalization, Christians can boldly pray, seeking God to pour out his Spirit and bring about revitalization.

Derek Thomas argues that the church today can learn much about the power of prayer from the early church.⁷¹ In the context of this passage, the church depended on God alone in order to fulfill the mission he called them to accomplish. God's people were united in corporate prayer to show their commitment to proclaim the gospel. In verses 23–24, Peter and John were released from prison, so they returned to their own to report all that happened. After giving their report, “They raised their voices together to God” (Acts 4:24). The Greek word, *ομοθυμαδόν* (*hōmōthumadōn*) means that the people prayed together with one accord or with one mind.⁷² It is the same word used at the beginning of Acts when the disciples awaited Pentecost, demonstrating their unity in prayer. Facing hostility and persecution, the church corporately worshiped the Lord through prayer as the sovereign ruler and praised his power to accomplish his purposes.⁷³

This example of prayer reveals the importance of the church praying corporately. Thomas contends this was more than just the people coming together to pray; instead, “they all agreed (of one mind) as to the suitability and content of their praying.”⁷⁴ Polhill commented it was unlikely that this was some sporadic act of corporate prayer; the early church faced hostile opposition, so they regularly gathered

⁷⁰ Strong, *Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and the Hebrew Bible*, 56.

⁷¹ Derek W. H. Thomas, *Acts*, Reformed Expository Commentary, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011), 104–15.

⁷² Strong, *Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible*, 51.

⁷³ Bock, *Acts*, 203–4.

⁷⁴ Thomas, *Acts*, 107.

corporately to pray.⁷⁵ Oftentimes, churches gather for a time of corporate prayer, but these gatherings are sporadically attended, inwardly focused, and spiritually shallow. For example, the traditional midweek “prayer meetings” has become overwhelmingly focused on the needs of the church members and spend little time in meaningful, bold, and outwardly focused prayer. Not only do Christians pray individually, but the church unites to boldly pray for God to work mightily through the corporate life of the church to accomplish his mission, including local church revitalization.

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, he graciously taught them the words of the Lord’s prayer (Luke 11:2–4). He did not command them to use those very words every time they prayed, but he gave them a structure to guide their act of praying, beginning with the understanding to whom they were praying. The disciples’ prayer begins, “Master, you are the one who made the heaven, the earth, and the sea, and everything in them (Acts 4:24). Thomas writes, “The prayer begins with God—his greatness, especially—and recalls his word of promise in Scripture (his covenant) and then quickly moves into petition.”⁷⁶ F.F. Bruce states, “They addressed God as Sovereign Lord, the Creator of all, in time-honored liturgical language derived from Hebrew scripture.”⁷⁷ Like the Lord’s Prayer, this prayer starts by petitioning God, hallowing his name by calling on him as the sovereign Lord who is the Creator of the universe.

The prayer opens by petitioning to God using the Greek word δεσπότης (děspōtēs), which means “an absolute ruler.”⁷⁸ This term for the lordship of God expresses his absolute authority, specifically praising him as the Sovereign Creator of the universe. This word implies a human ruler, like the despots of human history. However,

⁷⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, 148.

⁷⁶ Thomas, *Acts*, 108.

⁷⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, rev. ed. New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 98.

⁷⁸ Strong, *Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and the Hebrew Bible*, 21.

this term is used ten times throughout the New Testament, and in each example it is used of God. Furthermore, the New Testament use of this word described a slave-master relationship. Thomas notes how interesting it was that the early Christians did not call on God by his name or use Jesus's name at this point; their concern in the midst of threats was the sovereign and providential power of God to deal with the hostile powers of this world.⁷⁹ As Bock explains, the community is thinking theologically about the world's rejection of Messiah, and in effect themselves as his church.⁸⁰ Because of God's absolute position as master, there was a corporate humility expressed in turning to God, who is the Sovereign Lord. They pray to God for strength and courage to fulfill the mission of Christ in a hostile world.

Next, the community appeals to God using the language of a messianic psalm (Ps 2:1–2). This psalm envisioned the hostility of earthly rulers against the Messiah. Despite the world's opposition, the church seeks to be bold and faithful in its witness and its purpose carrying forth the Great Commission. Bruce states that the prophetic language of the psalm revealed how the community understood how those involved in Jesus's crucifixion were actually carrying out God's providential purpose.⁸¹ As Polhill states, "In the paradox of human freedom and divine sovereignty, despite all the raging of humanity, God's purposes prevail. They did so in Christ. They did so with the apostles before the Sanhedrin."⁸² The church understood that just as God is the sovereign ruler over his creation, God is also responsible for making the way of salvation possible only through the atoning death of his divine Son on the cross. Again, this truth acknowledged through prayer gives hope and encouragement for local church revitalization because God

⁷⁹ Thomas, *Acts*, 109.

⁸⁰ Bock, *Acts*, 204–5.

⁸¹ Bruce, *Acts*, 98–99.

⁸² Polhill, *Acts*, 149.

ultimately brings about revitalization, and he uses his people praying as a means to accomplish his purposes.

In the final verses of this prayer, the community offers their final requests (Acts 4:29–30). They do not petition the Lord to crush their enemies or spare them from hostility; instead, they appeal to God’s justice, demonstrate boldness in the face of opposition, and ask that God’s miraculous power is evident in signs and wonders through the apostles’ ministry. The Greek word, *παρρησία* (*parrhēsia*) means assurance, confidence, and outspokenness.⁸³ In addition, the *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* describes this word in terms of the political freedom to speak the truth with candor.⁸⁴ Peter and John proclaimed the gospel in the Temple complex and were imprisoned. They stood before the Sanhedrin, and filled with the Holy Spirit declared their allegiance to Christ and desire to proclaim salvation in Christ (Acts 4:8–12). Finally, the Sanhedrin observed their boldness (*parrhēsia*). They spoke freely, confidently, and boldly in the face of intimidation, imprisonment, and opposition to their message. This was their prayer, to boldly declare the gospel with Spirit-driven rhetoric and persuade unbelievers to believe in the crucified and risen Jesus.⁸⁵

God caused three immediate responses (Acts 4:31). First, their place of corporate prayer shook, giving them tangible evidence of God’s presence and response to their prayer. Next, they were filled with the Holy Spirit. This was not a second Pentecost, but fresh filling and renewed awareness of the indwelling presence and power of the Spirit in their lives and ministry. Finally, they continued to boldly proclaim the Word through the name of Jesus. The community was unified with one voice and that was to

⁸³ Strong, *Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible*, 56.

⁸⁴ Ceslas Spicq and James D. Ernest, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 56, Logos Bible Software 9.

⁸⁵ Ben Witherington III., *Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 203.

proclaim the gospel despite the threats and opposition. Bock states, “this prayer is an expression of complete dependence on God.”⁸⁶ The early church staked their lives on the truth of salvation in the crucified and risen Christ, and together they prayed for the Holy Spirit to give them boldness.

This example of prayer in the early church displayed the depth of faithfulness and boldness when approaching the Lord in prayer. The early church faced tremendous intimidation and hostility, not only from the Roman government, but particularly from the Jewish religious establishment. However, the community remained unified and trusted in God as the sovereign master of the universe to fulfill his promises to them despite the suffering they endured. They confidently proclaimed the name of the crucified and risen Christ, and they boldly prayed for strength and courage to fulfill the Great Commission. This is encouraging for pastors leading local church revitalization to boldly pray through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, unity is critical in the corporate prayer life of the church in order to sustain a revitalization effort. Church revitalization is difficult work and requires confident assurance that God alone has the power to bring about the spiritual renewal of his people and the revitalization of local churches, yet the Lord graciously uses bold and faithful prayer as a catalyst for church revitalization.

Conclusion

This chapter addressed the biblical and theological support for pastoral leadership of local church revitalization through the power of prayer. Prayer is a gracious gift from the Lord and it is calling upon the name of the Lord, appealing to his name in our petitions and praises. There are many religions that utilize some form of prayer, and their adherents pray to a god they believe in; however, Jesus taught his disciples and us

⁸⁶ Bock, *Acts*, 210–11.

today who we pray to and how to pray rightly. The Lord's Prayer reveals that Christians pray to the one true God, who welcomes his people to pray to him as their gracious Father. God alone has the power to bring about revitalization through the outpouring of his Spirit, yet he graciously welcomes and uses Spirit-driven prayer as a catalyst for revitalization. Having established the biblical and theological support for pastoral leadership of local church revitalization through prayer, chapter 3 will address the theological, historical, and practical arguments for leading local church revitalization through the power of prayer.

CHAPTER 3

THEOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL, AND PRACTICAL ARGUMENTS FOR LEADING LOCAL CHURCH REVITALIZATION THROUGH PRAYER

If local congregations desire to witness the revitalization of declining churches and the transformation of their communities by the gospel, then a proper examination of the practice of Spirit-driven prayer will provide insights into sustaining a successful revitalization effort. This chapter will address the theological, historical, and practical arguments for leading local church revitalization through the power of prayer. Statistics reveal that churches across America are in a state of serious spiritual decline, with many churches closing weekly. In addition, churches throughout rural America present unique challenges for revitalization. There are many factors leading to unhealthy, declining, and dying churches, but prayerlessness among pastoral leaders and congregations is one of the most significant factors. Furthermore, biblical and church history reveals how God has used prayer as a catalyst for historic revivals, so he will also bless prayer as a catalyst for modern local church revitalization. Lastly, pastoral leaders shepherd most effectively when they are devoted to prayer, which leads to local churches experiencing spiritual fruitfulness through prayer. Church leaders have instituted various theoretical models and practical methods to bring about local church growth, but this chapter will address the priority of prayer that leads to revitalization. Despite the negative church trends, spiritual deficiencies, and hardships of a revitalization effort, the church ultimately has a future and a hope rooted in the promises that Christ has for his church.

The Theological Argument for Revitalization through the Power of Prayer

Many churches today, particularly in the West, are in a state of spiritual decline

and need revitalization. In addition, rural churches need pastoral leaders willing to go to these declining and forgotten places in order to bring hope to the broken, lost, and neglected. The problem is so significant that the Southern Baptist Convention adopted a strategic prayer initiative with the goal of fulfilling the Great Commission through a movement of Spirit-driven prayer.¹ In order to lead local church revitalization through the power of prayer, it is important for ministry leaders and laypeople to understand the urgent need for revitalization and the vital role of prayer as a catalyst for the revitalization. Prayer is often neglected both individually and corporately, and prayerlessness within the church body is generally a major cause for the slow erosion of local churches. God alone has the power to bring about revitalization, yet he calls leaders to faithfully shepherd local congregations through the power of prayer.

Understanding the Need for Local Church Revitalization

The statistics are both alarming and discouraging. In 2020, Barna conducted its “State of the Church” research and concluded, “Christianity in the United States has undergone dramatic changes in the recent decades.”² For example, Barna’s research revealed significant declines in practicing Christianity, such as weekly church attendance, Bible reading, and prayer. Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board, states, “Viewed through the lens of any research you look at, Southern Baptist churches are in the midst of a health crisis and have been for many years.”³ At its annual

¹ Vision 2025 was adopted at the 2021 SBC Annual Convention. The following is the vision statement; “Reaching every person for Jesus Christ in every town, every city, every state, and every nation.” Vision 2025 consists of six strategic action points. Individual members and churches can join the prayer team and receive weekly text messages emphasizing specific prayer requests.

² Barna, “Signs of Decline and Hope among Key Metrics of Faith,” accessed on April 7, 2022, <https://www.barna.com/research/changing-state-of-the-church/>. The question was asked; “Percent Who Prayed to God within the Last Seven Days?” In 1996, the first year of this survey, 83 percent responded they prayed to God within the last seven days. From 1996 to 2009, the percentage remained approximately the same. In 2010, the survey indicated 85 percent responded they prayed within the last seven days. Since 2010, the percentage has steadily decreased, with 65 percent responding in 2020.

³ Kevin Ezell, “Breathing New Life into Dying Churches,” in *A Guide to Church*

convention in June 2021, the Southern Baptist Convention reported that church attendance, baptisms, conversions, and Cooperative Program giving continued to trend downward.⁴ These declining trends inspired the convention to adopt Vision 2025, calling on SBC churches and ministry leaders to reverse these trends by engaging in a movement of Spirit-led prayer.⁵

Most local churches experience some level of decline, but may not recognize the immediacy for revitalization. Sam Rainer writes, “The size of the church determines the urgency of the revitalization, not necessarily the need.”⁶ Like their urban and suburban counterparts, rural churches across the American landscape reflect these declining trends, yet rural churches offer unique challenges and solutions for revitalization. Traditional ministry practices have proven ineffective to meet the problems of changing demographics, population decline, and lack of resources which is creating a crisis for rural pastors. Despite the obstacles to rural ministry, ministry leaders and scholars believe there are signs that rural churches are experiencing revitalization.⁷ Tom Cheyney states, “The church in rural America is undergoing large economic, demographic, and environmental changes.”⁸ Local churches of all contexts are facing a

Revitalization, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2015), 13.

⁴ Southern Baptist Convention, “2021 Ministry Report,” accessed April 9, 2022, <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/ministry-reports/2021-ministry-report/>.

⁵ Southern Baptist Convention, “Vision 2025,” accessed April 9, 2022, <https://www.sbc.net/vision-2025/>.

⁶ Sam Rainer, “What Size Must a Church Be to Trigger the Need for Revitalization?,” *Church Answers* (blog), August 24, 2022, <https://churchanswers.com/blog/what-size-must-a-church-be-to-trigger-the-need-for-revitalization/>.

⁷ Thom Rainer, “Five Reasons Rural and Small Town Churches Are Making a Comeback,” *Church Answers* (blog), November 25, 2019, <https://churchanswers.com/blog/five-reasons-rural-and-small-town-churches-are-making-a-comeback/>. Through his research, Rainer briefly explains five reasons these churches are making a comeback. One of the reasons for the decline of rural churches was the population decline as people increasingly left rural communities to live in the urban and suburban locales. However, Rainer notes that in 2011 the rate of decline began to reverse, and by 2016 the population in rural areas increased. This provides a hopeful sign for rural church revitalization.

⁸ Tom Cheyney et al., *Church Revitalization in Rural America: Restoring Churches in America’s Heartland* (Orlando, FL: Renovate, 2018), 17. Many rural pastors and ministry leaders serve in bi-vocational rural settings, meaning the source of their income does not come primarily from the church,

crisis of decline and need revitalization.

In order to effectively lead local church revitalization, it is important to understand its meaning and context. Although revitalization of the local church goes back to the church at Ephesus, the terminology itself is a relatively recent phenomenon making it difficult to define and quantify.⁹ Terms such as *health, growth, renewal, revival, comeback churches, recovery, replanting, and revitalization* are often used interchangeably. For example, Rainer defines church revitalization as “the process of leading a dying church back to a healthy state, restoring the church’s purpose of glorifying God and fulfilling the mission of reaching the lost in their community.”¹⁰ Cheyney describes revitalization as a church that plateaus or declines after a period of expansion, goes through a repeating cycle of losing lay leaders, and endures declining morale and momentum; this culminates in a new low that becomes the new normal.¹¹ In many revitalization contexts, Mark Clifton uses the term *replant* because declining and dying churches must become something new again, or replanted.¹² In his dissertation, Joseph Steven Hudson highlights the variety of descriptions and categorical approaches to defining church revitalization.¹³ He then defines church revitalization “as an

instead they have to generate other sources of income. Some of the challenges of bi-vocational ministry include the lack of resources and theological training, discouragement, isolation, financial stress, and feeling overwhelmed. These challenges often lead rural pastors to seek better opportunities or quit the ministry.

⁹ In Revelation 2:1–7, the church in Ephesus received a divine word of rebuke and encouragement from Christ himself, calling on them to repent and remember, returning to Christ as their first love.

¹⁰ Thom Rainer, *Anatomy of a Revived Church: Seven Findings of How Congregations Avoided Death* (Spring Hill, TN: Rainer, 2020), 138.

¹¹ Tom Cheyney and Terry Rials, *Nuts and Bolts of Church Revitalization* (Orlando, FL: Renovate, 2015), 4.

¹² Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 18.

¹³ Joseph Steven Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Convention Churches: A Mixed Methods Study” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 24–29. Hudson provides a chart highlighting the variety of definitions for revitalization and four major approaches: cultural, tangible-growth, church health, and categorical.

intentional change of culture and praxis by members of a church community, after a period of church plateau or decline, that leads to greater church health and numerical growth.”¹⁴

Despite the immense challenges, there are positive motivations for church leaders to work towards local church revitalization. When churches prayerfully engage their communities, they become burdened for the spiritual and physical needs of the people. Harry Reeder offers four reasons to engage in church revitalization: it reflects the heart of Jesus; the apostle Paul planted churches that he often revisited due to their spiritual decline; there are inherent advantages of church revitalization; and global opportunities abound for expanded church revitalization.¹⁵ Building on the example of the church of Ephesus, Reeder writes, “A body of believers can arrest its decline and go from embers back to a flame if its leadership will teach it to simply ‘*remember, repent, and recover*.’”¹⁶ Declining and dying churches need faithful leaders committed to the work of revitalization because these local churches matter to God and through revitalization can once again thrive and reach their communities for the gospel.

The literature and research indicate the connection between church health and the need for revitalization. Churches experience decline for many reasons such as spiritual lethargy, doctrinal apathy, and inward focus. Although the statistical metrics are grim, one of the great tragedies of dying churches is the dishonoring of God through its fruitless spiritual impact on the community and lack of evangelism. As Mark Clifton states, “A dying church robs God of glory. Nothing matters more than his glory. . . . We

¹⁴ Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Convention Churches,” 30.

¹⁵ Harry L. Reeder III., *From Embers to a Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 17–25.

¹⁶ Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame*, 33. Reeder’s biblical paradigm for local church revitalization focuses on three core areas: remember, repent, and recover. Throughout the remainder of his book, he develops these core principles in greater detail. The plan contains ten strategies to facilitate the biblical church revitalization paradigm. The priority of intercessory prayer is one of the key paradigm strategies.

must care about what the church's death means in respect to the glory of God."¹⁷ The current state of the church in the West reveals the need for local church revitalization. Plateauing, declining, and dying churches can experience revitalization, impact the community, and glorify God. Therefore, having established a basic theological framework of the need for local church revitalization, it is now important to understand the theological significance of prayer as the primary means to lead revitalization.

Local Churches Need Revitalization through the Power of Prayer

The slow erosion of local churches and the declining trends in practicing Christianity reveal some disturbing trends for evangelical Christianity in North America, yet God uses prayer as a catalyst for personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization. However, local churches today have forfeited its power because of its lack of devotion to Spirit-driven prayer. Timothy Beougher asks, "Where are we as a culture? We are not a hundred yards farther towards godliness than last year, and last year wasn't anything to write home about. Our culture finds itself in the clutches of postmodernism, with secularization growing at an alarming rate. How are believers to respond?"¹⁸ In today's postmodern culture, Western society is predominantly ignorant of basic biblical truths. However, Beougher expresses hope and opportunity for the church to reach unbelievers through prayer. Beougher states, "People are ignorant, but many of them are open."¹⁹ Local churches have a tremendous opportunity to reach their communities and engage the postmodern culture with the gospel, beginning with a movement of prayer.

Many established churches are slowly eroding, and longstanding members are frequently oblivious to the gradual decline. Rainer states, "It is rare for a long-term

¹⁷ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 12.

¹⁸ Timothy K. Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism: Sharing the Gospel with Compassion and Conviction*, Invitation to Theological Studies (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2021), 90.

¹⁹ Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism*, 91.

church member to see erosion in his or her church. Growth may come rapidly, but decline is usually slow, imperceptibly slow.”²⁰

Local churches traditionally hold prayer meetings, schedule moments of corporate prayer during worship services, and have members who consistently pray; however, this does not mean that these local churches are praying churches. In his book, *Forgotten Power*, David Butts contends that churches need a theology of prayer to combine the clear biblical thinking about prayer with the actual practice of prayer.²¹ The Bible certainly teaches individuals to pray personally and privately, but many churches have forfeited much power by their failure to pray corporately through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Local church revitalization occurs when God’s people understand the power of Spirit-driven prayer and humbly seek him in steadfast prayer.

In his book, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, Rainer examines several common characteristics that led many local churches down slow erosion towards death. He interviewed members from one deceased church and he asked this question about prayer, “Did the church members pray together?”²² For example, several members responded with the typical answers of the inward focus of the traditional Wednesday night prayer meeting. Like many churches, the traditional prayer meeting consists mostly of prayer over the fellowship meal, an exhaustive list of members’ physical needs, and the lack of meaningful intercessory prayer for the community. As Rainer probes further, the

²⁰ Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 12–13. Rainer cites several factors for this slow erosion. Factors include church nostalgia, neglecting the Great Commission, obsessing over facilities, and lacking corporate prayer.

²¹ David Butts, *Forgotten Power: A Simple Theology for a Praying Church* (Terre Haute, IN: PrayerShop, 2015), 5–6. Butts describes the theology of a praying church as a church that clearly understands why Christians pray based on the Bible’s clear teaching about prayer. In Luke 11:1, one of Jesus’s disciples came to him and asked him to teach the disciples how to pray. Jesus then gave them a model for praying with a clear and practical framework to guide them to pray powerful and effective prayers.

²² Thom Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 63–69. Other common issues Rainer explores include inwardly focused churches, preference-driven churches, churches lacking a clear purpose, short pastoral tenures, churches obsessed over facilities.

members recall times in their church's history when they prayed like the New Testament church in Acts. It was during those times of meaningful, Spirit-filled prayer that this now deceased church once thrived. Rainer concluded, "When the church is engaged in meaningful prayer, it becomes both the cause and the result of greater church health."²³ Pastoral leaders serving in revitalization ministry contexts must evaluate the prayer life of the church in order to effectively lead personal renewal and corporate revitalization.

Prayerlessness is a serious threat to the spiritual vitality of both individual Christians and the corporate body. Christians recognize that prayer is important; however, there is a disconnect and/or lack of devotion to prayer. The Bible consistently speaks to the nature of prayer. For example, Paul exhorts the church at Thessalonica to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:16). In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul reminds his audience to pray because of the spiritual battle: "Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request" (Eph 6:17). One of the most common passages of intercessory prayer in the Old Testament occurs when Solomon dedicates the completion of the temple to the Lord and calls on the nation to pray: "And my people, who bear my name, humble themselves, pray and seek my face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land" (2 Chr 7:14). Finally, Jesus taught his disciples how to pray, praying to the Father in heaven and honoring his name as holy (Matt 6:9–15). Not only does the Bible speak to the priority of prayer, but countless theologians, scholars, and Christian leaders also speak to the Bible's gift of prayer.

There are seasons of spiritual numbness that happens in the lives of Christians. Spiritual apathy, lukewarmness, and the loss of joy for God leads to prayerlessness in local churches. When spiritual apathy and deadness sets in, Christians must fight to reclaim spiritual joy. John Piper states, "The key to joy in God is God's omnipotent, transforming grace, bought by his Son, applied by his Spirit, wakened by the Word, and

²³ Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 66.

laid hold of by faith through prayer.”²⁴ When Christians lose their desire for the things of God, prayer is the weapon that is needed to reclaim spiritual joy and the desire for God. The psalmist reminds Christians; “Turn my heart to your decrees and not to dishonest profit. Turn my eyes from looking at what is worthless; and give me life in your ways” (Ps 119:36–37). Paul reminds the church to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17). These two passages describe prayer as the means for reclaiming spiritual joy. Christians steadfastly trust in the Lord, never abandon the God of hope, and pray persistently.

Prayer is described as talking with God, but it is more than just communication. The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines prayer this way: “Prayer is offering up our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies.”²⁵ The Puritan clergyman Thomas Manton describes prayer as “a solemn preaching to ourselves, or a serious warming of our souls in our duty in the sight of God.”²⁶ Timothy Keller describes prayer as “continuing a conversation that God has started through his Word and his grace, which eventually becomes a full encounter with him.”²⁷ Ronnie Floyd describes prayer as “the vehicle that takes you into the privilege of experiencing fellowship with God.”²⁸ John Piper describes prayer “as a walkie-talkie for warfare, not a domestic intercom for increasing our conveniences.”²⁹ J. Gary Millar, in his extensive biblical study of prayer,

²⁴ John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God: How to Fight for Joy*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 138.

²⁵ A Puritan Mind, “The Westminster Shorter Catechism: Question 98,” accessed December 22, 2021, <https://www.apuritansmind.com/westminster-standards/shorter-catechism/>.

²⁶ Thomas Manton, *Psalms 119*, vol. 8 of *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (1872; repr., Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground, 2008), 204, Logos Bible Software 9.

²⁷ Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York: Dutton, 2014), 48.

²⁸ Ronnie Floyd, *How to Pray: Developing an Intimate Relationship with God* (Nashville: Word, 1999), 5–6.

²⁹ John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (1986; repr., New York: Multnomah, 2011), 178.

concludes that “prayer is calling on the name of the Lord to come through on his promises.”³⁰ Therefore, prayer is much deeper than simply passing on information between two parties; prayer involves personal devotion and continuous communication with God.

There is an amazingly affectionate relationship between God and the Christian that is displayed through prayer. The Lord intimately knows peoples’ hearts, thoughts, and words. As David declares, “Lord, you have searched me and known me. . . . You understand my thoughts from far away. . . . Before a word is on my tongue, you know all about it” (Ps 139:1–4). Prayer is incredibly important to God because he conceived prayer, and he commanded his people to pray. The unfolding of his purposes in human history demands prayer. Prayer reveals the loving goodness of God’s heart towards his people. Richard Foster states, “He is inviting you—and me—to come home, to come home to where we belong, to come home to that for which we were created. His arms are stretched out wide to receive us. His heart is enlarged to take us in.”³¹ Prayer is a precious gift of love from God to his people because he invites his children to come into his presence and simply ask him their hearts desires.

Prayer embodies communication and communion with God. However, it is more than simply mouthing words or spending a scheduled quiet time with God. Prayer reveals the unity between God and his people through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Hours before his crucifixion, Jesus spent his final moments with his disciples and encouraged them with these words: “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you” (John 15:7). Jesus impressed this truth upon his disciples because he wanted them to be unified in carrying forth the gospel

³⁰ J. Gary Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Prayer*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 38 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 27.

³¹ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home* (1992; repr., New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 1.

through the power of the Holy Spirit. In his book *The Power of Extraordinary Prayer*, Robert Bakke states, “Through prayer we pour our lives, our thoughts, our longings into God and receive the life, power, character, mind, and authority of God in return.”³² Too often, prayer becomes a strategy of convenience and personal preference. In contrast, Jesus demonstrated that true prayer is God-centered and kingdom-focused. As Butts states, “Prayer for us becomes that connectedness through the Spirit with the Father and Son, so that what they desire might be accomplished on earth through the praying Christian.”³³ Prayer is an extraordinary power that flows from our union with God, and it is his ordained method to accomplish his purposes on earth.

If prayer demonstrates unity with God and is essential to the work of the Great Commission, then prayerlessness is a sign of pride and is offensive to the Lord. The early church experienced tremendous spiritual power because they devoted themselves to prayer. However, the church today sings and speaks of power, yet lacks power as evidenced by the church’s current state of decline. Butts states, “The chief danger of prayerlessness is pride.”³⁴ Floyd agrees: “Prayer occurs when you depend on God. Prayerlessness occurs when you depend on yourself.”³⁵ Prayerlessness is a sign of pride because the church inevitably believes it can accomplish the Great Commission through its own skills, knowledge, and power. In his book on prayer, Jon Onwuchekwa describes the importance of prayer: “To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.”³⁶ Using a touch of hyperbole, he seeks to emphasize the necessity for Christians to devote themselves to unceasing prayer. E. M. Bounds declares

³² Robert O. Bakke, *The Power of Extraordinary Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 18.

³³ Butts, *Forgotten Power*, 25.

³⁴ Butts, *Forgotten Power*, 32.

³⁵ Floyd, *How to Pray*, 18.

³⁶ Jon Onwuchekwa, *Prayer: How Praying Together Shapes the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 17n1.

that the church does not need better methods or organizations; instead the church needs men committed to prayer.³⁷ Even in the rural church context, there is a concerning lack of prayer particularly among pastors. Cheyney states, “A church will never surpass the level of her pastor in any area: if the pastor is not praying, this will ultimately be true for the congregation as well.”³⁸ A praying church is one that turns from pride, humbly depends upon the Lord, and devotes itself to unceasing prayer.

Not only do Christians devote personal time praying to God, but there is extraordinary power when churches pray corporately. Prayer was central to the early church, and the power of God was poured out upon them in response to their prayers. For example, the book of Acts reveals how Jesus builds his church into a praying congregation. After Jesus ascended to heaven, the apostles returned to Jerusalem and “they all were continually united in prayer” (Acts 1:14). On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the apostles. After Peter preached, he called people to repentance and baptism, and multitudes obeyed. Afterwards, the church began to steadily grow because they devoted themselves to the Word and to prayer (Acts 2:42). The rise of the early church demonstrates how those believers were united in corporate prayer. As Armin Gesswein explains, “What is the story of this Jerusalem church? It is the story of one small praying congregation of about 120 members in an upper room . . . which got on fire for God and went on to change the world!”³⁹ When churches devote themselves to wholehearted and Spirit-driven prayer, spiritual renewal and local revitalization will arise.

Local churches throughout North America are in a state of serious decline for reasons that include spiritual apathy, ineffective pastoral leadership, and prayerlessness.

³⁷ E. M. Bounds, *Power through Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 12.

³⁸ Cheyney et al., *Church Revitalization in Rural America*, 76.

³⁹ Armin Gesswein, *With One Accord in One Place: The Role of Prayer in the Early Church* (Terre Haute, IN: PrayerShop, 2014), 20.

However, effective local church revitalization requires courage, patience, leadership, and prayer. The current decline and weak spiritual condition of many local churches should compel Christians to urgently pray for spiritual renewal and corporate revitalization. In the book of Revelation, Jesus sternly warns the Ephesian church to repent and return to its first love (Rev 2:1–7). Mohler states, “A passion for replanting a church must be matched by skills in ministry and a heart for helping a church to regain a vision.”⁴⁰ Countless local churches today, many that were once thriving, are plateauing, declining, and dying because they do not have a vision of the extraordinary power of prayer. The work of revitalization is a spiritual battle and it requires faithful devotion and dependency upon the Holy Spirit through prayer. Pastoral leaders who envision a biblical understanding of prayer and then commit themselves to personal and corporate prayer will effectively lead local church revitalization. Having established a theological framework of prayer’s connection to local church revitalization, it is important to understand the historical connection between prayer and revival as a model for the power of prayer in leading local church revitalization.

The Historical Argument for Leading Revitalization through the Power of Prayer

The statistics demonstrate that numerous churches throughout North America, and specifically, within the Southern Baptist Convention are declining. In order to reverse these trends and effectively lead the work of revitalization, pastors and churches must humbly submit to the Lord and faithfully commit to prayer. Biblical and church history reveals how God has faithfully responded to the prayers of his people to bring about an outpouring of supernatural revival through the power of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, the Lord continues to use the prayers of his people as a catalyst to bring about local church

⁴⁰ R. Albert Mohler Jr., “Christ Will Build and Rebuild His Church: The Need for ‘Generation Replant,’” in *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2015), 10.

revitalization. There are numerous examples of inspiration throughout biblical and church history of God bringing about personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization through the power of Spirit-driven prayer. However, there is a distinction between revival and revitalization that must be understood, yet both movements share the common bond of prayer as a catalyst. This section will examine the historical argument for leading revitalization through the power of prayer because God has used prayer as a means to bring about biblical and contemporary revivals; therefore, it serves as a model for modern local church revitalization.

There Is a Clear Distinction between Historical Revivals and Modern Revitalizations

God graciously invites his people to pray to him through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts reveals how the New Testament church prioritized prayer and God faithfully responded. Despite immense hostility and severe persecution from both the Jewish religious establishment and the Roman Empire, the early church experienced tremendous growth. One of the primary reasons was their devotion to faithful and persistent prayer. Similarly, church history also demonstrates how God uses Spirit-led disciples as a catalyst for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit to bring about personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization. Revival and revitalization are means of God's grace to bring about spiritual transformation in both individuals and local congregations. Prayer is at the heart of this extraordinary work, yet it is important to understand how God uses prayer in these two distinct movements.

Revival and revitalization are two distinct works that God uses to bring about spiritual change in people's lives and to realign the mission of local church to fulfill the Great Commission. Prayer precedes both of these movements as God uses it to facilitate an outpouring of the Spirit, but a distinction must clearly be made because revival and revitalization are not necessarily synonymous. Michael Ross defines revival as "the

visitation of the Holy Spirit that causes a church to experience the power, purity, and presence of Christ in such a way that the church is renewed, empowered, and purified for more effective use in ministry and mission.”⁴¹ In addition, Richard Owen Roberts defines revival as “an extraordinary movement of the Holy Spirit producing extraordinary results.”⁴² Lastly, Elmer Towns and Douglas Porter define revival as

an extraordinary work of God in which Christians repent of their sins as they become intensely aware of his presence in their midst, and they manifest a positive response to God in renewed obedience to the known will of God, resulting in both a deepening of their individual and corporate experience with God, and an increased concern to win others to Christ.⁴³

These definitions clearly emphasize the work of God as the source and originator of revival. In contrast, revitalization originates with men in cooperation with God to bring about renewed purpose and passion to the local congregation.⁴⁴ Genuine revival from God will naturally lead to revitalization of the local church, but revitalization does not necessarily lead to revival, especially apart from the sovereign outpouring of God. As Ross summarizes, “Simply put, one can never have revival without revitalization, but one can have revitalization without revival.”⁴⁵ Genuine Spirit-driven prayer is a catalyst that God uses to bring about both revival and revitalization because when God’s people wholeheartedly pray and trust in his sovereign power, the Lord faithfully responds to accomplish his purposes. However, churches must take great care not to fall into methods of revivalism. Iain Murray emphasizes this point in his work about that subject: “American history was shaped by the Spirit of God in revivals of the

⁴¹ Michael F. Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization: How to Revitalize Your Church through Your Pulpit* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2006), 21.

⁴² Richard Owen Roberts, *Revival* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1982), 16–28.

⁴³ Elmer L. Towns and Douglas Porter, *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever: From Pentecost to the Present* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 2000), 4.

⁴⁴ Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization*, 24.

⁴⁵ Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization*, 24.

same kind as launched the early church into a pagan world. . . . They foresaw the danger of revivalism long before it became a respected part of evangelicalism, and they would have had no problem in agreeing with the criticism which has since discredited it.”⁴⁶

Just as prayer is the gracious power God has used to bring about historic revivals, modern day local church revitalization must begin with prayer. When the people of God pray, the Lord faithfully responds to bring about spiritual transformation from that which was spiritually dead. In surveying revitalized churches, Rainer concludes, “It is God who revitalizes churches. If local congregations truly want to see God bring their declining and dying churches back to life, Christians must devote themselves to prayer.”⁴⁷ The problem is that prayerlessness defines too many churches. For example, the prayer meeting too often is powerless because churches focus more on personal needs and preferences rather than evangelistic intercessory prayer for the community; self-centered prayer rather than gospel-centric prayer. Cheyney writes, “Revitalization is the work leaders do to ensure that the conditions of God are met for revival and in order that the people of God are prepared when the Sovereign God begins to move.”⁴⁸ The lack of effective evangelism and discipleship is attributed to a spiritual deficiency of intercessory prayer. Historical revivals throughout biblical and church history demonstrates how prayer is a model for local church revitalizations today.

Evidence for the Power of Prayer in Historical Revivals as a Model for Modern Revitalizations

Biblical and church history provides evidence for the Lord responding to his people fervently praying for revival. Both the Old Testament and New Testament reveals

⁴⁶ Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750–1858* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), xx.

⁴⁷ Rainer, *Anatomy of a Revived Church*, 81.

⁴⁸ Cheyney and Rials, *Nuts and Bolts of Church Revitalization*, 57.

examples of how God responded to his praying servants by bringing forth an outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of spiritual transformation. Walter Kaiser describes what it means to pray: “When we pray we make our request known to God by the help of the Holy Spirit; in the name, authority, and mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ; with faith, fervency, and submission to the will of God; and with sole reference to His honor and glory.”⁴⁹ King Jehoshaphat provides an incredible model of biblical prayer in 2 Chronicles 20.

Within the context of King Jehoshaphat’s prayer, his kingdom was confronted with an enormous invading army, yet he resolved to take the matter to the Lord in prayer. Not only did the king of Judah humbly bow before the Lord in prayer, but multitudes of people across the kingdom of Judah joined together to petition the Lord (2 Chr 20:13). King Jehoshaphat then led his people to pray, providing an instructive biblical model of prayer for revival and revitalization. God answered the prayer and provided Judah with an incredible victory over their invading enemies, and they dedicated the victory to God. As Walter Kaiser states, “If prayer carried the day for these people, then we ought to learn to make our appeal to heaven as well. There is no higher court of appeal or avenue of influence among mortals. Let us therefore let our prayers begin to flow to heaven.”⁵⁰ King Jehoshaphat’s prayer provides encouragement for Christians today within the context of revitalization that God has the sovereign power to bring dying churches back to life and he delights to fulfill his promises according to his word, but he calls on Spirit-filled Christians to humbly come to him in prayer.

One of the most significant examples in the New Testament happened on the day of Pentecost as prayer not only ushered in the birth of the church, but it led to its

⁴⁹ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Quest for Renewal: Personal Revival in the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 90.

⁵⁰ Kaiser, *Quest for Renewal*, 98.

extraordinary growth and expansion despite the immense hostility and persecution the early church endured (Acts 2:1–13). Led by the apostles, the early church devoted themselves to persistent prayer and the Lord graciously responded by sending them the Holy Spirit to dwell within them and empower them to proclaim the gospel. The book of Acts details the incredible work of the early church. Polhill states, “There is no effective witness without the Spirit, and the way to spiritual empowerment is to wait in prayer.”⁵¹ The early church believed in the extraordinary power of prayer and they regularly gathered to pray and the Spirit moved mightily through their faithfulness.

Just as the Bible provides clear examples of the power of prayer and how God responds by pouring out the Spirit to bring about revival and revitalization, church history also demonstrates prayer’s connection to revival and revitalization. Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, and Billy Graham—three extraordinary preachers—are powerful models of faithful Christian leaders who consistently, patiently, and wholeheartedly devoted themselves to prayer. Also, the Businessmen’s Revival of 1857–58 demonstrates the power of God using laypeople devoted to prayer as a catalyst for revival. Each of these examples provide a model for modern day local church revitalization through the power of prayer. Finally, historical revivals provide a model for the contemporary movement of local church revitalization. As A. T. Pierson said, “There has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer.”⁵² The following examples from church history demonstrate the same is true for local church revitalization.

Jonathan Edwards’s theology of prayer. Jonathan Edwards is widely considered one of the greatest theologians ever produced in America. He was a

⁵¹ John Polhill, *Acts: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: B&H, 1992), 90.

⁵² J. Edwin Orr, “Prayer and Revival.” accessed September 14, 2023. <https://jedwinorr.com/resources/articles/prayandrevival.pdf>.

significant figure during the Great Awakening, the period of tremendous revival in colonial America. Not unlike Christianity in America today, Edwards stepped onto the scene during a time when societal and religious values seemingly declined. His preaching was instrumental to the spiritual awakening, but Edwards recognized the importance of corporate unity and Spirit-driven prayer. He states, “How condecant, how beautiful, and of good tendency it would be, for multitudes of Christians, in various parts of the world, by explicit agreement, to unite in such prayer as is proposed to us.”⁵³ Edwards held to a theology of prayer based on the doctrinal conviction that God hears prayer, God answers prayer according to his sovereign word and purpose, and prayer ultimately is a reflection of one’s delight in God.⁵⁴ Sincere, humble, Spirit-filled prayer puts forth the glorification of God and mankind’s dependence upon his sovereign purposes.

Edwards was a prolific writer engrossed in the subject of revivals. As a key figure of the Northampton revival of the 1730s and the Great Awakening of the 1740s, he was convinced of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and prayer’s connection as a catalyst for revival, particularly through corporate prayer.⁵⁵ Deeply influenced by his Puritan heritage, Edwards held to a robust theology of prayer that influenced his understanding of the revivals in his day. He articulated the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing about spiritual reconciliation and continual sanctification; “to pray for the Spirit, both for his initial converting work and for his ongoing work in the believer.”⁵⁶ He was convinced that corporate prayer was instrumental to the advancement of the kingdom of God. It is from Edwards that the church not only marvels at how God used prayer to bring about

⁵³ Jonathan Edwards, *Praying Together for True Revival*, ed. T. M. Moore (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 99.

⁵⁴ Brian G. Najapfour, *Jonathan Edwards: His Doctrine of and Devotion to Prayer*, 2nd ed. (Caledonia, MI: Biblical Spirituality, 2017), 39–43.

⁵⁵ Michael A. Haykin, *Jonathan Edwards: The Holy Spirit in Revival* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2005), 140–46.

⁵⁶ Haykin, *Jonathan Edwards*, 39.

revival, but the church also prepares their hearts theologically to pray for revival.

Biblical and church historical revivals provide an encouraging model for contemporary local church revitalization. Edwards was a local church pastor who came upon the scene during a time of great spiritual decline in the colonial region and God used him as a faithful steward for personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization. Through personal and corporate prayer, God used faithful Christian praying as a catalyst to bring about one of the great movements of revival in America. The revivals of Edwards's era serves as a model of encouragement for modern day local church revitalization. Humble and Spirit-filled prayer, trusting in God to do what only he is capable of doing is foundational for local church revitalization.

A revival born out of prayer. The New York Businessmen's Revival of the late 1850s is an example the Lord responding to the wholehearted and dedicated prayer of a few prayer warriors who regularly gathered to seek God's outpouring for revival. Several laymen led by Jeremiah Lanphier met each week to pray for an hour, which eventually led to God's blessing of an amazing spiritual awakening during the late 1850s.⁵⁷ It was a revival born out of prayer as Lanphier entered the third-story room of an old church building on Fulton Street in New York City on September 23, 1857 to pray over his community and for revival. At noon he entered the prayer room and patiently waited for others to join him. At 12:30, he was joined by six men and they prayed for several minutes. They agreed to meet again the following Wednesday and each week their prayer group increased. During that first small prayer gathering, there was nothing extraordinary; there was no great outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but little did Lanphier realize that God would use that initial prayer gathering as a catalyst for a nationwide revival.

⁵⁷ Collin Hansen and John Woodbridge, *God Sized Vision: Revival Stories That Stretch and Stir* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 77–94.

Cultural, political, economic, and spiritual conditions of the time were ripe for national revival. As the nation prospered and rapidly expanded, religious interest gave way to materialism and the pursuit of wealth; fortunes ballooned and faith diminished. However, the nation would soon experience one of the worst financial collapses, leading to unemployment, hunger, and desperation. Led by the powerful conviction of one man who longed to see an outpouring of spiritual revival in his community, the nation itself would experience spiritual awakening and transformation. Within eight months, over 10,000 businessmen gathered daily throughout New York City to pray. News of the prayer meetings spread and tens of thousands of people were saved. It was a revival born out of a movement of Spirit-filled, wholehearted devotion in prayer crying out to God to pour forth his Spirit upon a community and the nation.

There are three significant lessons this revival can teach the church about local church revitalization. First, God brings spiritual hope and revitalization to seemingly hopeless and desperate circumstances. Many local churches today are in desperate circumstances, in need of hope, and only God can bring about true spiritual revitalization. Second, Spirit-led prayer is the catalyst God uses to bring about personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization. God oftentimes uses just a handful of faithful prayer warriors as catalyst to accomplish his divine purposes. Finally, it is a reminder that the timeless spiritual practice of corporate intercession still works. When the people of God humbly surrender to the will of God and unite together in Spirit-filled prayer, God is faithful to pour out his Spirit. Biblical and church history is a reminder that just as revivals were born out of a movement of prayer, contemporary local church revitalization requires unceasing prayer in the Spirit.

Charles Spurgeon, the “Prince of Preachers,” and prayer. Charles Spurgeon, the longtime pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, left a significant spiritual legacy upon the local church and the broader evangelicalism. Known

as the Prince of Preachers, he is best remembered for his influential preaching ministry, and his numerous published writings continue to provide encouragement and guidance for pastoral leaders today. However, Spurgeon was more than just a preacher, he was truly a pastor, and prayer was foundational to his personal life and Christian ministry. He understood the absolute necessity of prayer in the life of the faithful minister: “Of course the preacher is above all others distinguished as a man of prayer. . . . Over all his other relationships the pre-eminence of the pastor’s responsibility casts a halo, and if true to his Master, he becomes distinguished for his prayerfulness in them all.”⁵⁸ Pastoral ministry is difficult and time-consuming work, between sermon preparation, visitations, funerals, and administrative duties, yet there are serious personal and corporate consequences to the body of Christ when pastors disregard prayer. Spurgeon states,

If you as ministers are not very prayerful, you are much to be pitied. If in the future, you shall be called to sustain pastorates, large or small, if you become lax in secret devotion, not only will you need to be pitied, but your people also, and, in addition to that, you shall be blamed, and the day cometh in which you shall be ashamed and confounded.⁵⁹

In his biography, Murray writes, “some of the most solemn warnings Spurgeon ever gave his congregation were of the danger of their ceasing to be dependent upon God in prayer.”⁶⁰ Prayerlessness not only has dangerous spiritual consequences for pastoral leaders, but it also threatens the spiritual unity and evangelistic impact of the church. Pastors and churches that do not pray forfeit the supernatural power of prayer and in essence do not trust in the power of the risen Christ. In a sermon on the peculiar power of prayer, he preached from Isaiah 65:24, in which he articulates how God demonstrates immeasurable grace upon his people as he invites them to pray. He said, “Prayer has an

⁵⁸ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 42, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁵⁹ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 43.

⁶⁰ Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, 2nd ed. (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1978), 41–42.

effect upon God himself; it comes into his ear, it moves his heart, it stretches out his hands. Let us not doubt this.”⁶¹ Spurgeon’s life and ministry are a model for pastoral leaders today particularly those in the context of revitalization because he was not only a faithful preacher of the gospel, but he devoted himself to unceasing prayer.

Billy Graham, “America’s Pastor,” depended on prayer. As a kid, I remember several instances sitting in the living room with my family glued to the television as Billy Graham preached on national television inside of a packed stadium of full of tens of thousands of people. He was obviously much older by the 1990s, less animated in the pulpit, yet he still spoke with clarity and conviction the truth of salvation through Jesus Christ, and many responded. Robert Jeffress, who currently serves as Pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, said, “Next to the Apostle Paul, Billy Graham was the greatest evangelist the world has ever known.”⁶² Following in the footsteps of previous evangelists like Dwight L. Moody and Billy Sunday, Graham has likely preached the gospel to more people than anyone else in history through his over half-century ministry of worldwide evangelistic crusades. The power of American television media aided his evangelistic impact as millions throughout the decades watched his crusades and heard the gospel.

For all his evangelistic work and success, prayer was crucial to his life and ministry. Just like the millions he preached to during his decades long revivals and crusades, Graham himself came to faith in Christ during a revival, but it all began with a few men devoted to Spirit-filled prayer. At the beginning of the 1930s, Charlotte felt the iron grip of economic depression; however, members of Charlotte Christian Men’s Club

⁶¹ Terence Peter Crosby, *C H Spurgeon’s Forgotten Prayer Meeting Addresses: Forgotten Prayer Meeting Addresses and Other Forgotten Metropolitan Tabernacle Sermons* (Leominster, England: Day One, 2011), 132.

⁶² Robert Jeffress, *Five Things I Learned from Billy Graham: And How They Can Transform Your Life* (Dallas: Pathway To Victory, 2019), 8.

saw that a spiritual depression was the real root of the financial recession so they met regularly to pray for revival.⁶³ It was these Spirit-filled prayer meetings that served as the catalyst to organize the revival that brought the evangelist M. F. Ham to Charlotte, which ultimately led to Billy Graham's spiritual conversion.

In his autobiography, Graham recounts the spiritual crucible he endured following the lackluster campaign in Altoona, Pennsylvania and preparation for the upcoming Los Angeles Campaign. In the summer of 1949, he begrudgingly attended a conference at Forest Home. While there, he wrestled with the authority and sufficiency of the Bible in light of his friend, Chuck Templeton's emphasis on intellectualism and his denial of the absolute truth of the Bible. Graham recounted the scene as he laid his Bible on a tree stump and prayed in the woods under the cover of a moonlit night, 'Father, I am going to accept this as Thy Word—by faith! I am going to allow faith to go beyond my intellectual questions and doubts, and I will believe this to be Your inspired Word.'"⁶⁴ When he was confronted with vicious personal attacks by opponents or when reporters asked him questions about Jesus, it was the strength of his prayer life that allowed him to humbly respond in a Christ-like manner.⁶⁵ It was during these moments of personal renewal through the power of Spirit-filled prayer that strengthened Graham's faith in Christ and fueled his desire to fulfill God's calling on his life for global evangelism.

Not only was prayer central to his personal life, but Graham understood that it was essential to the success of his ministry and the worldwide proclamation of the gospel. From the months long prayer meetings with local churches leading up to each campaign, to the inquiry rooms that received numerous respondents during the invitation call, prayer

⁶³ Edward E. Ham, *The Story of an All-Day Prayer Meeting and the Revival: When Billy Graham Found Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Sword of the Lord, 1955), 11–16.

⁶⁴ Billy Graham, *Just as I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1997), 139.

⁶⁵ Sherwood Eliot Wirt, *Billy: A Personal Look at Billy Graham, the World's Best-Loved Evangelist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 97–98.

was foundational to the ministry and the catalyst God used to bring countless people to salvation. Prayer was also the catalyst God used to get him to places in need of hearing the gospel. God impressed on the hearts of two pastors in Alaska to pray for revival and to bring Billy Graham for a crusade.⁶⁶ Many years and several setbacks later, Graham held a weeklong crusade. Through the power of unceasing prayer many years in the making, God used countless Billy Graham evangelistic crusades to save lost people, strengthen local churches, and transform cities; serving as a model for local church revitalization.

Prayer is foundational for local church revitalization. Historic revivals and historical Christian figures provide a model for leading revitalization because pastoral leaders and laypeople today can look to what God has done through biblical and church history and trust that he will pour out his Spirit and revitalize local churches. Local church revitalization as a movement is a relatively new concept. In recent years, American cities have witnessed the revitalization of historic neighborhoods and downtown localities. The revitalization phenomenon has infused new life and fresh energy into areas that declined and deteriorated. Similarly, local churches that once thrived gradually declined with many closing its doors, but recently many churches have turned around, experiencing revitalization and health because pastors are leading the church to renewed dedication and dependency upon prayer. God invites his people to pray, to pour out their petitions to him in the name of Christ, and to trust that the Lord will fulfill his sovereign purposes.

Many efforts to revitalize churches have been undertaken, and as Brian Croft states, “The biblical approach to true, life-giving church revitalization that will remain

⁶⁶ Eliot, *Billy*, 165–72.

throughout future generations will take a long time.”⁶⁷ Because of the immense need to revitalize struggling churches, many strategies and approaches have been employed, but Spirit-driven prayer must be central to the work. One of the mistakes many pastoral leaders make in a revitalization context is the overcomplication of the church’s mission. In their book, *Simple Church*, Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger articulate the contrast between healthy, growing, and vibrant churches and those that are struggling is simplicity: “The simple revolution has begun.”⁶⁸ Though published nearly twenty years ago, their argument is even more applicable today in the midst of rapid seismic changes culturally, politically, and economically in addition to fear and uncertainty throughout the world. In a revitalization context, simple is better and one of the most simple and effective ways to lead revitalization is through the power of prayer.

Clifton tells the story of how a small country church in Missouri experienced revitalization as its pastor lead them to pray without ceasing.⁶⁹ When Malachi O’Brien was voted in as pastor of Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church in Harrisonville, he began leading the small congregation in prayer, organizing an all-night prayer meeting within his first month. Like many declining and dying churches, attendance declined, baptisms were rare, and evangelistic effort was nonexistent. Over time, God used their prayers as a catalyst to move them toward confession and repentance, greater congregational unity, and evangelistic impact in the community. As the church began to grow, they made some aesthetic changes to the corporate worship style in order to fit the influx of younger people attending the church, but Spirit-filled prayer continues to be the heartbeat of the church. For example, the youth ministry is growing, salvations are happening, and they

⁶⁷ Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying and Divided Churches* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), 51.

⁶⁸ Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God’s Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 8.

⁶⁹ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 78–82.

are stepping forward as prayer warriors. Through patient and persistent prayer and trusting in the sovereign purposes of the Lord, Pastor O'Brien has faithfully shepherded his church, leading them from decline to greater health through the power of prayer.

Another example of God using prayer as a catalyst to bring about revitalization to the local church is the testimony of Croft and Auburndale Baptist Church.⁷⁰ Another reason churches experience significant decline and even death is because of disunity, conflict, and lack of repentance. The church grew to become one of the largest congregations in Louisville under the direction of its longtime pastor; however, when that pastor retired, the church began to gradually decline over the next three decades. It was a revolving door of pastors, the church eventually split, and by the time Croft was called as pastor, the church was on the brink of closing its doors. Although he endured his own share of conflicts, even an attempt to remove him as pastor, Croft continued to faithfully follow the Acts 6:4 model: "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." In God's gracious goodness, the ship turned and the church began to experience greater unity, growth, health, and revitalization. Croft says, "Herein lies the essential lesson for all pastors laboring in the work of revitalization. Jesus is with you!"⁷¹

Unfortunately, there are countless other examples just like those mentioned above; churches in such a state of decline that they are hanging on to a final thread of hope to turn things around. Worse, there are churches that have experienced the bitter taste of division and disunity, yet refuse to confess and repent of their sin. Like many pastoral leaders, Andy Davis, pastor of First Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina, learned the importance of trusting God through prayer as he led his church through a difficult period of reform and revitalization. He states, "The reformation of a local church can never be anything less than fully turning to God—loving him, trusting in him,

⁷⁰ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 101–16.

⁷¹ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 120.

seeking him, obeying him. This is what we seek, a purely God-centered answer to church reform. And it is pure folly for a pastor to think that that doesn't begin with him!"⁷² Jeffersonville Baptist Church has experienced a steady decline for many years, yet has remained very unified and surprisingly hopeful. The work of revitalization is difficult, but it is vital because God cares for his church and he raises up pastors who humbly and faithfully shepherd his church, and trust in the supernatural power of Spirit-filled prayer.

The Practical Argument for Leading Revitalization through the Power of Prayer

If declining and dying local churches are going to experience revitalization, it must begin with pastors facilitating a vision of Spirit-driven prayer both personally and corporately. Luke provides an incredible picture of Jesus's devotion to prayer: "But the news about him spread even more, and large crowds would come together to hear him and to be healed of their sickness. Yet he often withdrew to deserted places and prayed" (Luke 5:15–16). Not only did Jesus teach his disciples how to pray, but he modeled for them a life devoted to prayer. For pastors to grow a powerful praying church, they must devote themselves to prayer and help deepen the corporate prayer life of their congregations.⁷³ Pastoral ministry can become incredibly busy, yet pastors to their detriment neglect prayer amid the busyness of ministry. Chuck Lawless states, "If we love people and have the power to help, then we are going to be busy. Learning to pray doesn't offer us a less busy life; it offers us a less busy heart."⁷⁴ For local churches to become houses of prayer, pastors and ministry leaders must set the example by shepherding the congregation towards deeper devotion to prayer.

⁷² Andy Davis, "The Reform of First Baptist Church Durham," *9Marks Journal* (November/December 2011): 15.

⁷³ Richard Blackaby and Rick Fisher, *Developing a Powerful Praying Church* (Jonesboro, GA: Blackaby, 2017), 3.

⁷⁴ Chuck Lawless, *Lord, Teach Us Pastors to Pray: Creating a Culture of Prayer in Yourself and Your Church* (Franklin, TN: Church Answers, 2021), 3.

The early church began in a prayer meeting as they gathered to pray for the power of the Holy Spirit upon their lives. Ministry leaders and Christians recognize that prayer is vitally important to the spiritual health of the local church, yet they forfeit the blessings of this extraordinary gift of spiritual power. The crucified, resurrected, and exalted Savior sits on the throne of grace with his ear inclined to hear our prayers: “from which grace delights to look upon the miseries of mankind with tender eye to consider them and to relieve them.”⁷⁵ Christians at times struggle to pray for various reasons, but prayerlessness characterizes too many local churches. Local churches experiencing prayerlessness are likely led by prayerless pastors, elders, and ministry leaders. Many local churches today are unhealthy and need faithful, humble, and effective pastoral leadership to shepherd declining and dying churches to health and revitalization through the power of Spirit-filled prayer. The purpose of this doctoral ministry project is to lead revitalization at Jeffersonville Baptist Church through the power of prayer that transforms the individual and corporate prayer lives of the members. This section will address how pastoral leaders can facilitate a vision of personal and corporate prayer within the context of local church revitalization.

Effective Pastoral Leadership through Prayer Is Needed for Revitalization

The current declining state of many local churches reflects the ineffectiveness of pastoral leadership. Many local churches that are plateauing, declining, and dying are generally characterized as inwardly focused, divided, and without a clear vision for fulfilling the Great Commission. Likewise, many pastors either fear upsetting the status quo, are apathetic, or lack effective pastoral leadership training, so there is a correlation between unhealthy churches and ineffective pastoral leadership. Seminaries and Bible

⁷⁵ Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Throne of Grace,” in *Classic Sermons on Prayer*, ed. Warren Wiersbe (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1987), 27–39.

colleges produce numerous graduates, the overwhelming majority currently serving in declining churches. Given the significant decline of local churches, one questions the effectiveness of seminaries and Bible colleges in training pastors and ministry leaders to lead local church revitalization. There is not a lack of leaders; instead, local churches need pastoral leaders who re-envision a Spirit-led transformation by turning around declining and dying churches through revitalization.⁷⁶ Furthermore, a God-centered vision of prayer is necessary for pastoral leaders to effectively lead their churches towards revitalization.

In his dissertation on the role of pastoral leadership in church revitalization, Christopher Michael Aiken states, “Effective, biblical leadership is essential and catalytic in church revitalizations, and that leadership competencies, culture, and structure cannot be effectively evaluated apart from how they interrelate.”⁷⁷ Good character is an essential quality for effective leadership; however, it is not always sufficient. Leadership capabilities such as missional focus, interpersonal skills, shaping culture, communicating vision, team building, and facilitating change are examples of necessary pastoral competencies required in the work of revitalization. Aiken concludes, “The church is to pursue health and its leaders are to lay down their lives to bring the church to its healthy and glorious purpose.”⁷⁸ The Lord calls out leaders to shepherd local congregations; therefore, effective pastoral leadership is essential for successfully leading local churches to revitalization.

Several characteristics of leadership are evident in today’s pastoral leaders within the revitalization context. First, pastoral leaders must honestly acknowledge the

⁷⁶ Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon E. Penfold, *Re: VISION: The Key to Transforming Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 19–32.

⁷⁷ Christopher Michael Aiken, “Church Revitalization and the Role of Pastoral Leadership: A Mixed Methods Study” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 5.

⁷⁸ Aiken, “Church Revitalization and the Role of Pastoral Leadership, 123.

declining spiritual health of their local churches and implement a God-centered and inspiring vision for revitalization.⁷⁹ This takes patient and persistent prayer because too often pastoral search committees believe that hiring a younger pastor will ultimately solve the problem. Furthermore, zealous inexperienced pastors can move too quickly to overhaul everything and implement immediate changes, which leads to conflict and disunity. It is important for pastors to understand their behavioral style, or temperament.⁸⁰ In a revitalization context, changes are needed, but it requires careful leadership working alongside the laypeople to navigate through the difficult issues and to prayerfully implement a God-centered vision for the local church. All leaders want results and Christian leaders to make a significant spiritual impact on this world for the glory of Christ.⁸¹ However, vision requires patience, persistent prayer, and trust-building relationships. Cheyney states, “When vision—God’s preferred future—is envisioned through prayer . . . the impact of the vision’s fulfillment will be life-changing for many, both inside and outside the church.”⁸²

Pastoral leaders also recognize the humble nature of sacrificial servitude

⁷⁹ Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 14–16. Lencioni argues in his book that the most underexploited factor in organizations is organizational health. He articulates that organizations should shift their focus to becoming holistically healthier through the development of four disciplines: building a cohesive leadership team, creating clarity, overcommunicating clarity, and reinforcing clarity. Effective pastoral leaders identify potential leaders and equip and disciple them to carry out the Great Commission. Pastoral leaders also clarify and communicate the biblical vision of the local church.

⁸⁰ Malphurs and Penfold, *Re: Vision*, 69–88. In chapter 5, the authors define temperament as one’s unique, God-given (inborn) behavioral style. Temperament is important because it provides ministry leaders with an understanding of not only the people they serve, but it also self-reflection. The authors also believe temperament is vitally important for effective pastoral leadership and successful revitalization.

⁸¹ Mark Croston, *Big Results: Leadership* (Nashville: B&H, 2021), 1. Croston states that leadership is both difficult and fulfilling because there are many obstacles to leading, but achieving big results requires leaders to understand and obey their calling to Christ-centered leadership. This happens when pastoral leaders prayerfully lead with a God-inspired vision that is articulated in boldness and faithful submission to God’s timing. Oftentimes this leads to making necessary, yet unpopular changes in order to move the church towards health and revitalization.

⁸² Cheyney et al., *Church Revitalization in Rural America*, 51. In Cheyney’s research of 350 rural churches, he makes the point that casting vision and implementing changes likely will be much more difficult than in the nonrural context. However, effective rural church pastors can effectively understand, discern, and communicate vision by navigating the various personalities of the rural church context. These personalities include: theorists, realists, pragmatists, preservationists.

modeled by the servant leadership of Christ throughout his life and ministry.⁸³ Jesus declared that whoever wants to become great must become a servant, whoever wants to be first must be last, and the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom (Matt 20:26–28). Revitalization is challenging, but these local churches need pastoral leaders who sacrificially serve and humbly lead. As pastors serve and lead, they understand they are first followers of the God who goes before them, accepting that obedience to the Lord takes precedence over their positional authority.⁸⁴ In addition, Nehemiah proved to be an effective leader because he identified the central mission, devoted himself to persistent prayer, and implemented a plan of action.⁸⁵ Local churches today need pastoral leaders who are selfless and prayerful shepherds with the passion to faithfully and steadfastly fulfill the difficult work of revitalization through Spirit-led prayer.

Pastoral ministry is a calling or an unmistakable conviction that God places on an individual to fulfill the task of shepherding God’s people and teaching them the Bible.⁸⁶ It is a special calling because of its unique and strategic importance for the spiritual well-being of Christ’s flock. Christ himself is the chief shepherd and teacher, yet he commissions faithful servants to lead on his behalf to shepherd his church. Although pastors serve in a position of leadership and authority, their first priority is living as a Christian, which involves continuous prayer. Pastors and ministry leaders will constantly endure attacks from Satan; therefore, they must consistently pray in order to effectively shepherd the flock. When it comes to prayer, there are spiritual implications because

⁸³ Loren Reno, *10 Leadership Maneuvers: A General’s Guide to Serving and Leading* (Sisters, OR: Deep River, 2015), 41–44.

⁸⁴ Michael S. Wilder and Timothy Paul Jones, *The God Who Goes before You: Pastoral Leadership as Christ-Centered Followership* (Nashville: B&H, 2018), 9–11.

⁸⁵ Cheyney and Rials, *Nuts and Bolts of Church Revitalization*, 76–78.

⁸⁶ Derek J. Prime and Alistair Begg, *On Being a Pastor: Understanding our Calling and Work* (Chicago: Moody, 2004), 18–19.

Christians are engaged in spiritual warfare against a powerful enemy, but Spirit-led prayer gives believers strength, particularly in the work of revitalization.”⁸⁷ Local church revitalization is difficult and exhausting, yet pastors must steadfastly rely on the power of prayer.

Paul Miller states, “American culture is probably the hardest place in the world to learn to pray. We are so busy that when we slow down to pray, we find it uncomfortable. We prize accomplishments, production. But prayer is nothing but talking to God. It feels useless, as if we are wasting time.”⁸⁸ Too often, pastoral leaders become overwhelmed in the busyness of revitalization that they neglect prayer. E. M. Bounds states, “What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use—men of prayer, men mighty in prayer.”⁸⁹ Changes quite possibly need to be made and ministry methodologies are helpful, but revitalization requires patience, which means prayer should become a major priority of the pastor in leading the congregation. Even in the important preaching ministry, pastors neglect prayer. Bounds laments, “Every preacher who does not make prayer a mighty factor in his own life and ministry is weak as a factor in God’s work and is powerless to project God’s cause in this world.”⁹⁰ Revitalization is difficult work and patience and steadfast prayer, however, pastors increasingly devote more time to the busy work of church growth rather than deepening their personal prayer life and the prayer life of the congregation.

Becoming a devoted and consistent prayer warrior does not happen overnight or with one prayer: it is hard work to grow in prayer. However, there are some practical

⁸⁷ Prime and Begg, *On Being a Pastor*, 65–68.

⁸⁸ Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2009), 15.

⁸⁹ E. M. Bounds, *Preacher and Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1950), 6.

⁹⁰ Bounds, *Preacher and Prayer*, 11.

strategies pastors can strengthen their personal prayer lives. First, pastors must build an obedience to praying that leads to the joy of praying. Next, pastors must take the initiative to pray instead of waiting for a crisis to occur and then reactively praying. Lawless states, “When we pray only after the enemy seems to winning, we let the devil set the agenda for our prayer list.”⁹¹ Pastors must be more proactive in their prayer lives, lifting up their families, neighbors, congregations, and themselves before a crisis happens and then praying over that crisis. Next, pastors need to pray strategically and continually, or as the apostle Paul puts it, to pray constantly. By incorporating some simple prayer strategies into their prayer lives, pastors will steadily build a vibrant prayer life that reflects the joy of praying.

Pastors also have an incredible opportunity to teach and model prayer before the congregation through the pulpit ministry. Preaching is vitally important, but pastors can exhort and inspire their congregations from the pulpit through their public, Spirit-filled prayers.⁹² The congregation needs to see biblical, passionate, Spirit-filled prayer from the pulpit. The goal of public praying from the pulpit is not to impress the congregation, but too often pastors are careless when it comes to public praying. Not only do pastors model prayer from the pulpit, but pastors also demonstrate the high priority through its calendar and budgeting.⁹³ If a church values prayer then it will be evident in its year-round ministry strategy and activities.

Local Churches Experience Spiritual Fruitfulness in Revitalization When Devoted to Corporate Prayer

Michael Catt, the longtime pastor of Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany,

⁹¹ Lawless, *Lord, Teach Us to Pray*, 16.

⁹² Blackaby and Fisher, *Developing a Powerful Praying Church*, 54–64.

⁹³ Charles E. Lawless Jr., *Serving in Your Church Prayer Ministry*, ed. Paul E. Engle, Zondervan Practical Ministry Guides (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 39–42.

Georgia, wrote in his book *The Power of Purpose*, “All across the world there are churches that stand out when you hear their names—some because of great impact and others because of what they used to be.”⁹⁴ However, many of these once thriving churches have significantly declined, or worse, closed their doors. Communities across America are filled with vacant church buildings, a heartbreaking reminder of the crisis facing Christianity in the postmodern West. Catt continues, “If we aren’t purposeful in prayer, we are powerless, both individually and corporately. A church is no stronger than her prayer ministry.”⁹⁵ The weekly prayer meeting has increasingly become less attended and trivial, losing its evangelistic outreach as it focuses more on inward needs. Local churches must regain its focus and purpose for corporate prayer if it is experience revitalization and make an impact for the kingdom of God in their local communities.

In spite of the widespread struggles of the local church, God calls his people to pray and to trust that he will bring about corporate revitalization. Erroll Hulse states, “God himself has instituted prayer as a means of grace.”⁹⁶ When the church faithfully, persistently, and humbly prays, the Lord responds for the glory of his name. The prophet Isaiah provides a picture of this type of praying: “I have appointed watchmen on your walls; they will never be silent, day or night. There is no rest for you, who remind the Lord. Do not give him rest until he establishes and makes Jerusalem the praise of the earth” (Isa 62:6–7). The fruits of local church revitalization occurs when Christians take seriously the promises of God and persistently petition the Lord corporately in prayer. As the church deepens its prayer life, it gradually develops a culture of prayer with a strategic prayer ministry focusing on the spiritual needs of the community. Overtime, the

⁹⁴ Michael Catt, *The Power of Purpose: Breaking through to Intentional Living* (Nashville: B&H, 2017), 13.

⁹⁵ Catt, *The Power of Purpose*, 19.

⁹⁶ Erroll Hulse, *Give Him No Rest: A Call to Prayer for Revival* (Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1991), 23.

community will recognize that the local church is visible in the community, aware of their needs, and creates evangelistic opportunities. Just as it takes commitment to develop one's personal prayer life, the corporate prayer life of the local church also takes time to cultivate. The local church reclaims its purpose as a house of prayer.

Pastors must first teach their congregation the purpose of biblical prayer and the significance of gathering together to pray. In his dissertation, Dean Craig Clark addressed the development of a prayer culture within the work of revitalization and how pastors can implement a commitment to Spirit-led prayer in the everyday life of the church. His research indicated that churches experienced revitalization when pastors devoted themselves to personal prayer, taught their congregations to pray, established specific patterns of corporate prayer, and refocused the midweek gathering on prayer rather than teaching. After gathering data through surveys and interviews, Clark concluded that effective revitalization efforts were grounded in humble and fervent prayer.⁹⁷ His dissertation provides both encouragement and a framework for developing a culture of prayer within the local church. The apostle Paul exhorts the church at Colossae to pray: "Devote yourselves to prayer, stay alert in it with thanksgiving" (Col 4:2).

Corporate prayer. Personal prayer is vitally important, but the early New Testament church regularly gathered to pray. They understood the incredible spiritual power and intense camaraderie as they regularly prayed corporately. For example, when Peter was arrested by Herod Agrippa, "the church prayed very earnestly for him" (Acts 12:5). They were united in prayer for a faithful brother and it demonstrated their love for one another. Corporate prayer displays the majesty of God, produces congregational unity through confession and repentance, and enlarges the local church's vision to proclaim the gospel both locally and globally. John Franklin states, "The greatest workings of God

⁹⁷ Dean Craig Clark, "Transforming the Prayer Culture in Church Revitalizations: A Mixed Methods Study" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019), 130–47.

come by corporate prayer, and we will not see the power of God in sufficient measure to transform the world around us until we pray together.”⁹⁸ One of the first ways pastoral leaders can encourage corporate praying is to solicit members to gather weekly to pray for them, their families, and their ministries.⁹⁹ When pastoral leaders are strengthened and encouraged through a praying congregation, they are better equipped to lead the congregation towards powerful, God-exalting corporate praying.

One of the major causes for spiritual decline in many local churches is the lack of meaningful corporate prayer.¹⁰⁰ One reason is unconfessed sin within the local body and the absence of humble repentance. God is powerful enough to act and accomplish his purposes without his people praying, but he chooses to work through the faithful prayers of the church. However, the conditional nature of God’s mercies necessitates repentance.¹⁰¹ In the context of revitalization, the lack of meaningful corporate confession is a barrier to God pouring forth his Spirit in response to prayer. Many churches experiencing significant spiritual apathy lack the humility to repent.

Many congregations tragically are not praying corporately for the spiritual needs of their local communities and for the mission of the global church, yet it not just limited to one particular denomination: it is a spiritual crisis affecting Christ’s church throughout the West. In his dissertation, Jarrod Jennings Hylden witnessed this similar lack of corporate prayer within his local Lutheran congregation.¹⁰² Therefore, he set out to strengthen the prayer life of the church by leading and equipping laypeople to lead

⁹⁸ John Franklin, *And the Place Was Shaken: How to Lead a Powerful Prayer Meeting* (Nashville: B&H, 2005), 4.

⁹⁹ Lawless, *Lord, Teach Us to Pray*, 31.

¹⁰⁰ Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 63–69.

¹⁰¹ Richard Owen Roberts, *Repentance: The First Word of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 75–79.

¹⁰² Jarrod Jennings Hylden, “Equipping the Leaders of Skrefsrud Lutheran Church of Beresford, South Dakota to Lead Prayer Meetings Based on the Lord’s Prayer and the Psalms,” (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 2–3.

corporate gatherings to pray the Lord's Prayer and the Psalms. Praying the Scriptures is an incredibly profitable and spiritual enriching way to lead congregations to pray corporately. To effectively lead and sustain local church revitalization, meaningful corporate prayer must become the heartbeat of the local church.

Many Christians do not delight in praying because they are "bored" with praying the same old things.¹⁰³ Prayer is not supposed to be boring. However, the issue is not praying about the same old things; the problem is saying the same old things about the same old things which leads to a deficient prayer life.¹⁰⁴ Every Christian not only can have a meaningful personal prayer life, but the corporate prayer life of the congregation can also be vibrant and powerful. One of the ways to accomplish this is by filtering prayers through reading the Bible. Most Christians likely cannot begin praying first thing in the morning, but the Scripture can ignite people's hearts to pray. In addition, praying corporately about the same old things through the words of Scripture can bring about a rich and powerful corporate prayer life to the local church.

Prayerless churches generally reflects the prayerlessness of the pastor. The sad reality is that pastors preach sermons on prayer, teach about prayer, read books about prayer, and encourage people to pray, but they struggle to pray. Prayer strategies applied to others in the church seldom lead to lasting changes in the church. Pastoral leaders must actively lead their congregations in corporate prayer from the pulpit. E. M. Bounds states, "None but praying leaders can have praying followers. Praying apostles will beget praying saints. A praying pulpit will beget praying pews."¹⁰⁵ When local churches establish a culture of prayer and devote meaningful time to praying corporately, the Lord uses it as a catalyst to bring about local church revitalization.

¹⁰³ Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 11–21.

¹⁰⁴ Whitney, *Praying the Bible*, 20.

¹⁰⁵ Bounds, *Preacher and Prayer*, 120.

Intercessory prayer. The apostle Paul’s letters in the New Testament are filled with examples of how he models praying for others. Intercessory praying is the act of petitioning, appealing, and intervening to the Lord on behalf of others.¹⁰⁶ Praying for others is crucial for local church revitalization because it demonstrates the church’s heartfelt desire for God to accomplish his purposes in people’s lives. Foster describes intercessory prayer as selfless prayer, self-giving prayer, and a priestly ministry.”¹⁰⁷ As Christians intercede on behalf of others, they intercede with the assurance that Christ himself is the eternal intercessor. Intercessory prayer is not easy and it can lead to frustration, impatience, and discouragement; however, Christians must remain persistent. Like the watchmen on the walls who do not rest and give the Lord no rest, Christians exhibit patient determination trusting in the Lord’s sovereign purposes (Isa 62:6–7).

Local churches need a grand vision of intercessory prayer that is evangelistic and seeks the spiritual well-being of others. For example, Paul not only encouraged the church at Colossae to be persistently devoted, spiritually vigilant, and have a thankful heart when praying, but he also offered one special request. He asks, “pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains, so that I may make it known as I should” (Col 4:3–4). At the time Paul writes this letter he is imprisoned, yet he does not request prayer for his personal freedom, instead, he asks the church to pray for God to open a door to share the gospel.

Paul was more concerned with the spiritual needs of others despite his personal circumstances. His prayers throughout his letters provide incredible insight into his framework for prayer that leads to spiritual reformation. For example, he opens his second letter to the church of Thessalonica with a prayer of gratitude and thanks for the

¹⁰⁶ J. William Thompson and Trent C. Butler, “Intercession,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2003), 828, Logos Bible Software 9.

¹⁰⁷ Foster, *Prayer*, 349–50.

signs of grace present among the Christians.¹⁰⁸ As Paul petitions the Lord, his prayers are framed within the context of thanking God for the growing love and enduring faith of his fellow Christians under intense tribulation. It is a reminder as Christians that we need to pray for the church, especially Christians who are proclaiming the good news under intense persecution. Too often prayer becomes an add-on to other programs: neglecting adoration, praise, and thanksgiving for God, genuine confession and spiritual renewal, and intercession for unbelievers. One of the ways to strengthen the prayer meeting is for the congregation to pray for others.

Prayer meetings. Many churches have established prayer gatherings, such as the traditional midweek prayer meeting alongside the regular fellowship meals; however, these established prayer times have generally become sparsely attended, inwardly focused, lack evangelistic efforts, and apathetic towards the spiritual condition of the community. As Rials states, “Prayer meetings are too often ‘organ recitals’; we pray for people’s body parts.”¹⁰⁹ Praying for people’s physical needs is important; however, when inwardly driven physical needs are all that is prayed over, then the church lacks concern over the great spiritual needs of the community. The prayer meeting once functioned as the heart of a praying church; however, it has lost its significance, relevance, and power. Paul Miller describes how secularism has killed the prayer meeting, and the simultaneous combination of increasingly prayerlessness with the rise of secularism is no coincidence.¹¹⁰ Revitalization is difficult work which requires incredible patience and persistence in prayer.

Prayer meetings have seemingly lost its power and purpose because the

¹⁰⁸ D. A. Carson, *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 22–26.

¹⁰⁹ Cheyney and Rials, *Nuts and Bolts of Church Revitalization*, 22.

¹¹⁰ Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Church: Becoming a People of Hope in a Discouraging World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 14–18.

meeting itself lacks genuine, concerted prayer.¹¹¹ Bible studies are incredibly important and needed in the local church; however, prayer is deeply lacking in churches today. John Huss states, the originator of the dynamic term “Hour of Power” states, “Prayer makes its presence felt in every realm of church endeavor. It is indispensable. Prayer not only changes *THINGS*, but, thank God, prayer changes *PEOPLE*.”¹¹² The traditional prayer meeting has lost its power and relevance not because it is no longer effective, but because it has taken a backseat to other programs. As Huss articulates, the purpose of the prayer meeting is not merely to have a crowd, but to have a Christ-centered ministry that strengthens the people in their faith and compels them to meet regularly for wholehearted prayer.¹¹³ Charles Spurgeon preached to thousands every week, yet he understood Spirit-filled prayer to be the heartbeat of the local church. At one prayer meeting, Spurgeon praised God for saving multitudes of people during their prayer meetings and he also prayed for the Lord to save unbelievers who were present.¹¹⁴ Recapturing the power and effectiveness of the prayer meeting begins with prioritizing its spiritual significance and impact in the mission of the local church.

Prayerwalking. Another way local churches can enrich its corporate and evangelistic prayer life is through prayer walking.¹¹⁵ Prayer meetings are incredibly impactful and needed, but prayerwalking is an effective prayer strategy for local church

¹¹¹ Peter Deyneka, *Much Power Much Prayer: Change Your World through the Power of Prayer* (Loves Park, IL: Slavic Gospel Association, 2020), 57–74.

¹¹² John E. Huss, *Paths To Power: A Guide to Dynamic Mid-Week Prayer Meetings* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 19.

¹¹³ Huss, *Paths to Power*, 19.

¹¹⁴ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Only a Prayer Meeting: Studies on Prayer Meetings and Prayer Meeting Addresses* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2010), 14–15.

¹¹⁵ The Georgia Baptist Mission Board republished with permission a booklet called *Prayer Walking Made Simple*. The purpose of this pamphlet is to help local churches enhance their understanding, effectiveness, and enjoyment of walking with God in prayer. The original publication was produced by Dr. J. Chris Schofield of the North Carolina Baptist Convention.

revitalization because it encourages Christians to actively walk with Christ in unceasing fellowship as they intentionally pray in specific locations. Dan Crawford and Calvin Miller explain it this way; “Prayerwalking is intercession on location with information in cooperation against opposition for glorification.”¹¹⁶ God uses prayerwalking to embolden believers to actively intercede in prayer over their neighborhoods, schools, and communities by intentionally and actively praying outside the church buildings. It involves intercessory, intentional, and unceasing prayer in the very places Christians expect God to answer prayer.¹¹⁷ It is not a substitute for the traditional prayer meeting; instead, it encourages members to personally engage with the community, bringing awareness of the spiritual and physical needs of the community, and interceding. It is a way churches demonstrate they are serious about praying for the needs of the community by actively engaging with people.

Prayerwalking will ultimately lead to evangelistic opportunities by engaging with unbelievers and sharing with them the gospel. For older congregations, prayer drives are just as effective because people are actively praying outside the walls of the church building and witnessing firsthand the deep spiritual and physical needs of the community. It is more than just simply talking while walking around; prayer walking involves communion with God and intentionally interceding for the area being covered in prayer. For prayer walking to be effective, David Hibbert describes four biblical foundations: inspired revelation, territorial possession, identificational repentance, and spiritual warfare.¹¹⁸ As Christians prayerwalk, they submit to the Holy Spirit to guide their heart

¹¹⁶ Dan R. Crawford and Calvin Miller, *Prayer Walking: A Journey of Faith* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2002), 4–29.

¹¹⁷ Steve Hawthorne and Graham Kendrick, *Prayer Walking: Praying on Site with Insight* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1993), 15–18.

¹¹⁸ David R. Hibbert, *Transforming Your Territory through Prayer-Walking* (Brossard, Quebec, Canada: Destiny Media, 2017), 13–20. Personally, I agree with three of his biblical foundations; however, we must be careful with the concept of territorial possession. Many have sought to utilize this concept in unbiblical ways by claiming spiritual authority over demonic strongholds in specific geographic locations. My purpose in citing this work was to encourage our church to actively engage the community

and footsteps as they call upon the Lord to reign and rule over the location.

Prayerwalking is a spiritual battle and it requires patient persistence, trusting in God to transform the territory for his glory. Prayerwalking begins with hearts cleansed, minds focused, and eyes open to the Lord's guidance. Over time, Christians will develop a daily devotion to praying unceasingly, to intentionally pray everywhere.

Conclusion

As the church throughout America continues to experience significant decline and spiritual apathy, the nation continues to experience increased moral degradation. As biblical and church history testifies, a powerful movement of prayer necessitates personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization. The Holy Spirit has led the church to advance the kingdom of God into more places than ever before, yet the church experiences significant struggles today. Postmodernism, secularism, and liberalism have increasingly weakened the doctrinal fidelity of the church, while prayerlessness has rendered the church spiritually powerless. These disturbing trends within the church should compel Christian congregations to pray for God to bring about an outpouring of revival from the Holy Spirit. Erroll Hulse states, "Our paramount need is for a revival of the kind that will deal with our lukewarmness, ineffectiveness, and discouragement so that we may be taken up with the love of Christ and want nothing else but to live out our lives to his glory and honour."¹¹⁹ The same is true for local church revitalization: churches today are in serious spiritual decline and only a movement of Spirit-driven prayer can lead to personal renewal and corporate revitalization.

Pastors need to recover a biblical vision and purpose for prayer in order to effectively shepherd their churches towards revitalization. Megan Hill states, "By

through prayer, see the great physical and spiritual needs that are evident, and to humbly call upon the name of the Lord to have lordship over our community.

¹¹⁹ Hulse, *Give Him No Rest*, 88.

humility and hard work, by joining in a common cause, by investing ourselves in the joys and sorrows of others, we grow in love for one another.”¹²⁰ As the local church prays together, it demonstrates its desire to see the world transformed for the glorious name of Christ. One of the solutions to reversing the current declining trends in local churches is the need for healthy churches led by effective pastoral leaders who have a God-inspired vision for revitalization through the power of prayer. God alone through an outpouring of his Spirit, brings about personal and corporate renewal. However, the Lord graciously uses his people as a catalyst for the revitalization through the power of Spirit-driven prayer. Declining and dying churches, particularly those in the rural context, need hope and a biblical vision for the future. The Bible offers clear instructions for God’s people to pray, yet prayerlessness permeates many local congregations today. Only heaven-sent revivals and Spirit-driven revitalization can revive unrepentant believers, immoral nations, and dying churches, but it requires a movement of unceasing prayer. Prayer is a gracious invitation from God to simply ask him for things according to his will in the name of Jesus Christ.

¹²⁰ Megan Hill, *Prayer Together: The Priority and Privilege of Prayer in Our Homes, Communities, and Churches* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 68.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The overarching question for this research was how pastors can lead local church revitalization through the power of Spirit-driven prayer. As the statistics revealed, the majority of local churches today need revitalization, yet there are various ways pastoral leaders seek to lead this effort. However, it was the conviction and intention of this research project to demonstrate that local church revitalization occurs through a foundation of Spirit-led prayer. Jeffersonville Baptist Church has experienced a significant decline affecting the spiritual health of the congregation, specifically in the spiritual discipline of prayer. In order to lead JBC towards revitalization, this research project was designed to discover how prayer currently impacts the lives of our congregation and how prayer is foundational to revitalization. Local church revitalization emerges when God's people humbly seek him in steadfast prayer; therefore, helping to deepen the individual and corporate prayer life of the church members was essential because local churches like JBC can experience authentic revitalization and transform the community for Jesus Christ through Spirit-led prayer. The ministry project was scheduled for eighteen weeks, beginning February 12 and ending June 18.

Description of the Preparation Period

Listed below are some research questions designed to help fulfill the stated purpose of this ministry project. In order to effectively lead JBC towards revitalization through a foundation of Spirit-driven prayer, the people need a basic understanding of biblical prayer and how prayer can lead to revitalization (i.e. what prayer is, how prayer is modeled in Scripture, and why prayer is vitally important to the spiritual health of

Christians). The stated research questions are designed to discover the congregation's current prayer practices. For example, I wanted to learn if their prayers were more inwardly focused on their own personal needs and the needs of the church, or if their prayers were more outwardly focused on the spiritual needs of the community. The pre-assessment questionnaire provided some key indicators of the congregation's current knowledge and prayer practices. The following research questions were designed to help guide me in discovering the current knowledge and prayer practices of JBC as I seek to lead them toward revitalization through the power of prayer.

1. What are the current prayer practices of the people of Jeffersonville Baptist Church?
2. How important is prayer to the overall spiritual health of the congregation of Jeffersonville Baptist Church?
3. What factors hinder the prayer life of the people of Jeffersonville Baptist Church?
4. How can the people of Jeffersonville Baptist Church effectively pray for the community?
5. How can prayer lead to revitalization at Jeffersonville Baptist Church?

The research instrument utilizes a mixed-methods design that evaluates the qualitative and quantitative elements of survey questions and open-ended questions.¹ By analyzing these data elements, I hoped to discover the current prayer patterns and biblical knowledge of the congregation in order to effectively and biblically shepherd my congregation towards revitalization through prayer. My research methodology began by providing the pre-assessment questionnaire in order to gather basic information about the current knowledge and prayer patterns of the congregation. Built into the survey was also a series of open-ended questions intended to probe deeper into the experiences and thoughts of the people. At the completion of this project, this same research assessment

¹ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2018), 235.

was provided and the data was analyzed utilizing a convergent mixed methods design.² By collecting the data through both qualitative and quantitative means, analyzing the data separately, and then merging the results, I hoped to discover our congregation's current knowledge and prayer patterns so that I could implement a multifaceted prayer strategy to enhance the church members' knowledge and prayer practices as I shepherd them towards revitalization through the power of prayer. The questions were also designed to help uncover the depth of the church's personal and corporate prayer life because Spirit-led prayer is foundational for personal renewal and church revitalization.

Preparation Period: Weeks 1–2

The first phase of the ministry project assessed the test group on the subject of prayer and how Spirit-filled prayer is a catalyst for local church revitalization. On February 12, 2023, during the regular Sunday evening worship gathering, I gave the congregation a brief overview of the research project, its stated goals, and the pre-assessment questionnaire. The prayer assessment survey was distributed to the congregation in order to gather information about their current knowledge, practice, and experiences of prayer. The assessment consisted of three major parts.³ The first part was comprised of fifteen questions utilizing a six-point Likert scale to assess the basic knowledge and prayer practices of the participants. The second part encompassed a combination of multiple choice and short answer responses to assess a deeper understanding of their knowledge and prayer practices. The third part contained ten open-ended questions designed to probe deeper into their thoughts and experiences of the prayer. The pre-assessment survey was designed to meet the objective of the first goal of the ministry project.

² Creswell and Creswell, 240–44.

³ See appendix 1.

Overview of the pre-assessment preparation period. The pre-assessment survey was distributed on February 12 to twenty-two members and regular attendees of JBC and was completed by the Sunday evening service on February 19. Three of the surveys were delivered via email to those members who requested a survey. There were twenty-two surveys returned and the information was analyzed and compiled to debrief the congregation at the Sunday evening service on February 26. As the pastor, I also completed a questionnaire in order to discover my current knowledge and prayer patterns so that I could more effectively shepherd the church toward revitalization through the power of prayer. The surveys were completed on paper and manually entered into an Excel spreadsheet to generate the initial data for analysis.⁴

Next, the congregation was given a “7 for 7” prayer card in preparation for Easter Sunday 2023.⁵ The purpose of the prayer card was to fulfill the third stated goal for this ministry project, which was facilitating among the congregation greater intentionality for intercessory prayer and evangelism in our community. Each individual was given a prayer card and encouraged to list the names of seven individuals and/or families and, to intentionally pray for them over the next seven weeks, and invite them to attend our Easter Sunday worship service.⁶ The prayer card was not some magical solution to prayer; instead, it was to visually remind the saints to intercede for those listed on their cards who are either unbelievers or not currently attending a local church. Using Easter Sunday as target date, I wanted our congregation to intentionally and actively pray

⁴ The results from the pre assessment survey are detailed in Chapter 5.

⁵ See appendix 2.

⁶ The Big Easter Invite was a strategy developed by the Georgia Baptist Mission Board to encourage churches to intentionally invite people to attend church on Easter Sunday. The 7 for 7 Prayer Card is designed to encourage the congregation to write down the names of seven individuals and/or families, particularly those who are unbelievers or not attending church, and to intentionally pray for those names and invite them to church on Easter Sunday. This is a simple, yet effective way to get the church intentionally and actively praying evangelistically, which God can use as a catalyst for local church revitalization. When I began my pastorate in January 2020, I utilized a similar strategy by giving each person an index card and encouraging them to write the names of three individuals and/or families they will pray regularly for and invite to church.

for their listed names so that they not only would attend Easter Sunday but use that as a catalyst for the Spirit to move in their lives to follow Christ and to commit to attending church. The cards were distributed on February 12 to give the congregation a week to pray over names to list. On February 19, we set aside a special time of corporate prayer during the morning and evening services to specifically pray for the names on their cards. Over the next seven weeks leading up to Easter Sunday, we set aside a time of prayer during the Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday evening gatherings to pray for these names. Finally, we scheduled a prayer service for Wednesday evening, April 5, in order to engage in intercessory prayer for Easter Sunday and the prayer cards.

Overview of the sermon series preparation period. During the research phase of this ministry project, I developed a series of sermon outlines that focused on prayer and local church revitalization. During the preparation phase, I designed the sermon outlines to address the context of the congregation's current knowledge and prayer practices and to enrich the prayer life of the church as a catalyst for revitalization. After collecting the surveys and compiling the data, on February 26, I shared an overview of the pre-assessment analysis and discussed the purpose of the upcoming sermon series with the congregation. After this, I met with the five deacons and distributed to them copies of the sermon evaluation tool and the seven sermon overviews. The theme of the sermon series was "Pray and Go: Praying for Revitalization."⁷

I announced the sermon series each week in the church bulletin and on social media. The sermon series consisted of seven sermons preached on each Sunday in March during the morning and evening services. I preached the final sermon during the morning service on March 26. The evening service consisted of a review of the sermon series and a focused time of prayer for the names on the 7 for 7 card and for the community. By

⁷ See appendix 4.

preaching the sermons in this format my expectation was for the congregation to make the connection between prayer and revitalization. Each week “The Big Idea”, a summary statement for each individual sermon, was posted in the bulletin. A copy of each sermon outline was printed and available for each individual, particularly the deacons who evaluated the overall sermon series using the sermon evaluation tool⁸.

At the conclusion of the sermon series, a meeting with the deacons was scheduled to discuss their evaluation of the sermon series.⁹ This meeting took place on Wednesday evening, March 29, after the regularly scheduled prayer meeting and Bible study. The deacons were given copies of the sermon evaluation tool and the individual sermon outlines before the series started so they could provide detailed critiques at the conclusion of the sermon series. We went through the sermon evaluation tool and discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the sermon series. We also discussed the need to begin a prayer group. Three of deacons specifically mentioned how this church experienced growth several decades ago because the men of the church regularly gathered to pray.

Also, two upcoming community worship services focusing on corporate prayer were announced. First, a community-wide Palm Sunday evening worship service was scheduled for the evening of April 2, with an emphasis on intercessory prayer for the community leading up to Easter Sunday. Also, a community-wide corporate prayer service was scheduled for Wednesday evening, April 5. With Easter Sunday approaching on April 9, the purpose of this corporate prayer service was to intentionally pray for God to pour forth his Spirit upon the community to draw people to attend church on Easter Sunday, using it as a catalyst for personal salvations and dedicated church attendance. As Randy Sprinkle states, “When we pray, we are putting on public record our agreement

⁸ See appendix 3.

⁹ The results of the Sermon Evaluation Tool are detailed in Chapter 5.

with God's desires for this needy world and we are asking in the answer-assuring name of His very Son."¹⁰ The prayer service consisted of a focused time of corporate prayer, Scripture readings, and hymns.

Description of the Implementation Period

During the implementation period of the project, I began with a sermon series hoping to increase the congregation's knowledge of biblical prayer and understanding of how Spirit-driven prayer leads to personal and corporate renewal and revitalization of the local church. After examining the pre-assessment responses, I discovered based on the quantitative responses that the congregation as a whole believed they had a relatively thorough understanding of biblical prayer and that they are devoted to the practice of prayer in their personal lives. After probing the multiple-choice and open-ended responses, I also noticed that their prayers are more inwardly focused on the needs of the church and less on the outward evangelistic needs of the community. Therefore, I prayerfully and strategically crafted sermons rooted in biblical passages that focused on the purpose of prayer and the importance of intercessory praying.

After the sermon series, I wanted to enrich the personal and corporate prayer patterns of my congregation by leading them to actively engage in some intercessory prayer opportunities, such as the 7 for 7 prayer card for Easter, prayerwalking, and a weekend evangelism outreach event. In addition, I hoped to strengthen the congregation's corporate prayer patterns during our Sunday morning and evening worship services and the Wednesday night prayer meeting. After examining the pre-assessment questionnaire, one of the trends I noticed was that the congregation generally believes that we needed to strengthen the corporate prayer patterns of the church. By modeling evangelistic intercessory prayer during the weekly corporate worship gatherings and prioritizing

¹⁰ Randy Sprinkle, *Follow Me: Becoming a Lifestyle Prayerwalker*, rev. ed. (Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 2013), 85.

meaningful evangelistic prayer during the midweek prayer meeting, it was my hope to enrich the personal and corporate prayers of the congregation.

Sermon Series Period: Weeks 3–6

The implementation period of the ministry project consisted of increasing the congregation's biblical knowledge of prayer and how it leads to local church revitalization. In focusing the congregation's attention on biblical prayer, the sermon series was designed to teach the church what biblical prayer is, how and why Christians are to rightly pray, how God uses prayer as a catalyst for revitalization, and what are practical ways to pray for revitalization. The sermon series was preached during the month of March culminating with a recap of the overall sermon series and an opportunity for the congregation to ask questions. The format for the sermon series was strategic in that the individual sermons preached each Sunday morning and evening were connected to a common aspect of prayer leading to revitalization. An outline for each sermon was provided for the congregation and each message contained a summary statement called "The Big Idea."¹¹ The following sections provide a clearer understanding of this strategic plan for the sermon series. In the week leading up to the start of the sermon series, it was promoted through social media, the church website, and the weekly Sunday bulletin. The series theme was titled, "Pray and Go: Praying for Revitalization."¹²

Week 1 sermons. The first two sermons were preached during week one of the series and each focused on defining biblical prayer and how Christians are to rightly pray. Using Genesis 4:17–26 and Matthew 6:5–13, the first two sermons highlighted the means

¹¹ The Big Idea is a summary statement designed to help the congregation understand the overall point of the sermon. Although I organize my sermons in an outline with individual points drawn from the biblical text, the Big Idea provides listeners with a single summary point to help them capture the of the essence of the message. I use this strategy for sermons and teaching lessons.

¹² See appendix 5 for the series announcement and visual. Also, each week I provided a short blog entry in the Sunday morning worship bulletin which provided a message of encouragement related to the individual sermons and its connection to the overall series theme. See appendix 6 for the weekly blogs.

and ends of Christian praying for revitalization. The first sermon, “Calling Upon the Name of the Lord” from Genesis 4:17–26 was preached on Sunday morning, March 5.¹³ The Big Idea from this message was this: “Prayer is central to the revitalization of the local church because as Christians when we call upon the name of the Lord, we are trusting in the name of the one who can do that which only he can do, and that is to save people from their sin and to bring about personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization.” The biblical text gives an account of two genealogies descending from Adam. The first genealogy is the lineage of Cain, the firstborn son of Adam and Eve. The second genealogy is from the thirdborn son Seth. The biblical account reveals how these two families, both descended from Adam, took drastically different paths in life. The line from Cain continued to spiral deeper into sin and moral depravity, exalting their name and accomplishments to the world. However, the line descending from Seth began to call upon the name of the Lord, exalting the name of God in the world.

The second sermon, “Pray in this Way” from Matthew 6:5–13 was preached on Sunday evening, March 5.¹⁴ Often referred to as “The Lord’s Prayer,” this text is best described as “The Model Prayer.” In this passage, Jesus gave his disciples a framework for how to pray, which contrasted with the hypocritical way the Jewish religious authorities prayed and the self-centered prayers of the pagans. The Big Idea for this sermon was this: “Prayer is central to revitalization of the local church because as Christians who are adopted children of God through the person of Jesus Christ, we humbly and wholeheartedly pray to the Father, in the name of Jesus, that the Lord and his name is honored and glorified in all our requests.” Jesus did not give the disciples a list of prayer requests; instead, he offered a framework for praying to the Father who invites his people to pray and he inclines his ear to their petitions. In praying to God, Christians

¹³ See appendix 4.

¹⁴ See appendix 4.

desire that the name of the Lord be honored above all their requests. This is important for personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization because it is the desire of Christians to cry out to God in the name of Jesus Christ to accomplish his divine purposes. Both sermons pointed the people of Jeffersonville Baptist Church to earnestly call upon the name of the Lord in prayer and come before him rightly and humbly for the purpose of honoring his name.

Week 2 sermons. The third and fourth sermons revealed how the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit not only accomplishes the divine purposes of God but also how the Lord graciously uses the faithful prayers of his people in the work of redemption. The third sermon in this series, entitled “When God Invades the Boneyard” came from Ezekiel 37:1–14 and was preached during the morning service on March 12.¹⁵ This passage is commonly used to support God’s supernatural work of revival, but it is also appropriate for the context of local church revitalization. The Big Idea was this: “Prayer is central for local church revitalization because as Christians we understand that God alone has the supernatural power to bring dying churches back to life, yet he graciously uses the prayers of his faithful people as a catalyst to accomplish his divine purposes.”

Within the context of this passage, the Lord took Ezekiel through a supernaturally vision into a valley filled with decayed bones. The Lord asked Ezekiel if these bones could live, to which Ezekiel responded that only the Lord knows. The prophet undoubtedly knew that God has the power to do anything, including bringing the decayed bones back to life again. However, Ezekiel’s response was crucial because he believed the Lord could do anything, but the question remained whether he desired to restore life to the bones. God indeed desired to supernaturally resurrect the decayed bones, but he used Ezekiel as a catalyst, commanding him to prophesy to the bones. The

¹⁵ See appendix 4.

picture of the valley of decayed bones resembled exiled Israel, but the Lord would faithfully and mercifully restore them to their land. This is a beautiful reminder for local church revitalization today. Like JBC, many churches across Twiggs County, Georgia, and the United States resemble a declining, dying, and decaying boneyard; yet God graciously calls his people to pray and depend upon the Spirit to bring revitalization.

The fourth sermon preached on Sunday evening March 12 continued with the theme of addressing the supernatural outpouring of the Spirit to accomplish the divine purposes of the Lord while using God's faithful people as a catalyst for his redemptive work. This sermon, entitled "Earthshaking Prayer" came from Acts 4:23–37.¹⁶ The Big Idea for this sermon was this: "Prayer is crucial for local church revitalization because when the church is wholeheartedly unified and devoted to praying corporately in the name of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will bring about supernatural spiritual transformation to empower the church to boldly fulfill the Great Commission." This sermon not only emphasized the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in giving the Christian community bold power to proclaim the gospel despite facing hostile opposition, but it also addressed the significance of the Christian community corporately praying. When the church is united in corporate prayer, the Spirit responds in powerful and miraculous ways to bring about spiritual transformation and local church revitalization.

Week 3 sermons. The fifth and sixth sermons addressed the contrast between faithful, persistent intercessory prayer and prayerlessness. One reason many local churches today are declining is because they are not devoted to prayer or their prayers are overwhelmingly focused on the inward needs of the church members and lack a spirit of intercession and evangelism. For example, too often the traditional prayer meetings, which have largely become sporadically attended, simply lack meaningfulness and

¹⁶ See appendix 4.

spiritual power because the church is not burdened for the spiritual needs of others. Worse, the members of declining and dying local churches simply do not pray. There are plenty of excuses for prayerlessness, including busyness, apathy, bitterness, disappointment, or dryness; however, prayerlessness reflects the condition of the heart. Using Paul's prayers, week three's sermons focused on the power of interceding prayer and how to overcome the hurdles of prayerlessness.

The fifth sermon, preached on March 19 during the morning service, was entitled "Passionate Prayer for People." It came from 1 Thessalonians 2:17–3:13 and focused on the power of intentional, Spirit-driven intercessory prayer for others.¹⁷ Intercession means "to stand in the gap" or "mediate between two differing parties." Throughout the Bible, intercessory prayer is evident. Abraham prayed for God to spare the righteous as the Lord was going to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:16–33). Moses interceded on behalf the Israelite nation because their sin of building and worshipping the golden calf angered the Lord (Exod 32). In John 17, Jesus prayed for his disciples and for all believers. In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul stated that the exalted Christ intercedes on our behalf before the heavenly Father (Rom 8:27–34). If intercessory prayer was important during both the earthly ministry of Jesus and now as he sits on the throne in heaven, then Christians must passionately intercede for others.

The historical context of this passage was that Paul planted a church in Thessalonica but was forced to leave the city due to intense opposition and hostility (Acts 17:1–9). However, he longed to be with these Christians and was wholeheartedly concerned about their spiritual welfare. In reading the text, Paul's passionate affection for these people is evident; one can feel the emotion and passion Paul has for this congregation. Therefore, his prayer for them was a prayer of thanks to God for their faith.

¹⁷ See appendix 4.

The Big Idea for this sermon was this: “Prayer is crucial for local church revitalization because it demonstrates our passion for people as we lovingly and wholeheartedly petition the Lord on their behalf.” When we intercede for others, there is no greater prayer we can offer them than to pray that God would strengthen their faith so that they can stand blameless and faithful before the Lord on the last day. If God graciously grants personal renewal, nation revival, and local church revitalization, it begins with the local church praying together on behalf of others for God’s glory in their lives.

The sixth sermon was preached during the evening service on March 19. This message, entitled “Overcoming the Faithless Pride of Prayerlessness” came from Philippians 1:9–13.¹⁸ There are many excuses Christians make for not praying, but ultimately it comes down to the condition of the heart and a matter of faith. For example, Christians oftentimes use the reason of busyness as a cause for prayerlessness. In Luke 10:38–42, Jesus was invited to the home of two sisters: Martha and Mary. While there, Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to him speak while Martha was busy serving a gracious host. Martha then vented her irritation at Mary’s laziness to Jesus by saying, “Lord, doesn’t it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do the work? Tell her to come and help me” (Luke 10:40). Jesus’s response likely stunned Martha as he explained to her that what Mary was doing was more important (Luke 10:41–42). Pastoral leaders and Christian laypeople are busy with important ministry tasks, yet prayer is rarely prioritized.

Another reason for prayerlessness is spiritual emptiness. Christians can allow their feelings and emotions to dictate their prayer life. Bitterness, apathy, disappointment, and shame are some of the emotions that become hurdles to praying. Even unrepentant, unconfessed sin can create disunity among the congregation and cause prayerlessness. Christians forget the imperative words of Paul: “Rejoice in hope, be patient in affliction,

¹⁸ See appendix 4.

be persistent in prayer” (Rom 12:12). To overcome the barriers to praying, Paul encouraged the church at Philippi through intercessory prayer to continue growing in their love for one another, pursuing holiness so they would be found blameless and pure at the day of the Lord (Phil 1:9–11). The Big Idea for this message was this: “Prayer is essential to local church revitalization because it is the chief exercise of faith.” When we do not pray, it reveals our faithless pride that dishonors God and puts trust in ourselves. Christians must fight prayerlessness by repenting of our unbelief and fueling our faith with God’s promises if we truly hope to see personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization. Satan loves nothing more than to see prayerless Christians because he understands the power of Spirit-filled prayer. In order to witness personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization local churches must fight against prayerlessness.

Week 4 sermon and debrief. The final sermon, preached during the morning service on March 26, came from Isaiah 62:1–12 and the message was entitled, “Give God No Rest In Prayer.” The Big Idea was this: “Prayer is essential and foundational for local church revitalization because it demonstrates our unwavering devotion and wholehearted confidence to persistently petition the Lord in prayer.” Christians faithfully and humbly serve as God’s watchmen by giving ourselves to relentless prayer as we give the Lord himself no rest until he brings about personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization. The purpose of this message was to bring all the sermon ideas together to demonstrate how Jeffersonville Baptist Church can faithfully pursue revitalization through the power of prayer.

The historical context of this passage centered on God raising up the prophet Isaiah to proclaim a divine message of both judgment and restoration. Because of the continued sinfulness of the people in rejecting God, the Lord sovereignly allowed a foreign empire, the Babylonians, to conquer the land and take captive God’s people.

Known as the period of the exile, the Israelites were driven from their homeland and held in captivity by the Babylonians. However, God promised to graciously restore a remnant of his people back to their homeland. In this passage, Isaiah spoke of the Lord posting watchmen on the walls to pray continuously without rest, but these watchmen were to also give the Lord himself no rest until he made Jerusalem the “praise of the earth” (Isa 62:6–7). This passage serves as a powerful reminder that God has posted his church to be the watchmen on the walls of our homes, churches, communities, and nation: praying without rest. Furthermore, Christians are to give the Lord no rest in prayer until he brings about the fulfillment of his redemptive purposes. If the local church today wants to experience revitalization, it must begin with relentless prayer, confidently trusting in the Lord’s sovereign purposes.

During the Sunday evening service, I used this opportunity to debrief the congregation on the sermon series and provided them with an opportunity to ask questions about the messages. I used a PowerPoint presentation for the purpose of highlighting each of the sermons and summary statements. I also used open-ended questions from the pre-assessment questionnaire to generate some discussion among the congregation. Again, the goal of these sermons was to demonstrate what the Bible says about prayer and how it serves as a catalyst for local church revitalization. My hope with the sermon series was to increase the congregation’s knowledge of biblical prayer so that it would move us toward enriching our personal and corporate prayer practices.¹⁹

Sermon series evaluation tool. At the conclusion of the sermon series, I met with the deacons on March 29 to discuss the sermon evaluation tool. The deacons were each given copies of the seven sermon outlines and the sermon evaluation tool prior to the beginning of the sermon series. Furthermore, each of the sermons were recorded on

¹⁹ Chapter 5 will address this debriefing session in more detail.

Facebook Live and DVDs were produced for those who missed any of the messages. Each of the deacons along with myself completed the sermon evaluation tool and we spent time discussing each element of the rubric and the overall impact of the sermon series.²⁰ The discussions and reflections generated from this meeting were very helpful and encouraging. For example, the formation of a weekly pastors' prayer group emerged from this discussion.

Since I have been at this church, starting a consistent prayer group has been on my heart. As a bi-vocational pastor, many factors inhibited the formation of a prayer group, but the heart of the problem was busyness. Many bi-vocational pastors like myself are simply overwhelmed trying to balance bi-vocational work and ministry, and prayer is usually lacking in their lives. Furthermore, pastoral leaders have implemented other ministry programs, yet do not focus on implementing a ministry of prayer. In his book, Cheyney identified that one of the top mistakes in rural church revitalization is handcuffing the church through feeble prayer. He states, "The vast number of churches that are in trouble today and in need of revitalization or renewal are a display of either prayerlessness or at the very least possess a prayer focus centered around what we desire over what the Lord has planned for His church."²¹ Understanding the need to form a prayer group, the deacons and I scheduled a weekly time prayer group we called "Pastors' Prayer Partners" which began on Tuesday morning, April 4 at 11:00 am in my office. This group has continued to regularly and faithfully meet each week, with the addition of some new men.

Intercessory Prayer Period: Weeks 3–16

The purpose of this phase was to successfully achieve the third goal of leading

²⁰ Further reflections from the Sermon Evaluation Tool are presented in Chapter 5.

²¹ Tom Cheyney, *Church Revitalization in Rural America: Restoring Churches in America's Heartland* (Orlando, FL: Renovate, 2018), 233.

the church to more intentionally and actively engage in intercessory prayer both inside the church and within the community. This project incorporated a number of opportunities to achieve this goal, such as enriching the congregation's corporate prayer patterns during the Sunday and Wednesday services, engaging in personal intercessory prayer strategies, and actively ministering to the community through prayer with community events, prayer-focused worship services, and prayerwalking. One of the ways God uses the prayers of his people as a catalyst for local church revitalization is when the local church is wholeheartedly devoted to transforming the community for Christ: to not only pray within the walls of the church but to reach out and engage the community through prayer.

As the pastor, I wanted to model personal and corporate intercessory prayer for the church by establishing a dedicated and consistent prayer group, intentionally visiting church members more often to pray, praying more evangelistically during the worship services, partnering with the community to sponsor events to offer prayer, prayerwalking throughout the community, and visiting local institutions simply to pray.²² In our debriefing discussions, the congregation responded that they never had a pastor lead them to be more involved in reaching the community and they were supportive of my efforts. Throughout this project, I have encouraged the church to follow my lead under the authority of the Spirit to more intentionally and actively engage the community with prayer and many have responded wholeheartedly. I also modeled ways to enrich the corporate praying of the church in our regular Sunday and Wednesday services, and the church has gradually responded positively.²³

²² See Chapter 5.

²³ See Chapter 5.

Corporate prayer during the midweek gathering. Jeffersonville Baptist Church is the prototypical established church with the traditional midweek gathering for prayer and Bible study. Many churches in decline continue to gather for the traditional midweek prayer meeting, yet prayer has too often been seriously lacking or focused more on the inward needs of the members. Furthermore, these prayer meetings have increasingly become sparsely attended because the prayer meeting has seemingly lost its meaningfulness and spiritual power. What usually takes place today is people come together for a family evening meal, say a quick prayer about someone's physical need, and then participate in a Bible study. There is obviously nothing wrong with having more Bible studies; however, actual prayer rarely occurs during the so called prayer meeting. The purpose of the gathering is deceiving when it is called a prayer meeting, yet little to no actual prayer happens. When prayer does occur, the meeting typically opens with the leader asking for requests, but most of the needs are usually focused on the multitude of general physical health needs of the members. The leader then prays briefly before transitioning into an extensive Bible study. As Randy Sprinkle states, "Once vibrant meetings that were characterized by fervent intercession have now degenerated into 'organ recitals.'"²⁴

In the four years I have served as pastor at JBC, that has primarily described our midweek routine. The Wednesday evening gathering has typically been led by myself or by a retired pastor who has also served as our senior adult Sunday school teacher prior to the COVID pandemic. After reading Charles Spurgeon's thoughts on prayer meetings and Paul Miller's book on the praying church, I wanted to prioritize prayer during the midweek prayer meeting. Miller states, "Prayer is not a ministry of the church—it is the heart of ministry through which the real, functional leadership of the intimate union of

²⁴ Sprinkle, *Follow Me: Becoming a Lifestyle Prayerwalker*, 118.

the Spirit and Jesus, formed at the resurrection, operates.”²⁵ Therefore, Rev. Slaughter and I met to discuss the new format for the Wednesday night prayer meeting. We decided to alternate months leading the prayer meeting and to structure the service by prioritizing prayer, but to also allow for a time of singing and a short Bible devotion.

In March, I led the Wednesday evening gatherings in order to continue building upon the sermon series on prayer for revitalization. Each week we opened the service with a prayer and then sang two hymns. Next, I received prayer requests. At first the requests continued to focus on the inward needs of the church. However, as I modeled evangelistic prayer, I began tracking the requests and I noted that our corporate praying shifted, focusing more outwardly and evangelistically. After taking the prayer requests, we had a short Bible lesson or devotion, keeping it to roughly ten minutes. After the devotion, we spent concentrated and meaningful time praying. Initially, the corporate praying time felt like an “organ recital,” but the focus gradually turned towards the spiritual needs of the others with the introduction of the prayer card. Although restructuring the midweek service was not a specific goal for this project, strengthening the corporate prayer patterns of the church was an important part of successfully leading our congregation to pray evangelistically.

The 7 for 7 prayer card. In February, I introduced the 7 for 7 prayer card to the congregation.²⁶ The purpose of this card was to encourage and challenge the church to list seven names of individuals or families—particularly targeting those who are unbelievers, unchurched, and don’t regularly attend church—to consistently pray for them during the seven weeks leading up to Easter Sunday, and to intentionally invite

²⁵ Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Church: Becoming a People of Hope in a Discouraging World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 29–30.

²⁶ See appendix 2. This card was modified from the Georgia Baptist Mission Board’s BIG EASTER INVITE. I modified this card to encourage the congregation to spend the seven weeks leading up to Easter praying for seven individuals and/or families and invite them to Easter Sunday 2023.

them to church at every opportunity. As I have learned more about my congregation and their families during my pastorate, I have discovered that many of their children and grandchildren fall into these categories. Like so many family members from declining and dying churches, these children and grandchildren grew up at JBC and likely made a profession of faith and were baptized; however, as they relocated many fallen away from the church and it is likely they were never truly spiritually saved.

My hope for this prayer strategy was to successfully achieve the third goal of this project, which was leading the congregation to more actively and intentionally pray for others, including their families. Each congregant that received the pre-assessment survey received this prayer card and they were reminded and encouraged each week to pray for their listed names. Each person who received a prayer card was also provided a copy of the prayer card self-reflection questionnaire. The survey consisted of ten open-ended questions and I by the end of the challenge hoped to discover that the prayer card strategy helped deepen the prayer patterns of our congregation.²⁷ I planned to collect these completed questionnaires by Wednesday evening, April 12. Every Sunday morning and evening, I set aside time to pray evangelistically for God to save unbelievers and draw people in our community to a local church. At the conclusion of each sermon, I offered a traditional altar call to give the congregation the opportunity to respond in prayer over their listed names. In addition, one of my deacons suggested that the pastor and deacons meet on Saturday evenings at the church to pray over the empty pews. We were not praying for God to just increase our attendance, but we were humbly approaching the Lord and asking him to save our lost family members, friends, and citizens and give them a burning desire to connect with a local church.

²⁷ See appendix 15.

Twiggs County Easter event. On Saturday, April 1, the city council and commissioners of Jeffersonville sponsored a community health walk and Easter egg hunt event.²⁸ Our elected representatives recently began to sponsor various community events, and they started inviting churches and local business to participate. In my four years in Jeffersonville, my church has regularly participated in these events, setting up a booth to provide information about JBC, invite people to church, and distribute snacks, gospel tracts, and other Christian literature; just simply connecting with the community. This year, we once again participated in the community event, but focused on inviting people to church and praying with people.

Usually in the past, several of my church members would provide snacks for me to distribute, but they generally did not attend; however for this event I strongly encouraged them to participate and to be present at the event. Fourteen of my members attended, including all five of my deacons. Not only did we distribute invite cards to our Easter Services with bags of cookies, we also prayed with many people. My children made a poster that announced “Free Prayer” and as we connected with people, we offered to pray with them or asked them to submit prayer requests on cards and drop them into the prayer box we provided. The response was incredible as we not only prayed with people, but we also engaged in some gospel conversations. It was truly an evangelistic opportunity that God provided with prayer serving as the catalyst. People also responded on their cards by contacting our church’s website and submitting prayer requests through the prayer link. I collected the cards and distributed them among the deacons to pray over, and we prayed for our community at the Easter Prayer Service we held on Wednesday evening, April 5.

²⁸ See appendix 7.

The Midweek Easter prayer service. We scheduled a community-wide prayer service for Wednesday evening, April 5, for the purpose of inviting local churches to unite in corporate prayer leading up to Easter Sunday.²⁹ Utilizing Kenneth Boa's book *Face to Face*, the prayer service focused on multiple aspects of worshipping God through prayer, including adoration, confession, renewal, petition, intercession, affirmation, and thanksgiving.³⁰ The order of the prayer service consisted of alternating between corporate prayer and congregational hymns.³¹ At the conclusion of the service, the final prayer time provided the congregation the opportunity to spend time praying for the names on their cards. This was definitely the most powerful moment during the service because of the heartfelt petition from members of the congregation praying specifically for the names on their cards.

Easter Sunday worship service. In the four years I have served as the pastor of JBC, this was not only the highest attended Easter service, but the most attended worship service in many years. It was a testament to the glory of the Lord that he would so faithfully and lovingly bless our efforts. Three individuals I listed on my card came to the Easter worship service. In following up with the congregation, I asked them how many of the people they prayed for attended the worship service and everyone responded that at least one of their listed names attended the service. During the time of response at the conclusion of my message, I made the point to thank guests and visitors for coming and said that many of them were here because of God's providence in using the prayers of our church members as a catalyst for moving in their hearts to come to church and to hear the gospel. I conveyed to them the purpose of the 7 for 7 prayer cards and that our

²⁹ See appendix 8.

³⁰ Kenneth Boa, *Face to Face: Praying the Scriptures for Intimate Worship*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 138–40.

³¹ See appendix 9.

church was continually praying for them and we humbly wanted them to return. I also urged the members to continue praying for all their names, to not let their prayers end with Easter Sunday, but to trust in God to move in the hearts of their listed names. Finally, I asked the guests and visitors to consider completing the connect cards so that we could follow up with them and we wanted to let us know how we could pray for them.

Prayerwalking Jeffersonville prayer card. On Wednesday evening, April 12, our church gathered for the regular midweek prayer meeting. During this gathering we spent considerable time in prayer, specifically thanking the Lord for the blessing of Easter Sunday and answering our prayers with the number of individuals from our prayer cards who attended.³² After we prayed, I introduced the second part of the intercessory prayer strategy; the “Prayerwalking Jeffersonville” prayer card.”³³ I distributed the cards on Wednesday and the following Sunday morning and evening, April 16. Next, I explained the purpose of the prayer card by providing a short overview of prayerwalking. Utilizing examples from the Bible and several prayerwalking resources cited earlier in this research, I communicated the vision of an ongoing prayerwalking ministry to pray for the community. After teaching a series on prayerwalking, encouraging the congregation to incorporate prayerwalking as part of their regular prayer pattern, and scheduling monthly corporate prayerwalks, I hoped to successfully achieve the ministry goal of prayerwalking at least one hundred homes in our community. Just like we spent the seven weeks praying specifically for individuals and families leading up to Easter Sunday, I asked the congregation to list up to seven specific homes and other locations and commit to prayerwalking during the next seven weeks leading up to the community evangelism event scheduled for June 2–3 at the City Park of Jeffersonville.

³² Boa, *Face to Face*, 6. For this prayer meeting, I specifically returned to this book and emphasized prayer of thanksgiving. The focal passage was Psalm 65:5–7.

³³ See appendix 10.

Prayerwalking is not some new or mystical church growth strategy; instead, it ultimately leads to unceasing fellowship with the Lord. In order to help the church better understand the purpose of prayer walking, I incorporated some of the resources on prayerwalking cited in previously in this project. One of the most significant biblical passages for me about prayerwalking comes from Deuteronomy 11:22–24: “For if you carefully observe every one of these commands I am giving you to follow—to love the Lord your God, walk in all his ways, and remain faithful to him—the Lord will drive out all these nations before you, and you will drive our nations greater and stronger than you are. Every place the sole of your foot treads will be yours.” In this passage, Moses reminded the new generation of Israelites of God’s blessings upon their obedience as they prepared to enter and possess the Promised Land. It provided encouragement for us because as we faithfully obeyed in the presence and power of the Spirit, God would use our prayerwalking as a catalyst to bring about spiritual transformation because he has lordship over those locations. Before the teaching session, the congregation was encouraged to prayerfully identify locations to prayerwalk; their neighborhoods, the schools, businesses, government institutions, parks and playgrounds, churches, and the hidden places throughout Jeffersonville and Twiggs County. During the teaching series, they were encouraged to consistently prayerwalk these locations.³⁴

Prayerwalking Jeffersonville teaching sessions. In order to provide my congregation with a basic understanding of prayerwalking, I utilized Randy Sprinkle’s six-week study.³⁵ In addition to applying Sprinkle’s book on prayerwalking, David Hibbert’s book *Transforming Your Territory through Prayer-Walking* was also helpful in

³⁴ See appendix 11.

³⁵ Sprinkle, *Follow Me*, 17–21. Sprinkle’s book consists of a six-week study addressing key aspects of prayerwalking. For each of the lessons, I highlighted significant points from the teaching session. Appendix 12 provides outlines of each of the teaching sessions.

providing some important biblical truths for understanding prayerwalking.³⁶ Hibbert defines prayerwalking as “praying on-site, with insight,” but for prayerwalking to be effective, he argues it must be grounded in four foundations: “identificational repentance, inspired revelation, spiritual warfare, and territorial possession.”³⁷ On Sunday evening, April 16, I taught an introductory session on the means and methods of prayerwalking.³⁸ Using the Bible and some of the prayerwalking resources, I provided the congregation with a basic understanding of prayerwalking. Prayerwalking is not a replacement for the prayer meeting, it is merely another strategy to reach our community through prayer: a way to engage the community and to see it through God’s eyes.

First, I explained some simple definitions of prayerwalking. Like Hibbert, both Hawthorne and Kendrick define prayerwalking as “praying on-site with insight.”³⁹ It is genuine, intentional, and direct intercessory prayer in the very places we expect our prayers to be answered. Another helpful definition came from Crawford and Miller’s book: “Prayerwalking is intercession on location with information in cooperation against opposition for glorification.”⁴⁰ By praying on-site with insight, our church wanted to connect with the community with physical and spiritual eyes open to the prompting of the Spirit’s call to pray. After providing a basic biblical overview of prayerwalking in this introductory teaching session, I called upon the church to commit each week to prayerwalk their listed locations and trust the Spirit to accomplish his redemptive purposes in those locations. Finally, we closed the service in prayer calling upon the

³⁶ David R. Hibbert, *Transforming Your Territory through Prayer-Walking* (Brossard, Quebec, Canada: Destiny Media, 2017), 13–27.

³⁷ Hibbert, *Transforming Your Territory Through Prayer-Walking*, 27.

³⁸ See appendix 12.

³⁹ Steve Hawthorne and Graham Kendrick, *Prayerwalking: Praying on Site with Insight* (Orlando, FL: Creation House, 1993), 12.

⁴⁰ Dan R. Crawford and Calvin Miller, *Prayerwalking: A Journey of Faith* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2002), 26.

name of the Lord to empower us each week to faithfully prayerwalk. For each lesson, the congregation was provided an outline. At the conclusion of each lesson, there was a prayerwalking challenge for the week with some self-reflection questions related to the lessons.

The first lesson began on Sunday evening, April 23 and the focus was on walking unceasingly with the Lord.⁴¹ Using Micah 6:1–8 as the focal passage, the Big Idea was this: “Prayer is not incessantly talking with God, it is unceasingly walking with the Lord.” Before we could begin the practice of prayerwalking, we needed to understand God’s purpose for our lives is to walk in unceasingly close fellowship with him daily. Prayerwalking is not about just talking to God while simply walking, it is ultimately about understanding our position in Christ, being close to God, and living out the Christian life daily. The prayerwalking challenge for this week encouraged the congregation to spend a few minutes each day thinking about the incredible truth that God created us to walk with him. Also, the congregation was encouraged to intentionally and continuously thank God for the joy and love we have in his presence. I also distributed copies of the prayerwalking reflection questionnaire to be completed by the Wednesday prayer service on May 31.⁴²

The second lesson was taught on April 30 with an emphasis on preparing ourselves to follow Jesus as prayerwalkers.⁴³ The focal text was Deuteronomy 11:18–32, in which Moses gave the next generation of Israelites some final instructions before they entered the Promised Land. The context of the passage was one of blessing: that if the Israelites obeyed the Lord, followed his commands, and worshiped him only, then God would guide their steps and drive out the pagan peoples as the Israelites possessed the

⁴¹ See appendix 12.

⁴² See appendix 16.

⁴³ See appendix 12.

territory. Interestingly, this passage also spoke of God commanding his people to take more of the territory than they actually conquered, they needed to obey God and allow him to guide their steps. However, their failure to obey God caused them to not only end up with less territory, but they struggled to drive out all the pagan peoples which ultimately led to serious spiritual problems. This was the Big Idea: “As we prayerwalk Jeffersonville, we declare through the presence and power of the Spirit our steadfast commitment to uplift every square inch of territory to the Lord, and that he would transform our community for his name and glory.” This lesson emphasized that through the power of on-site, Spirit-driven prayerwalking, God would have lordship over our entire community. The prayerwalking challenge for this week encouraged the congregation to consciously ask God each day to enable us to walk with him and to be attentive to his guidance.

The third lesson was taught on May 7 and the Big Idea for this lesson was this: “As we prayerwalk Jeffersonville and Twiggs County, we recognize that God is the initiator and we are his faithful responders. While God is sovereign and can accomplish all he wants, when he wants, how he wants, he graciously chooses to make his divine work dependent upon our prayers as a catalyst for accomplishing his purposes.”⁴⁴ Using John 5:1–30 as the focal passage, God graciously invited his redeemed people to be part of his redemptive work and purposes. Jesus clearly identified himself as the divine Son of God, yet he did not accomplish his work apart from the Father. There was an inseparable divine unity between the Father and the Son in accomplishing their redemptive work. Because we became one with Christ at salvation, we have the privilege of participating in the ministerial work by prayerwalking God’s kingdom and will into our community. This week’s prayerwalking challenge encouraged the church to ask God to show them where and to whom God is at work, readying themselves to instantly recognize his work and to

⁴⁴ See appendix 12.

pray in light of what is revealed.

In the fourth lesson taught on May 14, the Big Idea was this: “God wants to do, through each of us, a powerful work in the lives of the lost, broken, and hurting. For that to happen, God must first do a powerful work in us. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that love is at the heart of God’s nature, and what we do as his faithful prayerwalkers.”⁴⁵ Using 1 Corinthians 13:1–13 as the focal passage, this lesson emphasized how intercession is an act of love. When we prayerwalk specific locations, we demonstrate our wholehearted desire for God to transform our community because we want to see God’s glory reign throughout our community. God demonstrated his love for rebellious sinners by sending Jesus to die on the cross; therefore, we display God’s love as redeemed Christians by praying for our community and proclaiming the gospel. This week’s prayerwalking challenge encouraged the people to submit to God their willingness to go and intercede anywhere he wants us to go to allow the Spirit to empower us to go and prayerwalk.

The fifth lesson was taught on May 21 and the focus of this lesson was on prayerwalking and spiritual opposition. Using Ephesians 6:10–20 as the primary passage, the Big Idea was this, “All intercession is spiritual warfare. Throughout the New Testament, the theme of spiritual warfare is resisting Satan and his schemes. To intercede is to do battle with the enemy and prayerwalking is invasionary intercession. Critical to our success is being laser-focused on Christ, so the enemy does not deceive us.”⁴⁶ One of the teaching points from this lesson emphasized that following Jesus in this world is to walk into warfare that can be overwhelmingly intense, but unceasing Spirit-led prayer assures us of victory. To stand firm in this spiritual battle requires us to fight with spiritual armor, the type of armor that our Savior first wore as he defeated sin and

⁴⁵ See appendix 12.

⁴⁶ See appendix 12.

accomplished salvation on our behalf. This week's prayerwalking challenge was likely the most difficult, encouraging the church to consider a place where the enemy has great sway, and asking God if he would have us pray in these difficult places.

The final lesson was taught on May 28 and emphasized praying for the spiritual welfare of Twiggs County. Using Jeremiah 29:1–14 as the focal passage, the Big Idea was this, “It is no accident that God has divinely placed our church in the location we inhabit. We are called to impact our neighborhood and community for the glory of Christ. Prayerwalking finds our heart bound more closely to God and to the people of Twiggs County.”⁴⁷ Jeremiah 29:11 is one of the most quoted verses from the Old Testament. The passage is often used to encourage people that God has great plans for our future. However, in studying this passage in its biblical and historical context, the verse goes deeper. The Jewish people were exiled to Babylon and deported from their homeland by King Nebuchadnezzar through God's sovereign judgment. The people would spend seventy years in exile in a foreign land, but they were called to seek the good of the city, to pray for its peace, and to point people to God until the day they would be restored to their homeland. It is a reminder that it is no accident or mistake where our church is located, that we are called to magnify the name of Christ throughout the community. Jesus wants us to have his boundless love for our town, a love that has filled our hearts for him and spills over into this community that desperately needs to know his love for them.

At the conclusion of this final lesson, I reminded our church of the upcoming community prayer service at the city park where the evangelism family weekend would take place. I scheduled this community prayer service for Wednesday evening, May 31, and it provided an opportunity for our church to not only pray corporately, but to partner with another local church to prayerwalk together at the park, praying for the Lord to use

⁴⁷ See appendix 12.

this event as a catalyst to save unbelievers, invite people to connect with a church, and lead to renewal and revitalization. Lastly, I encouraged the congregation to continue prayerwalking and that each month we would corporately prayerwalk certain areas of our community. The final prayerwalking challenge encouraged the congregation to consider committing themselves to continuous prayerwalking.

Prayer at the park community prayer service. On Wednesday evening, May 31, JBC partnered with the Jeffersonville Church of God to host a joint community-wide prayer service at the City Park of Jeffersonville.⁴⁸ The city park served as the site for the community evangelism family weekend event on June 2–3. This prayer service not only provided both our churches the opportunity to partner together for corporate prayer and worship, but it also afforded an opportunity for our churches to prayerwalk the local park and surrounding neighborhoods. After welcoming everyone, I opened the service in prayer and then the worship team from the Church of God led the attendees in two songs of worship. Next, the pastor from the Church of God shared a passage of Scripture and then prayed for national revival. The worship team then sang another song, and then I came forward to share a passage of Scripture and prayed specifically for our community, the park, and the upcoming family weekend evangelism event. The worship team concluded with a song and then we divided the congregation into several groups to prayerwalk the park and the surrounding neighborhood. It was a tremendous evening of worship and nearly all of my members attended the service.

Twiggs County family weekend evangelism event. This year marked the third time we participated with other local churches to sponsor the “Twiggs County Family Weekend,” a community evangelism event with the purpose of reaching out to the

⁴⁸ See appendix 13.

community evangelistically.⁴⁹ It was a two-day event that took place on Friday evening and Saturday morning. Friday evening was primarily a community cookout and worship service and Saturday morning was a Vacation Bible School blitz. This year, we partnered with the Jeffersonville Church of God, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Women of the Word from Ingleside Baptist Church, and the Twiggs County Gideons Camp. This year we hosted this event at the City Park of Jeffersonville.

Since I arrived at JBC, our church has been very supportive of evangelistic opportunities in the community. For example, when the city government sponsored a fall festival event, my church set up a tent to give out candy to the kids, Bible tracts and books for the adults, and invited families to church. JBC has hosted community events at the church, such as quarterly sings, Baccalaureate services for the local schools, and hosting our local foster and adoption families for Christmas dinner and spring banquet. The church has also faithfully contributed to missions, such as the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, Annie Armstrong Easter Offering, the Cooperative Program, Operation Christmas Child, the Georgia Baptist Children's Home, and other mission opportunities. However, there were very few evangelistic efforts to reach Twiggs County, but over my four years, our church has gradually increased our evangelistic efforts through these community events.

The city park is located a block from my church and it was once a thriving park, but when we arrived in Jeffersonville we noticed that it had become rundown. We wanted to revitalize the park, so our church led the effort in cleaning it up and getting public support for its restoration. With help from volunteers, the park began to draw families once again, so we chose to host the family weekend event at the park. Prayerwalking was not new to me, so I regularly prayerwalked at the schools and the neighborhood surrounding my church, including the city park.

⁴⁹ See appendix 14.

On Friday evening, June 2, we hosted a community cookout and worship service. Not only did we host a community prayer service at the park the week of the event, but I regularly prayerwalked the park in anticipation of the Spirit doing an incredible work through this evangelistic event. Located in the neighborhood a couple of blocks from JBC, I soon discovered that many of the residents did not attend a local church. This provided an opportunity for our church to seriously and intentionally engage these residents and invite them to this event in order to hear the gospel.

On Saturday morning, June 3, we partnered with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and sponsored a Vacation Bible School blitz for the children in the community with games, crafts, and a unique gospel presentation from a local artist. The park and the surrounding neighborhood were specific areas I listed to intentionally prayerwalk. Again, these events and the prayerwalking ministry were strategies I hoped would not only increase our church's knowledge of intercessory prayer, but also deepen the prayer practices of our church as we reached out into our community for Christ. It was my hope that the prayerwalking self-reflection questionnaire would demonstrate some growth in our knowledge of intercessory prayer and our prayer patterns.

Description of the Follow-up Period: Weeks 17–18

The follow-up period lasted two weeks. On Sunday evening, June 4, I distributed copies of the post-assessment questionnaire to the participants. I distributed twenty-two pre-assessments; however, due to some health issues with some of the participants, I only received eighteen post-assessment surveys. The follow-up period lasted two weeks, ending on Sunday evening, June 18. During this follow-up period, I debriefed the congregation on responses from the two prayer card self-reflection questionnaires on Wednesday evening, June 7. The following Sunday evening, June 11, we held a special prayer service in order to thank God for the blessings he provided during this ministry project and to also commit ourselves as a church to continue the

work of interceding for our community. On Wednesday evening, June 14, I collected the post-assessment questionnaires so that I could start analyzing the data from both the pre- and post-assessment surveys.

On Sunday evening, June 18, I debriefed the church on the purpose and goals of the ministry project. I also provided them with a snapshot of the data from the various surveys. Finally, I announced some of the ways moving forward during the summer and fall of ways to pray for our community. For example, I scheduled some dates our church would prayerwalk each of the local schools, in addition to hosting a community worship service on the campus of Jeffersonville Elementary School. During this follow-up period, I wanted to not only gather all the survey materials necessary for evaluation and reflecting on the effectiveness of the ministry project, but I also wanted to continue to lead and encourage our church to faithfully pray, and trust that the Lord will bless our efforts to reach Twiggs County, and bring about revitalization.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on fulfilling the purpose of this ministry project: to lead revitalization through prayer at Jeffersonville Baptist Church that transforms the personal and corporate prayer patterns of the church. The ministry project was designed to address this purpose through four specific goals, increasing the biblical knowledge and understanding of prayer and the enriching the spiritual practice of prayer. The preparation and implementation of this project reaffirmed my strong conviction that prayer truly is foundational for local church revitalization. In Chapter 5, I analyzed each of the goals and offered my personal reflections of the overall ministry project.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION AND REFLECTIONS

In this final chapter, the ministry project will be assessed followed by some reflections on the overall process of the project. First, the purpose of this ministry project will be evaluated to determine if it was clearly fulfilled. Next, the ministry project consisted of four goals to help enrich the individual and corporate prayer life of the congregation; therefore, the goals will be analyzed. Furthermore, I will reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of this ministry project including some thoughts on any changes or adjustments I would have made to the project. Finally, I will provide some theological and personal conclusions about the entire project process. Having completed and evaluated this ministry research project, my desire moving forward is two-fold. First, my desire is to grow as a pastor by continuing the process of leading my local church toward greater health and revitalization through the power of prayer. Second, I want to encourage and equip fellow pastoral leaders, particularly in the rural context, to lead themselves and their churches toward personal renewal and revitalization through prayer.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this ministry project was to lead local church revitalization through the power of prayer at Jeffersonville Baptist Church. Several contextual factors led me to discern that the lack of meaningful, Spirit-filled prayer was a significant reason for the continued decline of the church. When I began my pastorate in January 2020, I knew I inherited an older, traditionally established church that endured significant decline; however, there was a core group of spiritually mature, albeit older members committed to reversing the declining trend. The signs of shifting economic and

population dynamics began in the late 1980s as people gradually started moving out of rural Twiggs County to surrounding areas with greater economic and social-cultural opportunities. By the turn of the century, the gradual decline of JBC became so significant that attendance and baptisms became less frequent. The church also experienced a revolving door of pastors creating a lack of pastoral stability and leadership for the church. The church continued to faithfully give to missions; however, there was a lack of evangelistic effort within the community.

In the early weeks of my pastorate, I began to ask questions of the congregation, probing their hopes and dreams for the future of this church. Their responses were typical—they wanted the church to grow and see young families attending again—and they knew that hiring a young pastor was the answer to all their problems. The first book I preached from was Zechariah and I tried to articulate the theme that God is not finished with this church; that he wants to use this church to impact this community for his glory. Again, this congregation overwhelmingly consisted of people aged sixty-five to ninety, and at thirty-eight years old, I was the youngest pastor they had in many decades, and they probably believed that I was going to leave very quickly once a larger church came calling, so they likely had some reservations about my long-term commitment to this church and community. However, I believe a breakthrough occurred when the COVID-19 pandemic struck and the congregation witnessed my response.

During the early weeks of the pandemic, I routinely contacted my members to check on them and to pray. Because I regularly contacted the members during these difficult and unique circumstances, I sensed they truly began to accept me as their pastor sooner than normal. I also began reading some books about local church revitalization, particularly on the emphasis of shepherding the local church through the power of prayer. Even before the pandemic, my personal prayer life was sporadic at best as I was caught up in the busyness of bi-vocational ministry. In addition, the church's corporate prayer

gatherings were very inwardly focused and lacking genuine spiritual power. When we finally returned to in-person worship on Mother's Day 2020, I sensed a greater urgency to lead our church to prioritize prayer. Through biblical reflection and prayer, I became increasingly convicted that if our church was going to experience revitalization, it would require a gracious outpouring of the Spirit, and prayer must become a focus of both my personal life and pastoral ministry.

This research project was designed to strategically enrich the personal and corporate prayer life of the church and to equip the congregation to intentionally and actively pray for our community, leading to greater health and revitalization. The goals were designed to measure the effectiveness of this project's purpose in leading revitalization through the power of prayer, with the hope of seeing a significantly positive increase in the knowledge and prayer practices of the congregation. This required personal patience because I am naturally very impatient; however, I do demonstrate perseverance in many ways. Brian Croft's book about local church revitalization provided encouraging guidance. He states, "Church revitalization is a long hard work. It cannot be done in a few years. It requires a man called by God not just to go to a dying church, but to go, plant, stay, wait, and be patient. . . . Never lose sight that the road to long term, faithful perseverance begins before the work even starts."¹ Over the duration of this ministry project, I believe the prayer life of our church has enhanced, but I also understand that local church revitalization will not occur over a sixteen-week ministry project; it is a continuous process of unceasing Spirit-filled prayer. The following section will provide an evaluation of each of the four goals.

Evaluation of the Goals

The four goals helped provide a strategic framework for fulfilling the ministry

¹ Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying and Divided Churches* (Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), 49.

project's purpose of leading local church revitalization through prayer. There are many ways pastoral leaders lead local church revitalization, such as preaching, evangelism, discipleship, prayer, or a combination of each strategy. Throughout my research, I wanted to demonstrate on the basis of biblical and church history that prayer must undergird every aspect of church ministry, especially local church revitalization. God himself pours out his Spirit to bring spiritual transformation, yet he graciously uses prayer as a catalyst for personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization. A sensible and objective evaluation of the stated goals is required to determine the overall impact of the project's purpose. The following is a sequential review of the stated goals.

Goal 1: Assessment of the Church's Prayer Practices and Knowledge

The first goal assessed the current prayer patterns of the congregation by utilizing a pre-assessment questionnaire. This questionnaire was beneficial in helping to answer my first research question, which was to discover the current prayer patterns of the church, both individually and corporately. I distributed twenty-two pre-assessment questionnaires and received all of the assessments for a 100 percent completion rate. The pre-assessment questionnaire was divided into three sections and it provided me with the opportunity to gather both quantitative and qualitative information pertaining to the congregation's prayer patterns and biblical knowledge about prayer. At the conclusion of the project implementation, the participants completed the questionnaire again in order to evaluate changes in their knowledge and prayer practices. Due to some unfortunate health circumstances, I only received eighteen of the post-assessment questionnaires for an 82 percent completion rate, but in my *t*-test analysis, I removed the four participants who did not complete the post-assessment questionnaire. It was a small sample size, but I hoped to see a statistically significant positive increase in the congregation's knowledge and prayer patterns. I provided several tables to document the data received from the pre- and post-assessment questionnaires.

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of fifteen questions, utilizing a six-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The participants answered each question with a number that corresponded to the degree of intensity (i.e., 1=strongly disagree, 6=strongly agree). This quantitative data was then calculated on an Excel spreadsheet to determine the average, mean, and standard deviation. For the purpose of my research, I was most interested in discovering the current knowledge and prayer patterns of the congregation. The following table provides the average and standard deviation of each question for both the pre- and post-assessment questionnaires.

Table 1. Data analysis of the Likert Scale questions

Question Number	Pre-Assessment Responses		Post-Assessment Responses	
	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation
1	5.14	1.25	5.57	0.76
2	5.56	0.59	5.64	0.50
3	5.50	0.60	5.36	0.63
4	3.56	1.01	3.21	1.19
5	4.68	1.17	5.00	1.11
6	5.77	0.43	5.86	0.36
7	5.40	0.85	5.71	0.47
8	5.13	1.13	4.36	1.50
9	4.30	1.49	4.43	1.22
10	3.77	1.57	3.64	1.50
11	4.90	1.91	5.21	0.70
12	4.40	1.50	4.50	1.27
13	3.18	1.47	3.93	1.33
14	3.50	1.37	3.36	1.28
15	2.40	1.81	2.07	0.83

After completing the ministry project and comparing the two assessments, there were three patterns of prayer I hoped to discover. First, I expected to see our church members consistently pray. The first question addressed the degree to which the congregation consistently prays: “I pray every day.” As the table above reveals, there was

a minimal increase in the average of respondents who “agree” that they pray every day. The standard deviation for this question reveals that there was less degree of difference between the responses. For example, all the participants under the age of fifty-five responded in the categories of disagreement on the pre-assessment; however, on the post-assessment each responded in the categories of agreement.

In our discussions about the data, one of the most cited reasons for not praying every day by these younger participants was the issue of busyness. Like myself, these individuals are still in the season of life balancing work and family responsibilities daily, which oftentimes leads to prayerlessness. However, this was encouraging to see the data reveal their awareness and desire to prioritize prayer. The overwhelming majority of the church is over the age of sixty-five, they consistently attend church and are generally spiritually mature Christians, so it was not a surprise to see the data reveal the level of consistent prayer among the older congregants. The data reveals that the congregation believes God hears and responds to prayer, and there is a desire to continue learning more about biblical prayer.

Secondly, I expected to see the church pray more for others, particularly evangelistically for unbelievers in the community. Many local churches today are declining or dying simply because they either do not pray together or the prayer gatherings are overwhelmingly inwardly focused, which leads to neglecting the spiritual and physical needs of the community. Therefore, a series of questions were designed to gain insight into the congregation’s degree of intercessory prayer. Questions 5, 7, 9, and 12 all asked the respondents to answer the degree to which they intercede for others. In contrast, questions 4 and 8 asked the participants the degree to which their prayers were inwardly focused. Now, praying for our individual needs and the corporate needs of the church is not wrong because the Lord graciously welcomes our petitions. However, if we want God to save unbelievers, bring about national revival, and revitalize local churches, then we must consistently and wholeheartedly intercede for others. Very seldom did our

Wednesday night “prayer meetings” and the Sunday corporate prayers consist of much meaningful evangelistic intercession. Over the course of this project, I believe I witnessed some gradual increase in corporate intercessory praying. Our church also scheduled regular monthly prayer services on the first Sunday evening of each month. The people have continued to dedicate themselves to praying over the names on their prayer cards. Finally, with school starting back in August, we scheduled prayerwalks at each of the local schools.

Lastly, I wanted to provide my church with some practical strategies to become more consistent and intentional in prayer. Questions 10, 13, 14, and 15 asked the participants the degree to which they prayed, had a set time, and if they used the Bible, a prayer list, and/or a journal for prayer. The average for these responses leaned toward the disagree side of the Likert scale. I was not overly surprised that the congregation does not use a prayer journal to record their reflections, although this is something I started utilizing with the plan of sharing some of my reflections during the scheduled prayer services. However, given the fact that our church keeps an extensive prayer list in our weekly bulletin and that we utilized some prayer cards during the project implementation, I was surprised that the response to question 13 about praying over a list was not heavily on the agree side of the scale. This was an area I wanted to continue to shift our focus because I found the prayer cards very beneficial. The church also disagreed somewhat with having a specific time and place to pray. For this portion of the survey, I was encouraged to see that the church overwhelmingly agreed and leaned to strongly agree with little deviation that praying helps the fruitfulness of the church (question 6).

Parts 2 and 3 of the survey were designed to dig deeper into the personal prayer practices of the church through a series of multiple-choice responses and short-answer questions. By providing a list of multiple-choice options and open-ended responses, I anticipated learning how the people pray, what they pray for, and why they pray. This information proved important because leading revitalization requires shifting

the church's prayer patterns from an inward focus to an outward focus. The table below provides a visual representation of the data from the second part of the survey. The information provided shows the answer with the highest percentage. I will provide further discussion about the percentages in this section.

Table 2. Data analysis of the multiple-choice responses

Survey Question Numbers	Pre-Assessment Responses	Post-Assessment Responses
16	71% pray more than once each day	75% pray more than once each day
17	76% pray 1–10 minutes	57% pray 1–10 minutes
18	Top three answers—God’s guidance, family/friends, giving thanks	Top three answers= Family/friends, giving thanks, God’s forgiveness
19	76% pray most often for family/friends	84% pray most often for family/friends
20	52% say most important purpose of prayer is to seek God’s guidance	57% say most important purpose of prayer is intimacy with God
21	38% God always answers your prayers, no one said God never answers prayer	42% God often answers prayers, no one said God never answers prayer
22	86% prayers not answered because it’s not in God’s plan	93% prayers not answered because it’s not in God’s plan
23	86% most often pray at home	86% most often pray at home
24	Describe the corporate prayer life, Common responses—generally focuses on health concerns, not what it should be, genuine, we pray for others physical needs	Describe the corporate prayer life, Common responses—community focused, praying more for lost people, pastor prays for other churches, emphasizing spiritual needs of the community, health
25	81% say the main emphasis of corporate prayer is the needs of the church members	78% say the main emphasis of corporate prayer is the salvation for unbelievers

In digging deeper into the prayer practices and knowledge of the congregation, the data revealed three significant points. First, the church recognized the importance of consistently praying. In questions 16, 17, and 23, the majority of the congregation responded that they pray more than once each day, they spend up to ten minutes praying, and they generally pray at home. The post-assessment revealed some changes in these prayer patterns. In the pre-assessment, 24 percent responded that they prayed for more than ten minutes. This increased to 43 percent on the post-assessment and the majority of those who responded prayed for up to twenty minutes. The relationship between these two statistics indicates that those who pray multiple times during the day will pray for a short time span while those who indicated they pray less frequently during a day will spend a greater amount of time in prayer. When I interviewed the deacons about their prayer routine, three of the five deacons indicated they pray once per day for at least twenty minutes. This also tended to be my daily prayer routine. Also, praying for family and friends was the top prayer request indicated on both questionnaires, which seemed to correlate with the responses on the prayer card survey that the congregation listed mostly family and friends that they committed to prayer for and inviting to church Easter Sunday. In the pre-assessment, unbelievers/unchurched received 10 percent, but it jumped to nearly 30 percent in the post-assessment, demonstrating that the congregation was gradually moving towards praying evangelistically for the community.

The second part of the survey also indicated a change in the congregation's view about the most important purpose of prayer (question 20). In the pre-assessment, 52 percent responded that seeking God's guidance is the purpose of prayer while 33 percent responded that intimacy with God was the most important purpose of prayer. The post-assessment revealed a change as 57 percent indicated the intimacy was most important while 36 percent still viewed God's guidance as the most important purpose of prayer. Part of this change was likely the result of the emphasis during the sermon and teaching series on the purpose of prayer as "calling upon the name of the Lord." When we call

upon the name of the Lord through the person of Jesus Christ, we demonstrate our absolute dependency upon God. He welcomes our prayers and as we pray for our own needs and others, prayer reveals our intimacy with God. There was also a strong belief that God answered prayer according to his sovereign purposes.

Third, this part of the survey provided deeper insights into the corporate prayer life of the congregation. The lack of meaningful corporate prayer is one of the underlying causes of the decline of local churches today. For questions 24 and 25, respondents were asked to provide their views on the purpose of corporate prayer. Question 24 was an open-ended question asking the congregation to describe the corporate prayer life of the church. Responses on the pre-assessment were not surprising given my assessment of the Wednesday night prayer meeting and the various prayer times during the Sunday worship gatherings. The common responses could be summarized as very inwardly focused. The overwhelming majority of prayer requests received during the worship gatherings were the typical health concerns of the members. Again, there is nothing wrong with these types of petitions; however, the prayer requests were overwhelmingly focused on the church members' health requests. In addition, the Wednesday night prayer meeting consisted of very little praying. This was also highlighted in question 25 as 81 percent of the congregation viewed the corporate prayer life as inwardly focused. In contrast, the post-assessment revealed some encouraging trends toward interceding for the community with 78 percent responding the church is gradually moving towards greater evangelistic praying. As a pastor, I believe I am shepherding my church to intentionally and actively pray for the community as I model it in my personal prayer life and during the worship gatherings.

The third part of the survey consisted of ten open-ended questions. This section allowed the congregation to reflect on their prayer life while it provided me the opportunity to discover deeper insights into the influence of prayer on their lives. I found this section very beneficial because it was personal and touching. Many of the responses

were candid as the participants shared how prayer has guided them through their personal experiences. One of the advantages of pastoring a small church has been the ability to get to know them personally, so I was able to follow up with each individual and probe deeper into their responses.

Questions 26 and 27 asked the respondents to reflect on their personal prayer patterns. When asked to provide their description of prayer, the most common responses on the pre-assessment were “speaking to God, asking for needs according to his will, praising God, and giving him glory.” This matched the top two responses provided from question 20 (i.e., to seek God’s guidance and to thank God for blessings). However, on the post-assessment, the most common answers included “being in God’s presence, speaking to God, daily talking with the Lord.” These responses demonstrated a shift in how the church viewed prayer: not just offering up petitions or talking to God, but daily living in the presence of the Lord and having unbreakable communion with him. There did not appear to be a significant change in the congregation’s typical prayer routine. The majority wrote they prayed at home either in the morning or the evening with the majority indicating they prayed in the morning. The majority still prayed multiple times per day for a short period of time although three people indicated they prayed at a specific time, in a special place, and for at least one hour. Some indicated they prayed after reading their Bible, some used a list, very few used a journal, and the most common requests were for family and friends.

This section of the questionnaire assisted in helping me to address a second research question, which was identifying some of the obstacles that hindered our personal and corporate prayer life and implementing some simple strategies to overcome these hindrances. Question 31 provided some valuable insights into some obstacles that hinders our church’s prayer life. Busyness, neglecting personal quiet time, daily distractions, and apathy were the most common responses from both surveys. Too often we are quick to lay aside or put off prayer and Bible study when interruptions or distractions occur. Also,

we can too easily become apathetic, indifferent, or bored when praying for the same things each day, especially if we feel like God is not listening or answering our prayers. Therefore, the following were some personal and corporate prayer practices I implemented after the ministry project to address some of these obstacles.

First, I started posting in the Sunday morning bulletin a daily prayer emphasis alongside our weekly Bible reading plan. For example, each Sunday I wanted our people to pray for pastors and churches throughout the community. During the worship service each Sunday morning, I prayed for a specific pastor and his church. Each day of the week there was a specific prayer emphasis so that our church was interceding weekly for others as they read the daily Bible passage. This encouraged them to commit to a regular time of prayer as they read their Bible. Second, I encouraged them to utilize a prayer journal to record their petitions and reflect on how God has answered their prayers. Third, I continued to remind them of the purpose of the Wednesday evening prayer meeting and to come prepared to pray. Because we do not want to waste time just taking up constant prayer requests, I asked the congregation to turn in their prayer requests before Wednesday either by email or on the prayer card and place it in the prayer box at the church; therefore, we can compile the list for the prayer meeting. These strategies have benefited our prayer time with the Lord in a focused and meaningful way.

This goal was considered successfully met when at least 70 percent of the congregation completed the pre-assessment questionnaire. As detailed earlier, twenty-two pre-assessment questionnaires were distributed and completed. However, only eighteen participants completed the post-assessment. With an 82 percent completion rate for both the pre- and post-assessment questionnaires, this goal was successfully met. Further insight will be provided in the section about goal three, but it merits consideration at this point to provide an analysis of the *t*-test results for dependent samples of the two assessments. Table 3 below presents the results from the *t*-test for dependent samples for the pre- and post-assessment questionnaire for knowledge and prayer practice questions.

A *t*-test for dependent samples did not show a statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-assessment total scores for knowledge and prayer practices: $t_{(17)} = 0.477, p > .3193$.

Table 3. Results of *t*-test dependent samples for pre- and post-assessments

	Pre-Assessment Totals	Post-Assessment Totals
Mean	66.72222222	66.11111111
Variance	73.15359477	69.75163399
Observations	18	18
Pearson Correlation	0.794297684	—
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	—
df	17	—
t Stat	0.4779421	—
P(T<=) one-tail	0.319389676	—
t Critical one-tail	1.739606726	—
P(T<=) two-tail	0.638779352	—
t Critical two-tail	2.109815578	—

Because the assessment totals did not generate a positive difference, I then broke down the assessment results based on the knowledge questions and the prayer practices questions. Table 4 below presents the results of the *t*-test for dependent samples for the pre- and post-assessment knowledge questions. A *t*-test for dependent samples did not show a statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-assessment knowledge questions: $t_{(17)} = 0.261, p > .3985$.

Table 4. Results of *t*-test dependent samples for knowledge questions

	Pre-Assessment Knowledge	Post-Assessment Knowledge
Mean	26.33333333	26.5
Variance	6.117647059	5.558823529
Observations	18	18
Pearson Correlation	0.373223645	—
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	—
df	17	—
t Stat	-0.261291202	—
P(T<=) one-tail	0.398503577	—
t Critical one-tail	1.739606726	—
P(T<=) two-tail	0.797007153	—
t Critical two-tail	2.109815578	—

Table 5 presents the results of the *t*-test for dependent samples for the pre- and post-assessment prayer practice questions. Again, a *t*-test for dependent samples did not show a statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-assessment knowledge questions: $t_{(17)} = 0.851, p > .2030$.

Table 5. Results of *t*-test dependent samples for knowledge questions

	Pre-Assessment Practices	Post-Assessment Practices
Mean	40.38888889	39.61111111
Variance	45.42810485	42.01633987
Observations	18	18

Table 5, continued

	Pre-Assessment Practices	Post-Assessment Practices
Pearson Correlation	0.829019011	—
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	—
df	17	—
t Stat	0.851827304	—
P(T<=) one-tail	0.20307517	—
t Critical one-tail	1.739606726	—
P(T<=) two-tail	0.406150339	—
t Critical two-tail	2.109815578	—

Finally, I decided to analyze the data for just the church leadership, which consisted of the pastor and the five deacons. Table 6 presents the results of the *t*-test for dependent samples for the pre- and post-assessment totals. A *t*-test for dependent samples did not show a statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-assessment totals for the church leadership: $t_{(5)} = 0.085, p > .4677$.

Table 6. Results of *t*-test dependent samples pre- and post-assessment totals (leadership)

	Pre-Assessment Totals Leaders	Post-Assessment Totals Leaders
Mean	68.66666667	68.83333333
Variance	86.66666667	92.96666667
Observations	6	6
Pearson Correlation	0.872683834	—
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	—

Table 6, continued

	Pre-Assessment Totals Leaders	Post-Assessment Totals Leaders
df	5	—
t Stat	-0.085187405	—
P(T<=) one-tail	0.467709144	—
t Critical one-tail	2.015048373	—
P(T<=) two-tail	0.935418287	—
t Critical two-tail	2.570581836	—

Table 7 presents the results of the *t*-test for dependent samples for the pre- and post-assessment knowledge questions for the leadership. Although the mean increased slightly from the pre- to post-assessment, a *t*-test for dependent samples did not show a statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-assessment knowledge questions for the church leadership: $t_{(5)} = 1.378, p > .1132$.

Table 7. Results of *t*-test dependent samples knowledge questions (leadership)

	Pre-Assessment Knowledge Leaders	Post-Assessment Knowledge Leaders
Mean	26.33333333	27.83333333
Variance	9.066666667	4.566666667
Observations	6	6
Pearson Correlation	0.507669813	—
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	—
df	5	—
t Stat	-1.378915679	—

Table 7, continued

	Pre-Assessment Knowledge Leaders	Post-Assessment Knowledge Leaders
P(T<=) one-tail	0.11320733	—
t Critical one-tail	2.015048373	—
P(T<=) two-tail	0.22641466	—
t Critical two-tail	2.570581836	—

Table 8 presents the results of the *t*-test for dependent samples for the pre- and post-assessment prayer practices questions for the leadership. A *t*-test for dependent samples did not show a statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-assessment knowledge questions for the church leadership: $t_{(5)} = 0.781, p > .2349$.

Table 8. Results of *t*-test dependent samples prayer practices questions (leadership)

	Pre-Assessment Prayer Practices (Leaders)	Post-Assessment Prayer Practices (Leaders)
Mean	42.33333333	41
Variance	51.86666667	59.2
Observations	6	6
Pearson Correlation	0.844580074	—
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	—
df	5	—
t Stat	0.781464665	—
P(T<=) one-tail	0.23494805	—
t Critical one-tail	2.015048373	—

Table 8, continued

	Pre-Assessment Prayer Practices (Leaders)	Post-Assessment Prayer Practices (Leaders)
P(T<=) two-tail	0.4698961	—
t Critical two-tail	2.570581836	—

Based on the analysis presented in the above tables, a comparison of the data for the first part of both questionnaires reveal that there was no statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-assessment surveys. However, further discussion about the effectiveness of this ministry project will be provided in the following sections.

Goal 2: Analysis of the Sermon Series

The second goal was to develop and preach a seven-part sermon series focusing on the biblical truths about prayer and its connection to local church revitalization. This goal was designed to answer the research question, “How important is prayer to the overall spiritual health of the congregation at Jeffersonville Baptist Church?” To assess the effectiveness of these sermons, copies of the sermon outlines and the sermon evaluation tool were provided for the deacons. In addition, a short blog and the sermon’s summary statement, called the Big Idea, were printed in the weekly bulletin and posted on social media. Each sermon was also recorded on Facebook Live and DVD copies were produced and available for those who missed. Upon completion of the sermon series, the deacons and I completed the evaluation rubric and reflected on the effectiveness of the messages. We also spent some time during the Wednesday evening gatherings each week to discuss questions, concerns, and reflections on how the sermons made the connection between prayer and revitalization. The rubric below provides a snapshot of the responses and comments.

Table 9. Critique of the sermon series

Sermon Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
Each sermon was sound in its interpretation of what Scripture says about prayer leading to revitalization.			BH DW	BW JM WM CO	Good exposition of all the messages, made the overall connection between prayer and revitalization, explained prayer and revitalization well
Each sermon was faithful to the biblical theology of prayer for revitalization.			DW	BH BW JM WM CO	Each sermon emphasized the importance of prayer for revitalization
Scope					
The content of each sermon sufficiently covers what the Bible teaches about prayer leading to revitalization.			DW BH CO	BW JM WM	Good balance between the Old and New Testament, I would have liked an example from Paul's writings
Each sermon sufficiently covers a biblical framework of prayer for revitalization.			DW	BH BW JM WM CO	Each sermon highlighted why prayer is imperative for the church
Knowledge					
Each sermon was clear, containing a big idea.			DW	BH BW JM WM CO	The main idea was posted in the bulletin and outlines
Each sermon provides opportunities for participant interaction with material.			DW	BH BW JM WM CO	The sermon outlines in advance were helpful, the Wednesday reviews were helpful

Table 9, continued

Sermon Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Practicality					
Each sermon clearly details how prayer is vital to the health of the church.		WM	DW	BH BW JM CO	One of my concerns is the lack of prayer between the pastor and the deacons, we need to pray together as men, the period of this church's greatest growth the men prayed together
At the end of the sermon series, participants will be able to articulate a biblical theology of prayer and how it leads to revitalization.			DW	BH BW JM WM CO	Explained prayer and revitalization thoroughly, sermons made the connection between patiently praying and experiencing sustained revitalization

In chapter 4, I provided an overview of each sermon. The deacons and I used the sermon evaluation tool to critique the sermon series on its effectiveness in demonstrating a biblical theology of prayer and its connection to local church revitalization. The rubric assessed the sermon series on four criteria: biblical accuracy, scope, knowledge, and practicality. Each person, including myself graded the series on a four-point scale ranging from insufficient, needs attention, sufficient, and exemplary. Furthermore, the two surveys also provided credible feedback of the congregation's growth in their understanding of prayer and its connection to revitalization.

In our discussions, one of the strengths of the sermon series was the effective use of the Big Idea, the summary statements for each sermon and how the deacons believed each statement effectively made the connection between prayer and revitalization. Sermon conclusions have been a weakness in my preaching, so I really hoped to conclude each sermon by making the connection between prayer and revitalization from the text. For example, the sermon from Ezekiel 37:1–14 was about

how God alone has the power to bring resurrected life from that which is dead. My hope with this sermon was that Jeffersonville Baptist Church had experienced significant decline over the years, and even hopelessness had set in among the church; however, God has the power to bring life and fresh vitality to this church and he graciously invites us to pray for revitalization. Another strength included the deacons increasing understanding of revitalization. Local church revitalization is a relatively new concept and prayer's connection really challenged their preconceived opinions about church growth. Too often, declining and dying churches think if they hire a young pastor or implement a new program that it will immediately lead to growth, but revitalization takes time and requires patient and persistent prayer.

One of the weaknesses revealed from the sermon series was the practicality, particularly the lack of prayer between the pastor and the deacons. We agreed that the sermon series articulated how prayer is vital for revitalization; however, there was no ongoing prayer ministry involving the pastor and the deacons. One of the deacons expressed how the church experienced spiritual vitality and growth when the pastor and the men gathered regularly for prayer. As a pastor, I accepted responsibility for not praying with my deacons, so we immediately scheduled Tuesday mornings to pray together. Since this decision, we have also started to regularly prayerwalk the church neighborhood and other areas throughout the community, visit church members together for prayer, pray together at the church on Saturday nights for the Sunday worship services and for the Lord to bring new people. Again, the Lord alone brings about revitalization, but he uses the prayers of his faithful people in amazing ways as a catalyst to accomplish his purposes.

Overall, our discussions and the responses from the surveys reveal that the sermons helped increase the church's understanding of prayer and its connection to revitalization; therefore, this goal sufficiently met 90 percent of the evaluation criterion. However, one of the most important critiques revealed was the awareness of the lack of

prayer between the pastor and the deacons and the immediate implementation of a pastor's prayer group. Upon praying together, we have sensed the Spirit moving in some amazing instances. For example, we have been regularly praying evangelistically for individuals and families and one couple has returned to the church. This focused prayer time has caused us to grow closer by sharing our dreams and concerns and praying for each other as we also pray for the church and community. The sermons series helped us recognize the importance of prayer and trusting in the Lord to bring about revitalization as we faithfully pray and go evangelistically into the community.

Goal 3: Application of the Knowledge of Prayer

The third goal was to apply the knowledge of biblical prayer by more intentionally and actively praying both personally and corporately for God to bring about local church revitalization. This goal was designed to answer the research question, "how can prayer lead to revitalization at Jeffersonville Baptist Church." There were several ways the congregation applied their knowledge through intentionally and actively engaging in intercessory prayer. This goal was measured by assessing the two surveys, particularly the open-ended questionnaire about the effectiveness of the 7 for 7 prayer card. This goal was very complex and yielded some interesting yet mixed results making this goal unsuccessful based on the data analysis from the Likert-scale questions, yet the project was likely successful in other ways, as evidenced by the responses to open-ended questions, commitment to participate in the 7 for 7 prayer card challenge, attendance during the community Easter outreach event, the prayer service, attendance at the Easter Sunday service, and the establishment of a weekly prayer group. I also wanted to see 70 percent of the participants affirm their commitment to pray at least twice per week for all the names on their 7 for 7 prayer cards for seven weeks leading up to Easter Sunday 2023, intentionally invite at least three of their names to church on Easter Sunday, and complete the intercessory prayer questionnaire. This part of the goal was considered

successfully met. An analysis of the surveys and the intercessory prayer questionnaire, in addition to weekly observations and conversations at the Wednesday evening prayer meetings, provided valuable insights into the church’s growth in intercessory prayer.

Table 10. 7 for 7 prayer card questionnaire responses

Question Number	Responses
1	22 prayer cards were distributed
2	Children; grandchildren; next-door neighbor, a young single mother I taught several years ago in school; man who owns the hardware store who grew up in this church but no longer attends; my son and his wife who no longer attend church, a new couple with two small children who just moved into town
3	My grandchildren do not know Jesus; both my son and daughter no longer attend church; my next door neighbor is not a Christian
4	I get up early in the morning and pray for all the names on my card; I go up to the church on Monday mornings to pray; I pray every day for my children and grandchildren; I pray for one name each day; I go up to the church on Saturday evenings to pray; I have added these names to my regular prayer list
5	I invited each of my children and grandchildren to come to church on Easter; I call my grandson every Saturday night to tell him I will come pick him up if he will come to church; I sent an Easter invite card to each family on my list; I called my son and his wife on Easter Sunday inviting them to church; I called each family on my card and urged them to come to church
6	The Bible calls us to pray for others; if we want unbelievers to get saved we must pray for them; God answers prayers when we pray for others; Jesus prayed for others so we need to pray for others
7	It helped me focus on who to pray for and why; my praying for others felt more meaningful; the card encouraged me to pray every day for my family; I don’t usually pray using a list but this card was very helpful
8	I found myself praying longer but not rambling; I really felt a sense of urgency to pray like never before for others; I felt more burdened to pray for others more intentionally

Table 10, continued

Question Number	Responses
9	There was a breakthrough of reconciliation between myself and my son and his wife; my grandson has started attending church; God is moving in our church to reach our community
10	It was very helpful; it was a good visual reminder to pray for people every day; it was a simple and easy reminder to pray; really helped me understand the evangelistic nature of praying

In chapter 4, I explained several opportunities for the congregation to intentionally and actively engage in intercessory prayer. This included the 7 for 7 prayer card in which the church listed seven names of individuals and/or families they committed to pray for over the seven weeks leading up to Easter Sunday 2023, and then intentionally inviting them to church. We also participated in a community outreach event in which we set up a booth to invite the community to attend church on Easter Sunday, but we also offered to pray for people and directed them to a prayer box where they could fill out a prayer card, drop it in the box, and our church would intentionally pray for those requests. We partnered with several churches in the community to host a Palm Sunday evening worship service in which corporate prayer was emphasized. We also scheduled a community prayer focused worship service the Wednesday prior to Easter Sunday to specifically pray over our community and the names on our prayer cards. We also started to schedule a monthly prayer-focused worship service on the first Sunday evening of each month, focusing on corporate prayer for personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization. Finally, our church has intentionally sought to restore prayer to the Wednesday night “prayer meeting,” emphasizing prayer during the Sunday gatherings and teaching our children’s ministry to prioritize prayer.

Throughout the ministry project, our church made significant spiritual progress interceding for others. It was not surprising to read that the overwhelming majority of our congregation listed family members on their cards. As I took the time to get to know the

people of my church, I learned that many of their children and grandchildren either have not surrendered their lives to Christ or they rarely attend church. However, I noticed a renewed urgency in the way they prayed for their family members, especially during the Sunday and Wednesday worship services. In addition, my church was well represented at the community Health Walk and Easter Egg Hunt and helped me distribute invite cards and pray with many people. We also collected individual prayer request cards and prayed for each request, following up with individuals who left their contact information. The congregation embraced the prayer card challenge and many said it gave them renewed intensity to pray for their families and the community.

There were some valuable spiritual lessons we learned from these various intercessory strategies. First, the church must patiently, persistently, and unceasingly engage in personal and corporate prayer. There were many on our cards that came to church on Easter Sunday, yet have sporadically attended church since Easter. There were also many we prayed for that have not connected with a local church, but we are determined to pray unceasingly that the Spirit will move in people's hearts. Secondly, my vision for Jeffersonville Baptist Church is that we are a church that loves our community so we will continuously pray for our community; therefore, our worship gatherings must emphasize prayer. As Miller states, "Corporate prayer was at the heart of early church worship." The early New Testament church devoted themselves to prayer and to the teaching of God's Word. It is my heart's desire to continually shepherd my church through the power of prayer, trusting that God will graciously and powerfully pour forth his Spirit to bring about personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization. God is being glorified in the many ways he opens opportunities for Jeffersonville Baptist Church to engage our community outwardly and welcome in our community all through the power of faithful prayer.

Goal 4: Prayerwalking Ministry

The fourth goal was to implement an ongoing prayerwalking ministry in which the church actively prayed over one hundred homes in the community. This goal was designed to answer the question, “How can the people of Jeffersonville Baptist Church effectively pray for the community?” In a recent blog, pastor and church consultant, Sam Rainer, listed several ways a church can get the attention of the community, and beginning an on-going prayerwalking ministry was included. He states, “One of the best reputation builders for a church is to pray for people in the community and let them know.”² People throughout Jeffersonville and Twiggs County will know that we are praying for them when they see us prayerfully engaging with the community. According to responses from the prayerwalking reflection questionnaire, we did not successfully meet our goal of prayerwalking at least one hundred homes in the community; however, we have gradually begun to establish an ongoing footprint and visible presence throughout the community as we continue to incorporate our prayerwalking ministry.

The purpose of the prayerwalking ministry is to actively engage the community onsite prayer. The traditional prayer meeting inside the church building is vitally important, but prayerwalking encourages us to go into the community to pray for the spiritual and physical needs of the culture. Like the 7 for 7 prayer card, each person was given a “Prayerwalking Jeffersonville” prayer card and encouraged to list names and locations they will commit to prayerwalking for seven weeks leading up to the “Twiggs County Family Weekend” evangelism event in June. As they prayerwalked these locations, they would also likely encounter opportunities to meet people, to pray with them personally, engage in gospel conversations, and invite them to church. The prayerwalking ministry was to become an ongoing evangelistic prayer strategy to reach

² Sam Rainer, “Eight Ways Any Church Can Get the Attention of the Neighborhood,” *Church Answers* (blog), July 19, 2023, <https://churchanswers.com/blog/eight-ways-any-church-can-get-the-attention-of-the-neighborhood/>.

the unsaved and unchurched. During the Prayerwalking Jeffersonville challenge, I also used Sunday evenings to teach a six part series on prayerwalking. At the conclusion of the teaching series, our church partnered with other churches in the community and met at the City Park of Jeffersonville for a corporate prayer service and to prayerwalk the area in preparation for the upcoming evangelism event.

At the conclusion of the prayerwalking challenge, the congregation completed an open-ended questionnaire about their reflections on the strategy. The first two questions asked them to record how often and how many homes they prayerwalked. The congregation prayerwalked a total of thirty-eight times and prayed over seventy-eight homes. However, question three noted that several prayerwalked other locations, such as local businesses, government offices, or drove around the county to pray. On average, those who did prayerwalk spent at least eighteen minutes on each prayerwalk. The congregation was supportive of the prayerwalking strategy and although many did not consistently participate due to health, almost the entire congregation showed up for the corporate prayerwalking service at the city park. Several responded on the questionnaire and their initial thoughts changed as a result of the teaching series and also seeing some of the incredible physical needs throughout the community. Several indicated that they regularly prayerwalked the church neighborhood, engaged with some of the residents, and invited them to church. The figure below provides more information from the questionnaire.

Table 11. Prayerwalking questionnaire responses

Question Number	Responses
1	Total of 38 times
2	Total of 78 homes
3	Twiggs County Schools, City Park, driving around the county, local businesses, government offices, law enforcement offices, nursing home, church neighborhood, other churches

Table 11, continued

Question Number	Responses
4	There is power in prayer, opened my eyes to needs in the community, want revival to come to our community, revitalization of our churches, God answers prayer
5	The total average time for the congregation was 18 minutes
6	God answers prayer, pray for peace, pray for families to be safe, I'm usually in a constant state of prayer so I didn't prayerwalk much, I have always walked the neighborhood but now I became intentional about seeing the neighborhood and praying for each home for their salvation and to be in church
7	Being led by the Spirit, being intentional about the needs of the community, new, but very rewarding, more people don't attend church and need prayer, realized the needs in our community
8	Unchurched families, incredible poverty in many areas, our schools need prayer, unsaved family members
9	Law enforcement dealing with crime, new families to come to our church, people struggling with physical needs, community growth and safety, salvations, raising our children in the church, break down racial divisions and political division
10	I saw someone in the yard working and walked up to the fence to let them know I was praying for the neighborhood and gave her a prayer card and she called a couple days later about a personal need so we prayed and I invited her to church; I was at the city park and prayed with the teenagers playing basketball and invited them to church
11	How many people don't attend church, many children growing up in broken homes, many single parent homes that need prayer and church support
12	The power of being visible in the community and praying so people actually know we are truly praying for them, each home has different needs and God knows them so being present helps, God listens and answers our prayers for others, pray for God to have lordship over our community
13	Spiritual warfare is definitely present, the devil wants to distract us or keep us from praying, to press on and trust God, the enemy will sometimes do what he can to keep us from praying in a difficult area, there are people we will encounter who simply hate Jesus and Christians
14	Some of the people we prayed with have started coming to church, the city park is being revitalized and kids are going there again, churches coming together to pray for our community, met a foster family and our church is helping them, many people came to the family evangelism event and we were able to personally pray with several people and invite to church

Table 11, continued

Question Number	Responses
15	Met a woman who was excited about the increasing attendance at her church since their church was closed for two years, people are reaching out for prayer

Overall, I found the “Prayerwalking Jeffersonville” challenge to be partially successful, even though we did not achieve the stated goal. I considered it successful because we launched an ongoing prayerwalking strategy that compels us to move outside the walls of the church and intentionally and actively pray throughout our community. I have continued to encourage the people to prayerwalk, but I also found it more helpful to regularly schedule corporate prayerwalking gatherings as evidenced from the service we held at the city park and the back-to-school prayer service. We have scheduled monthly prayerwalking gatherings for the first Saturday morning of each month, in addition to partnering with other local churches and the Twiggs County Gideons Camp to prayerwalk multiple areas. Sam Rainer lists that prayerwalking is one of the most powerful ways to revitalize a church, yet it is rarely done. One of the reasons he articulates is this: “By moving outward into the community, people physically see the mission field in a new light. You can’t reach your community if you don’t know your community. Prayerwalking helps you understand your neighborhood.”³ We also are incorporating Thom Rainer’s “Pray and Go” strategy by utilizing a door hanger with information about our church to leave at locations we prayerwalk and invite people to church.

Finally, on August 6, we hosted a community-wide corporate prayer service and prayerwalk at Jeffersonville Elementary School and we had over one hundred people

³ Sam Rainer, “One of the Most Powerful Ways to Revitalize Your Church That Almost No One Does,” *Church Answers* (blog), March 1, 2023.

attend; nearly all of my congregation attended. This was such an encouragement for me, and the school principal testified to the entire group how overjoyed she was with the community support to pray. My congregation and the other community stakeholders were able to walk the school and pray for the needs of the school all because they visited the campus. As Donnie Griggs states; “Until we reckon with the challenges that would cause us not to love our town, we won’t be pushed down on our knees in prayer to find the kind of love our town desperately needs.”⁴ I have learned through leading our church to prayerwalk that the community at large is welcoming and responding as we intentionally and actively pray for personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Ministry Project

Looking back over the ministry project, there were certainly some strengths and weaknesses. I wanted to develop a ministry project that would ultimately become an ongoing ministry emphasis of our church. The Bible and church history reveal the priority and power of prayer in the Christian life; however, the church too often lacks this power because prayerlessness has gripped our lives. This project not only opened my eyes to the lack of meaningful prayer in our church, but especially the prayerlessness in my life. However, the overall success of this ministry project does not solely depend on whether our church experiences immediate revitalization, although I pray God will bring sustained spiritual health and growth to our church. Instead, I believe the success of this project depends solely on our obedience to the Lord and trusting wholeheartedly upon his power through prayer. The following sections offer some reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of this project.

⁴ Ronnie Martin and Donnie Griggs, *Pastoring Small Towns: Help and Hope for Those Ministering in Smaller Places* (Brentwood, TN: B&H, 2023), 19.

Strengths of the Ministry Project

One of the strengths of the ministry project is the biblical emphasis on prayer. One of the things I have noticed, not just within my church, but throughout the community is the deep desire people have for hope in a world of uncertainty, brokenness, and spiritual unbelief. The church, through the power of the crucified and resurrected Savior, has a message of eternal hope. People seemingly welcome prayer and believe in the power of prayer although Christians too often have forfeited the power of the prayer. These past four years have been volatile, uncertain, and fearful days, but God has given us the gracious gift of prayer through the power of his Spirit. There seems to be a renewed emphasis on revival and prayer. For so long churches emphasized growth through dynamic programs and contemporary forms of worship; however, the Bible and church history demonstrates how the church has experienced national revival, personal renewal, and sustained revitalization when they are devoted to strong biblical teaching and prayer. Dynamic ministries, worship gatherings, and preaching are critically important, but all must be undergirded in faithful, persistent, and unceasing prayer. One of the strengths of this ministry project is the faithful articulation and exposition of what the Bible reveals about prayer's connection to revitalization.

Another strength of this ministry project was witnessing our congregation engage in meaningful corporate prayer. The sermon series on prayer and the teaching series on prayerwalking provided the church with a greater understanding of biblical prayer and its connection to revitalization, but there were some powerful moments when we prayed together during the prayer meetings and corporate prayer services. The congregation embraced the prayer card challenges and have continued to pray for their names. Also, the prayer meetings have become more meaningful and powerful because we understand the necessity of praying evangelistically for others. Finally, it has been amazing to see our people engage the community through the different community-wide events and prayerwalking services. At first, I was skeptical that our people would

participate, but I regretfully undervalued their commitment because of their age, health concerns, and lack of community involvement in the past. In contrast, the congregation overwhelmingly supported and participated in these efforts because they want to see their unsaved and unchurched family members, friends, neighbors, and community follow Christ and they want their local church to thrive. We still have much work to do, but it is a blessing from the Lord to shepherd this local body and testify to our commitment to pray for our community. It is a reminder of the importance of pastoral leadership in shepherding the church. We truly want to be the church in our community that is known for prayer.

One final strength included the establishment of the pastor's prayer group with the deacons. As a bi-vocational pastor, it can be very difficult balancing the needs of the church and providing for my family; however, I quickly realized the failure of prayerlessness in my personal and ministry lives. It was better understood when I invited a retired pastor who formerly served at JBC in the late 1970s to come and preach our homecoming service in May of 2022.⁵ In the months leading up to the service, we spoke regularly and he told me that early in his tenure the best thing that happened was when one of his deacons told him they were going to meet regularly to pray. Like myself, he struggled with praying, but when this older deacon invested time to pray with him, it was a turning point in his life and ministry that has continued today.

I am very thankful for my deacons who are much older than me and who want me to be an effective pastor. The discussions from the sermon evaluation tool revealed the importance of starting a prayer group. All the deacons shared how, in the past, when this church experienced growth, health, and unity it was because the men of the church

⁵ Rev. Al O'Quinn recently retired from pastoral ministry after serving over forty years in several churches. He served as pastor of Jeffersonville Baptist Church from 1978-1982. On May 22, 2022, we held a homecoming service and I invited Rev. O'Quinn to be the guest preacher. His message focused on prayer.

regularly prayed together. More importantly, they all wanted to pray regularly with me. Since we started our prayer group, we have grown closer and the prayer time has been sweet and powerful. We also began regularly prayerwalking the church neighborhood and we gather on Saturday evenings in the church sanctuary to pray. When the pastor and lay leaders together model prayer, it greatly impacts the congregation to pray.

One final strength of the project was the prayer card strategies: the 7 for 7 prayer card and the Prayerwalking Jeffersonville prayer card. Recording prayer requests is not uncommon, but the two intercessory prayer challenges utilized prayer cards to encourage the congregation to commit themselves to pray for specific people and locations during a specific time period. The prayer cards were a visible reminder of each person's commitment to intentionally pray evangelistically for others. Like many churches, our church's weekly bulletin contains many prayer requests that may get overlooked; however, the prayer cards have served as a specific reminder to pray daily. We have continued to utilize the prayer card strategy trusting that God will answer our prayers.

Weaknesses of the Ministry Project

One weakness of the project included the lack of emphasis on teaching about personal prayer, especially since the pre-assessment questionnaire inquired about the congregation's knowledge and personal prayer practices. The majority of the project prioritized corporate prayer strategies, such as prayer meetings, prayerwalks, and worship services as the primary means for revitalization, but there needed to be a strategy implemented to help the congregation grow in their own personal prayer patterns. In addition, I believe the sermons provided a biblical overview of prayer, but I think that a small group focus on biblical prayer would have greatly benefited the church, especially since the data analysis from the *t*-tests did not yield a statistically significant difference in the congregation's knowledge and prayer practices. This discovery impressed upon me to

relaunch our Sunday School ministry in August and strategically focus on studying specific prayers in the Bible, such as Paul's prayers.

Another weakness of the project was the lack of effectiveness in strengthening my personal prayer life as a husband and father. One of the areas I continue to struggle with is praying with my wife and my children. I believe my wife and I have a wonderful marriage, but for some reason praying with my wife is difficult. I regularly pray for my wife and children, but it seems that something is missing when we do not pray together. Paul Miller states, "The only way you can sustain love, especially in close relationships, with all the complexities of your sin and the other person's, is to saturate your relationship in prayer. Constant love requires constant prayer."⁶ Corporate prayer is vitally important, but one weakness of the project as evidenced by the surveys is teaching our people the importance of personal prayer practices. The launch of the new Sunday School class has provided my wife and me the opportunity to be part of a smaller group that allows us the opportunity to develop effective prayer practices with others, particularly two younger couples who have recently started attending our church.

Another weakness of this project was the ineffective implementation of the prayerwalking strategy. Not that the prayerwalking strategy was a complete failure, but in our current context I think it would be more effective as a corporate strategy, which was demonstrated by the well-attended prayerwalking service we held at the city park for the evangelism event. Instead of asking the congregation to immediately prayerwalk one hundred homes, it probably would have been more effective to encourage the congregation to prayerwalk one or two listed locations of once per week. The responses from the prayerwalking reflection questionnaire reinforced this critique as several of the members did not actively prayerwalk, but they stated that they prayed over their listed

⁶ Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Church: Becoming a People of Hope in a Discouraging World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 231.

names and locations. However, we held a prayer service and prayerwalk for the local schools at Jeffersonville Elementary School and it was well attended by our congregation and the community.

One final weakness of the project was the lack of knowledge and understanding of revitalization. The church was familiar with revivalism, but local church revitalization is a relatively contemporary model. Declining and dying churches want to experience growth and health, but those two objectives are completely different. The objective of church revitalization is not statistical growth, although growth is an expected consequence. Numerical statistics have been a driving metric for many years, but statistics alone do not tell the full story of a healthy church. Revitalization is hard work that requires patient perseverance from the pastor and the congregation, especially in small rural towns. I believe the sermons and lessons emphasized a biblical approach to revitalization through prayer, but I also believe the congregation, particularly the deacons, would have greatly benefited from exposure to the literature on local church revitalization and testimonies of revitalized churches.

What I Would Do Differently

The most important change I would make to this project would have been to implement it in a smaller group setting with the deacon body. Although I believe the congregation benefited from some aspects of the ministry project and the corporate prayer patterns of the church were enriched, I think the project was too broad in its scope and should have focused on strengthening the personal prayer lives of the pastor and deacons in order to lead this revitalization effort. The congregation is very unified as a body and supportive of my ministry. They are spiritually mature, faithfully attend church, and are concerned for the spiritual needs of the community. They also have experienced the gradual decline of the church and are deeply concerned about its future, and they have taken some steps towards becoming more evangelistic.

Because the *t*-tests did not indicate any statistically significant difference in knowledge and prayer patterns, I think the various questionnaires could have been more effective and greatly enhanced the overall effectiveness of the ministry project. I set out to try and strengthen every aspect of the church's corporate prayer life and also lead our church to engage the community through prayer, yet I should have prioritized a greater understanding of prayer's role in leading local church revitalization. Like many churches facing this same predicament, my church studies the Bible regularly and intensely, but some important aspects of our prayer patterns and knowledge are likely still lacking. Not that the congregation as a whole has not been receptive to reflecting on their prayer lives and participating in the prayer strategies; however, looking back I think investing more intensely in the deacon body from the beginning would have made the ministry project more effective, as evidenced by establishing a weekly prayer gathering among the pastor and deacons. I believe that was a huge success because we have consistently gathered each week to pray.

Although the ministry project was likely too broad in its scope, I am excited that we have begun to prioritize a true midweek prayer meeting, implemented a prayerwalking ministry, started a pastor's prayer group, prioritized meaningful prayer during the corporate worship services, and established prayer as our church's mission in the community. There is much work to do in strengthening my personal prayer life in order to more effectively shepherd my family as I continue to lead the church through this revitalization effort. The pastor's prayer group came out of the realization that in order for our church to understand a biblical approach to revitalization through prayer, the church leadership must be competent and devoted to this process. Because prayer requires patient perseverance and discipline, it too easily can be neglected or abandoned by the busyness and struggles of this world. Paul's words encourage us to devote ourselves to prayer, to be watchful, vigilant, and thankful, and to pray evangelistically (Col 4:2-4). Looking back over this project, I think leading the deacons to pray like Paul

would have inspired them to take ownership in helping me to more effectively lead the congregation to never give up on the power of prayer.

Theological Reflections

The culmination of this ministry project has been one of the most challenging yet rewarding endeavors I have ever undertaken. This project means more to me than simply earning a degree by taking my church through some ministry strategy. My ultimate desire is to see spiritual transformation in the lives of the congregation and myself, for us to become so immersed and dependent on the power of Spirit-filled prayer, to impact our community for Christ, and to become Great Commission Christians.⁷ Jesus Christ commanded his people to carry forth the gospel and to make disciples, it was not an option. The church is the instrument through which God has ordained the fulfillment of this divine mission. Rainer states, “Prayer is the difference between Christians who share the gospel and Christians who don’t.”⁸ Leading local church revitalization through the power of prayer has theological implications because too many pastoral leaders and churches have neglected prayer, which has seriously diminished the church’s evangelistic impact, causing churches to experience serious decline.

The Bible and church history reveal that prayer is a gracious gift from God, inviting Christians to come before the Father through the indwelling presence and power of the Spirit to commune with the Lord. Just as there are theological implications to leading revitalization through prayer, there are also personal implications. I grew up in a typical traditional Southern Baptist church.⁹ At the time, it was one of the largest

⁷ Thom Rainer, *Pray and Go: Your Invitation to Become a Great Commission Christian* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2023). 9–12.

⁸ Thom Rainer, *Sharing the Gospel with Ease: How the Love of Christ Can Flow Naturally from Your Life* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2022), 67.

⁹ My home church, Green Acres Baptist Church (GABC), is located in Warner Robins, GA, and during the late 1980s and early 1990s, it was regularly recognized by the Georgia Baptist Mission Board and the Southern Baptist Convention for its growth and baptisms. By the early 2000s, population

churches in the community and was even recognized by the convention for its growth and baptisms. However, as the socioeconomic dynamics of the neighborhood and broader community changed, my home church gradually experienced a significant decline. Unlike other prominent churches in the community, my church did not relocate; instead, they made the decision to stay in the neighborhood, yet it has still been extremely difficult. Like that church and so many others, JBC has experienced a significant decline and needs revitalization. In contrast, I have experienced churches that are seemingly healthy and growing numerically, but they depend upon programs and personalities rather than Spirit-filled prayer. Too many churches and Christians have forfeited the supernatural power of prayer because they do not know how to pray or they pray as the last resort. This ministry project has deepened my conviction that prayer is foundational for personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization.

Personal Reflections

As the pastor of a rural church in a revitalization context, there are several lessons I learned from this ministry research project. Even though I spent nearly twenty years in public education teaching and coaching, I had this burning desire to pastor a local church, particularly a small church in a rural community. During the candidacy process at Jeffersonville Baptist Church, I understood some of the dynamics of the church as one that faced serious decline, had no young families attending the church, and was a very close to closing its doors. I listened to all the podcasts and read a number of books about church growth and revitalization. Because I am a driven individual, I believed that by simply working hard, preaching well, regularly visiting the current members, and doing everything I could to reach out into the community would instantly lead to growth

growth with the city and changing population dynamics impacted the church tremendously, leading to a significant decline that has continued to impact this church today. GABC is making strides towards revitalization by reaching their neighborhood and the community at large through the power of prayer.

and revitalization. However, I quickly learned that I was too busy and impatient to effectively lead a rural revitalization without prayer. I realized my soul was gripped with prayerlessness, which negatively impacted my ability to shepherd my family and church. I needed to get serious about praying in the Spirit, as Paul says: “Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving” (Col 4:2).

In addition to reading and studying every passage in the Bible that I could find on prayer, a book called *The Kneeling Christian* brought me great conviction and encouragement. For example, the author states, “Prayer is not given to us as a burden to be borne, or an irksome duty to fulfill, but to be a joy and power to which there is no limit.”¹⁰ In my four years pastoring this church, I have struggled with Satan polluting my mind with the possibility that God may not bring revitalization to JBC. As stated throughout this ministry project, God alone has the power to bring revitalization, yet he uses the prayers of his people as a catalyst to accomplish his purposes of renewal, revival, and revitalization. I was not making any changes in the church in terms of worship style or aesthetics of the church, but in my efforts to reach out into the community I was overwhelming myself with the extreme busyness of reaching the community such that I was not devoted to personal prayer nor leading my church to pray.

The lack of prayer was also impacting my preaching ministry because I placed greater emphasis on my hours of preparation rather than seriously and intentionally devoting time to pray for the Spirit to guide my preaching. Charles Spurgeon’s book, *The Pastor in Prayer* was another great resource of encouragement. Known as the “Prince of Preachers,” Spurgeon’s preaching ministry was so impactful and universal that we can forget how much he depended upon prayer. Reading his recorded prayers from sermons and prayer meetings was spiritually enriching and edifying. For example, he prayed these words as a prelude to his sermon entitled “Trust and Pray” from Isaiah 30, “O LORD

¹⁰ Unknown Christian, *The Kneeling Christian*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 59.

GOD, the strength and the hope of Thy people, we would approach Thee through Jesus Christ Thy Son with notes of thanksgiving, for we are not ashamed of our hope, neither has our confidence led us into confusion. We have proven it to be true, that they trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which can never be moved, which abideth forever.”¹¹ Spurgeon’s prayers like this remind me to faithfully, humbly, and obediently work hard for the Lord, yet wholeheartedly depending upon the power of the Spirit to bring forth the fruit of revitalization.

Throughout this ministry project, God has richly blessed our church in many ways because we are rededicating ourselves to honoring God through Spirit-dependent prayer. I have also learned that the fruit of local church revitalization looks different in every church, but its focus is ultimately on the glory of Jesus Christ. In strengthening the individual and corporate prayer life of the church, Jeffersonville Baptist Church is gradually becoming a corporate prayer warrior for the entire community as we pray evangelistically for the unsaved and unchurched, prayerwalk throughout the community, intercede for fellow believers, pastors, and churches, and engage in spiritual warfare through the power of the Spirit.¹² Whether God chooses to bring revitalization to our church or not, we are committed to trusting in the Lord, faithfully praying to him, and reaching out into our community through prayer in the name of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to lead revitalization at Jeffersonville Baptist Church through the power of Spirit-filled prayer. In the four years that I have pastored

¹¹ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Pastor in Prayer: A Collection of the Sunday Morning Prayers of C. H. Spurgeon* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2004), 65.

¹² Thom Rainer, *I Am a Christian: Discovering What It Means to Follow Jesus Together with Fellow Believers* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2022), 89–102. Rainer uses this curious term “prayer warrior” to describe a lady named Lillian who was part of a group regularly praying for their church and a new pastor. Rainer accepted the pastorate at this declining church and he attributes Lillian’s devotion to Spirit-filled prayer and as a reason God brought revitalization.

this church, I have grown to love this congregation and the community. Revitalization is hard work which requires patient perseverance, but I have learned that it is much more than simply bringing a declining church back to life. As he documented the astonishing work of the Lord throughout his community, Jonathan Edwards wrote: “This work of God, as it was carried on, and the number of true saints multiplied, soon made a glorious alteration in the town . . . the town seemed to be full of the presence of God.”¹³ Patience and slowness are extremely difficult for me, but I quickly realized that not all changes are good changes. Ronnie Martin states, “The slowness of patience leads us toward treating our people less like projects that need to be completed and more like people who need the completeness of Jesus to provide them with wholeness.”¹⁴ There are changes that likely need to be made that could cause us to grow quickly, but the most important change we needed was to strengthen our personal and corporate prayer lives and to reach our community through prayer. Prayer requires patience and it leads to spiritual transformation as our people become more Christ-like.

In his book *The Surprising Return of the Neighborhood Church*, Sam Rainer states, “The location of your church is God’s strategy to reach and serve the community.”¹⁵ As we work to lead Jeffersonville Baptist Church toward health and revitalization through prayer, we also want to have greater spiritual impact on the community by taking the gospel to our community. The church and the community had been seriously declining long before I arrived and there is no guarantee that this church will survive beyond this present older generation. However, I firmly believe as this ministry project has demonstrated that local church revitalization is dependent upon an

¹³ Jonathan Edwards, “A Narrative of Surprising Conversions,” in *Jonathan Edwards On Revival*, Select Works of Jonathan Edwards (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1984), 14.

¹⁴ Martin and Griggs, *Pastoring Small Towns*, 83.

¹⁵ Sam Rainer, *The Surprising Return of the Neighborhood Church: Discover How Your Church Is Primed to Reach Your Neighbors* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2023), 11.

outpouring of the Holy Spirit, yet the Lord uses his people as a catalyst to bring about renewal and revitalization. The church must be obedient to Jesus's command to fulfill the Great Commission, and prayer undergirds that mission.

In addition, as I continue to lead and encourage my church to pray outwardly, I have discovered that I have become recognized as a pastor to the community at large and it has given me a deeper love for all of Twiggs County. I reached out to several pastors in the community and together we have formed a ministerial association that meets monthly primarily to pray. I have also started working through our local association, the Ebenezer Baptist Association, to partner with churches that are like mine and need revitalization, working together first to pray and to also help resource and train these pastors and churches. Furthermore, I have reached out to my state convention the Georgia Baptist Mission Board, in order to form partnerships to help resource and train the many bivocational pastors throughout our region and strengthen the rural church beginning with prayer. It is my prayer that God will be glorified in these efforts to lead Jeffersonville Baptist Church toward revitalization; however, my church also needs me to love them, biblically preach and teach them, pray for them, and lovingly shepherd them home to Jesus. As I care for them pastorally, our church can faithfully and wholeheartedly reach our community through prayer trusting that God will bless our church with personal renewal and corporate revitalization.

APPENDIX 1
PRAYER QUESTIONNAIRE

This prayer questionnaire was designed to assess the biblical knowledge and prayer patterns of the people of Jeffersonville Baptist Church.¹ This prayer questionnaire was used first as a pre-assessment in order to measure the congregation's current knowledge and prayer practices prior to the implementation of the sermon series and prayer strategies. The questionnaire encompasses three parts. The first part contains fifteen questions based on a six-point Likert scale. The second part includes multiple choice questions with the option of a short answer response based on the participants' views. The third part consists of written short answer responses. This same survey was used at the conclusion of the project implementation to assess the congregations' growth in knowledge and prayer practices.

¹ This prayer questionnaire has been adapted from the C.S. Lewis Institute.

Participant Identification Number: _____ Age: _____

Gender: _____ JBC Church Member: _____

The following questionnaire in which you are about to participate is designed to determine your views and patterns on prayer in your personal and corporate life. This research is being conducted by Daniel Wright for the purposes of collecting data for a ministry project on prayer for revitalization. For this research, you are asked to answer this questionnaire two times: before project implementation and after project implementation. Your participation is voluntary. Please answer the questions with honesty.

I agree to participate: _____ I do not agree to participate: _____

Part I—Use the scale below to answer the following questions.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

- ___ 1. I pray every day.
- ___ 2. I believe God hears and responds to me when I pray.
- ___ 3. I want to learn more about the purpose and power of prayer.
- ___ 4. When I pray, I spend more time praying about my personal needs.
- ___ 5. I pray at least once a week for the salvation of an unbeliever.
- ___ 6. I believe praying helps the fruitfulness of the church.
- ___ 7. I pray at least once a week for my pastor, deacons, and church leaders.
- ___ 8. I pray more when I am facing personal struggles in life.
- ___ 9. I pray at least once a week for my community leaders (i.e. elected government leaders, school board, law enforcement, etc.)
- ___ 10. I have a set time and place to pray.
- ___ 11. I believe my church is devoted to prayer.
- ___ 12. I pray at least once a week for the needs of my community.
- ___ 13. When I pray, I use a list that I pray over.
- ___ 14. When I pray, I use Scripture.
- ___ 15. When I pray, I use a journal to record my reflections.

Part II—For the following questions, choose the best answer that fits your current prayer context.

___ 16. How often do you pray?

___ more than once each day

___ once a day

___ a few times a week

___ once or twice a week

___ 17. On average, how much time do you usually spend when you pray?

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| ___ 1–10 minutes | ___ 10–20 minutes |
| ___ 20–30 minutes | ___ 30–45 minutes |
| ___ 45–60 minutes | ___ 60+ minutes |

___ 18. In the last month, the focus of my prayers have mostly been about (top 3):

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ___ health & safety | ___ personal finances and/or work |
| ___ relationships | ___ general strength |
| ___ comforting the bereaved | ___ family/friends |
| ___ God’s forgiveness | ___ God’s guidance |
| ___ unbelievers/unchurched | ___ victims of tragedies |
| ___ world crises/concerns | ___ the president/world leaders |
| ___ stronger faith | ___ giving thanks |
| ___ (not listed) _____ | |

___ 19. I most often pray for:

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| ___ myself | ___ family/friends |
| ___ community needs | ___ nation |
| ___ (not listed) _____ | |

___ 20. The most important purpose of prayer is:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ___ to improve your own life | ___ to help others |
| ___ to express your intentions | ___ intimacy with God |
| ___ to seek God’s guidance | ___ to thank God for blessings |
| ___ (not listed) _____ | |

___ 21. Are your prayers answered?

___ never

___ sometimes

___ often

___ always

___ 22. When your prayers are not answered, what do you believe the most important reason is?

___ God is punishing you

___ it's not in God's plan

___ God helps those who help themselves

___ God does not respond to specific prayers

___ your faith is not strong enough

___ 23. Where do you pray most often?

___ at church

___ at home

___ while driving/traveling

___ in nature

___ at work

___ via the internet/online prayer circles

___ 24. What should be the purpose of the church gathering together for prayer?

___ 25. During the corporate worship gatherings, what is the main emphasis of prayer?

___ needs of the church members

___ personal struggles

___ salvation for unbelievers

___ secular needs

Part III—Open ended response questions. Answer the following questions as thoroughly as you feel is appropriate.

26) How would you explain what prayer is? _____

27) Describe your routine of praying? _____

28) Who has had the greatest influence on your praying (in what way)? _____

29) Share a time when you believe the Lord answered your prayer? _____

30) Describe a time when the Lord answered your prayer in an unexpected way? _____

31) Are there times when you find it difficult to pray (if so, explain)? _____

32) When you pray, what are some things you most often pray about? _____

33) How would you describe the corporate prayer life of Jeffersonville Baptist Church?

34) What does revitalization of the local church mean to you? _____

35) Explain why prayer important to you? _____

APPENDIX 2

7 FOR 7 PRAYER CARD

7 for 7
prayer card

Pray for 7 people/families for 7 weeks
leading up to Easter

7 for 7
prayer card

Pray for 7 people/families for 7 weeks
leading up to Easter

7 for 7
prayer card

Pray for 7 people/families for 7 weeks
leading up to Easter



APPENDIX 3

SERMON EVALUATION TOOL

The purpose of this sermon evaluation tool was to utilize a rubric to critique the effectiveness of a sermon series. This particular tool was used by a panel that consisted of myself and the deacons in order to evaluate the biblical fidelity, understanding, and application of the entire sermon series on prayer. A copy of this evaluation tool is provided in order to assist pastors as they seek to improve the overall effectiveness of their sermons.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Sermon Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
Each sermon was sound in its interpretation of what Scripture says about prayer leading to revitalization.					
Each sermon was faithful to the biblical theology of prayer for revitalization.					
Scope					
The content of each sermon sufficiently covers what the Bible teaches about prayer leading to revitalization.					
Each sermon sufficiently covers a biblical framework of prayer for revitalization.					
Knowledge					
Each sermon was clear, containing a big idea.					
Each sermon provides opportunities for participant interaction with material.					
Practicality					
Each sermon clearly details how prayer is vital to the health of the church.					
At the end of the sermon series, participants will be able to articulate a biblical theology of prayer and how it leads to revitalization.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 4

SEVEN-PART SERMON SERIES OUTLINES

The following are sermon outlines for each of the sermons preached during the seven-part series. The purpose of these sermons was to fulfill the goal of teaching the congregation the importance of biblical prayer with the hope that it would lead to an increase of knowledge and prayer practices that would help bring about local church revitalization.

Sermon Brief

Name: Daniel Wright

Date: March 5, 2023, 11am worship service

Title: “Calling on the Name of the Lord”

Text—Genesis 4:17–26

CIT—As mankind continued down the path of sin and depravity, the lineage of Cain arrogantly proclaimed their name to the world, but Seth’s lineage marked a new beginning for humanity to call on the name of the Lord.

CIS—Prayer is central to the revitalization because as Christians when we call upon the name of the Lord, we are trusting in the name of the one who can do that which only he can do, and that is to save people from their sin, and to bring about personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization.

Introduction

1. Opening illustration related to the Businessmen’s Revival of the late 1850s and prayer.
2. The Central Idea of the Text is this— As mankind continued down the path of sin and depravity, the lineage of Cain arrogantly proclaimed their name to the world, but Seth’s lineage marked a new beginning for humanity to call on the name of the Lord.
3. Today, you and I can call upon the name of the Lord through the person of Jesus Christ to deliver on his promises.

Body

- I. The pride and arrogant sinfulness of this world leads to worshiping and proclaiming mankind achievements (Gen 4:17–24).
 1. The family of Cain arrogantly, pridefully, and sinfully proclaim and exalt their name in the world (vs. 17–18).
 2. Although Cain’s family creates incredible cultural advancements, their continued sin leads to increased moral and spiritual failings (vs. 19–24).
 3. Biblical truth—Like Cain’s genealogy, mankind’s sinfulness reveals our pridefulness and ambition to proclaim our name throughout the world
- II. The faithful and humble obedience of redeemed people leads to worshiping and proclaiming the name of the Lord (Gen 4:25–26).
 1. The birth of Seth restores Eve’s hope in God’s promised plan of redemption through a righteous seed (vs. 25).
 2. The family of Seth begins to faithfully worship the Lord by calling upon his name (vs. 26).
 3. Biblical truth—Like Seth’s genealogy, calling upon the name of the Lord appeals to his holy name and his perfectly righteous character

Conclusion—The Big Idea is this—Prayer is central to revitalization of the local church because as Christians when we call upon the name of the Lord, we are trusting in the name of the one who can do that which only he can do, and that is to save people from their sin, and to bring about personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization.

Sermon Brief

Name: Daniel Wright

Date: March 5, 2023, 6pm worship service

Title: "Pray in This Way"

Text—Matthew 6:9–13

CIT—In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught his disciples how to pray for the purpose of approaching God and petitioning their requests to the Lord.

CIS—As God's adopted children through the person of Jesus Christ, we have the amazing privilege of petitioning God in prayer for the purpose of honoring his name in all our requests.

Introduction

1. Opening illustration related to U.S. Supreme Court case banning prayer in schools
2. The Central Idea of this Text is this—In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught his disciples how to pray for the purpose of approaching God and petitioning their requests to the Lord.
3. Christians are graciously invited to pray in the name of Jesus Christ to a holy and loving Father who welcomes our petitions.

Body

- I. When we pray we proclaim God's holy name to be honored and magnified above all our requests (Matt 6:9).
 1. We have the gracious privilege of daily communing with God
 2. We come into the Father's holy presence as adopted children through Christ
 3. We approach the Almighty Father in prayer who lives in heaven
- II. When we pray we honor God's holy name as he fulfills his global purpose (Matt 6:9–10).
 1. We pray for the hallowing of God's name in the universe
 2. We pray for the fulfillment of God's kingdom to come
 3. We pray for God's reign in our lives here on earth
- III. When we pray we treasure God's name as he fulfills our daily needs (Matt 6:11–13).
 1. We pray trusting in God's daily provision
 2. We pray for God to forgive our sins and others
 3. We pray for God to protect us from evil and give us a heart of gratitude

Conclusion—The Big Idea is this—Prayer is central to revitalization of the local church because as Christians who are adopted children of God through Christ, we humbly and wholeheartedly pray to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ that his name is honored and glorified in all our requests.

Sermon Brief

Name: Daniel Wright

Date: March 12, 2023, 11am worship service

Title: “When God Invades the Boneyard”

Text—Ezekiel 37:1–14

CIT—The prophet Ezekiel was taken by the Spirit of God in a vision to valley filled with bones and shows him that he alone has the power and gracious desire to resurrect this graveyard of dry bones to life again.

CIS—Prayer is central for local church revitalization because as Christians we understand that God alone has the supernatural power to bring dying churches back to life, yet he graciously uses the prayers of his faithful people as a catalyst to accomplish his divine purposes.

Introduction

1. Opening illustration—Strange things can happen in a graveyard
2. The Central Idea of the Text
3. When God invades the boneyard of declining, dying, and decaying churches, local church revitalization happens supernaturally.

Body

- I. The Lord opens our eyes to see the hopeless devastation and spiritual decay all around us and encourages us to wholeheartedly trust in his sovereign purposes (Ezek 37:1–3).
 1. Ezekiel is taken in an astonishing vision to a decayed filled boneyard (vs. 1–2).
 2. God poses the question that tests Ezekiel’s faith in God (vs. 3).
- II. Though the Lord has the supernatural power to bring life from death, God graciously uses his faithful purpose in the work of redemption (Ezek 37:4–10).
 1. God’s redemptive work always originates with himself (vs. 4–6).
 2. God graciously uses Spirit-filled people as a catalyst to accomplish his work of Redemption (vs. 7–10).
- III. Despite mankind’s continuing sinful rebellion, spiritual apathy, and decaying immorality, the Lord delights in pouring forth his Spirit to give life (Ezek 37:11–14).
 1. God reminds Ezekiel of the disastrous consequences of sin (vs. 11)
 2. God graciously empowers Ezekiel in participate in God’s divine purposes— (vs. 12–14).

Conclusion—The Big Idea is this—Prayer is central to local church revitalization because as Christians we understand that God alone has the supernatural power to bring dying churches back to life, yet he graciously uses the prayers of his faithful people as a catalyst to accomplish his divine purposes.

Sermon Brief

Name: Daniel Wright

Date: March 12, 2023, 6pm worship service

Title: “Earthshaking Prayer”

Text—Acts 4:23–37

CIT—After Peter and John were released by the Sanhedrin for proclaiming the name of Jesus Christ, they gathered with fellow believers to pray corporately for boldness to continue proclaiming the good news.

CIS—Prayer is crucial for local church revitalization because when the church is wholeheartedly united and devoted to praying corporately in the name of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will bring about supernatural spiritual transformation to empower the church to boldly fulfill the Great Commission.

Introduction

1. Opening illustration—Angers Bridge in France collapse when military marched in unison across the bridge
2. The Central Idea of the Text
3. As Jeffersonville Baptist Church is wholeheartedly unified in Spirit-filled corporate prayer, God will respond in extraordinary ways to bring about revitalization.

Body

- I. Earthshaking prayer emboldens the church to confidently, steadfastly, and faithfully proclaim the gospel in the midst of overwhelming opposition and difficulty (vs. 23–31)
 1. The church praises God’s sovereignty in unbreakable unity (vs. 23–24)
 2. The church’s message is always rooted in the authority of Scripture (vs. 25–26)
 3. The church’s purpose is fulfilled in Christ (vs. 27–28)
 4. The church’s prayer is answered in the power of the Holy Spirit (vs. 29–31)
- II. Earthshaking prayer empowers the church in unbreakable unity to accomplish Christ’s mission in the community—verses 32–37
 1. The mission of the church is united under one common purpose (vs. 32)
 2. The mission of the church is united under one common message (vs. 33)
 3. The mission of the church is united to care for the community (vs. 34–35)
 4. The mission of the church is encouraged by examples of faithfulness (vs. 36–37)

Conclusion—The Big Idea is this—Prayer is crucial for local church revitalization because when the church is wholeheartedly unified and devoted to praying corporately in the name of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will bring about supernatural spiritual transformation to empower the church to boldly fulfill the Great Commission.

Sermon Brief

Name: Daniel Wright

Date: March 19, 2023, 11am worship service

Title: “Passionate Prayer for People”

Text—1 Thessalonians 3:9–13

CIT—The Apostle Paul longed to be with the Christians in Thessalonica so he prayed an incredibly heartfelt intercessory prayer for their continued faithfulness in following Christ.

CIS—Prayer is crucial for local church revitalization because it demonstrates our passion for people as we lovingly and wholehearted petition the Lord on their behalf.

Introduction

1. Opening illustration—Church in Scotland prays for David Livingston in Africa.
2. The Central Idea of the Text.
3. As the church we can intercede on behalf of others for personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization.

Body

I. The cause of our intercessory prayer arises out of deep concern for others and our passionate affection for their spiritual good (1 Thess 2:17–3:8).

1. Paul was deeply concerned about their spiritual welfare (vs. 2:17–20)
2. Paul expresses deep longing for their spiritual growth (vs. 3:1–3)
3. Paul rejoices at the news of their perseverance, love, and faith (vs. 3:4–8)

II. The ends of our intercessory prayer is to thank God for the work he does in strengthening the faith and love of his people (1 Thess 3:9–13).

1. Paul encourages the church with rich thanksgiving to God (vs. 9)
2. Paul encourages the church with his desire to help them (vs. 10–11)
3. Paul encourages the church to exhibit Christ-exalting love (vs. 12)
4. Paul encourages the church to anticipate their future glorification (vs. 13)

Conclusion—The Big Idea is this— Prayer is crucial for local church revitalization because it demonstrates our passion for people as we lovingly and wholehearted petition the Lord on their behalf. When we intercede for others, there is no greater prayer we can offer them than to pray for God to strengthen their faith so that they stand blameless and faithful before the Lord on the last day.

Sermon Brief

Name: Daniel Wright

Date: March 19, 2023, 6pm worship service

Title: “Overcoming the Hurdles to Prayerlessness”

Text—Philippians 1:9–11

CIT—The Apostle Paul intercedes in prayer on behalf of the Christians in Philippi by encouraging them to continuing growing in their love for one another.

CIS—Prayer is essential to local church revitalization because it is the chief exercise of faith. We must fight prayerlessness by repenting of our unbelief and fueling our faith with God’s promises if we truly want to see personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization.

Introduction

1. Opening illustration—Billy Graham tree stump prayer.
2. The Central Idea of the Text.
3. Prayerlessness is sinful and prideful barrier to local church revitalization and through the power of the Spirit we must fight against prayerlessness.

Body

- I. We overcome the hurdles of prayerlessness by praying for what is most excellent (Phil 1:9–10).
 1. Paul’s prayer spells the death of entrenched excuses for not praying (vs. 9)
 2. Paul connects Christian love to the knowledge of the gospel (vs. 9–10a)
 3. Our decisions are based on a heart transformed by God’s grace (vs. 10a)
- II. We overcome the hurdles of prayerlessness by pursuing spiritual transformation and eternal glorification (Phil 1:10–11).
 1. Paul encourages the church to pursue righteousness through the Spirit (vs. 10b)
 2. Paul encourages the church to pursue a vision of eternal glory (vs. 11)

Conclusion—The Big Idea is this— Prayer is essential to local church revitalization because it is the chief exercise of faith. When Christians don’t pray we reveal faithless pride that dishonors God and puts trust in ourselves. We must fight prayerlessness by repenting of our unbelief and fueling our faith with God’s promises if we truly want to see personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization.

Sermon Brief

Name: Daniel Wright

Date: March 26, 2023, 11am worship service

Title: “Give God No Rest in Praying”

Text—Isaiah 62:1–12

CIT—The Lord’s passionate zeal for the glory of his bride, Zion, is relentless as he called forth watchmen to persistent intercession until he fulfilled his glorious purpose of spiritual transformation.

CIS—Prayer is essential and foundational for local church revitalization because it demonstrates our unwavering devotion and wholehearted confidence to petition the Lord in prayer. We faithfully and humbly serve as God’s watchmen, giving ourselves to relentless prayer as we give the Lord himself no rest until he brings about personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization.

Introduction

1. Opening illustration—Story about a factory night watchman fired from his job.
2. The Central Idea of the Text.
3. The church today serves as dedicated watchmen who relentlessly watch and pray.

Body

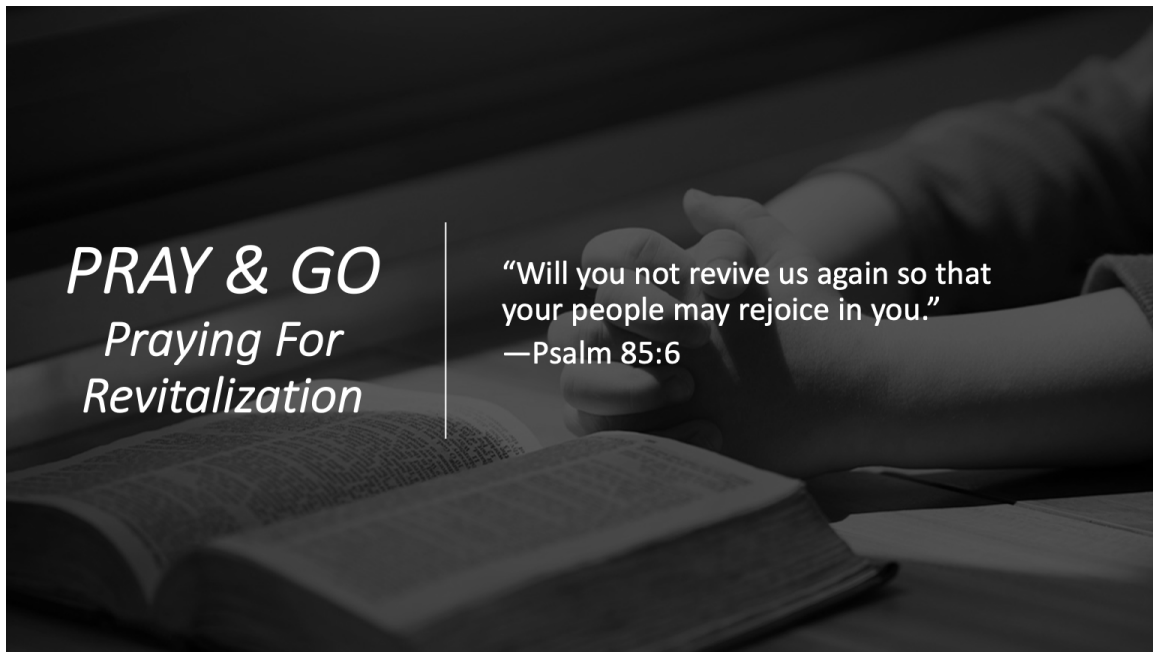
I. The Lord’s appointed watchmen relentlessly pray for spiritual transformation of our communities that joyfully proclaim the glory of God (Isa 1–5).

II. The Lord’s appointed watchmen relentlessly pray for the Lord to fulfill his redemptive promises (Isa 6–9)

III. The Lord’s appointed watchmen relentlessly pray for the completion of the Great Commission (Isa 10–12)

Conclusion—The Big Idea is this—Prayer is essential and foundation for local church revitalization because it demonstrates our unwavering devotion and wholehearted confidence to petition the Lord in prayer. We faithfully and humbly serve as God’s watchmen, giving ourselves to relentless prayer as we give the Lord himself no rest until he brings about personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization.

APPENDIX 5
SERMON SERIES VISUAL



PRAY & GO
Praying For
Revitalization

“Will you not revive us again so that
your people may rejoice in you.”
—Psalm 85:6

APPENDIX 6

PASTOR'S WEEKLY SUNDAY BULLETIN BLOG

Each week, I wrote a short blog in the weekly Sunday morning bulletin. The purpose of these blogs was to provide a snapshot of the sermons and to also provide a word of encouragement for the congregation to patiently and persistently pray because God uses our faithful prayers as a catalyst to pour out the Spirit in order to bring about personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization.

March 5, 2023

From Pastor Daniel,

Revitalization, it is a word that is commonly used today that speaks of giving new life, fresh vitality or energy to something. In recent years there has been significant financial investment throughout our nation to revitalize cities and locations that were declining, deteriorating, and dying. Just this past week I was able to participate in a meeting with local leaders and citizens addressing the needs of our community, how to brand Twiggs County and one of the potential firms pitching their company used the terms "revitalize" and "energize" when talking about how to help our community grow. In the church world, revitalization is a relatively new and modern term. It is likened to the common term of "revival." You have likely heard over the past several weeks about a potential "revival" that began at Asbury University in Kentucky and has since spread to other college campuses. You also likely have seen and heard that the church in America is steadily declining, no doubt our church like thousands across the nation are experiencing it and this decline has deeply impacted the rural church, but the overwhelming majority of churches are experiencing significant decline, both physically and spiritually. The local church matters to God and that is why we are praying for revitalization. Just as God has poured out his Spirit to renew people's hearts and revive cities and nations, I know that God can bring about revitalization to our local church as we faithfully pray for this community.

BECAUSE WE LOVE OUR COMMUNITY WE ARE PRAYING FOR OUR COMMUNITY!!!



March 12, 2023

From Pastor Daniel,

If you didn't already know, I am a fanatic when it comes to baseball. I loved playing it, I was a high school coach for many years, my kids enjoy baseball, and my wife will testify that the greatest vacation for me is simply sitting at a ballpark watching a game. And of course, my favorite team is the Atlanta Braves. For any fan of the Braves, November 2, 2021, is a day Braves fans will never forget. It was the day they won the World Series, nearly 26 years after winning their first one. Two decades is quite a long time between championships, but what is even more remarkable is that the Braves were for some time one of the absolute worst teams. During the 1990s and early 2000s, they were one of the best teams, but then for nearly a decade they were terrible. When the team moved to a new stadium north of Atlanta, I would oftentimes stare at those pennants, especially the 1995 World Series pennant, and reminisce, longing for just a taste of the good ole days. Then it happened, the team became good again, excitement filled the stadium, and the team won a second World Series. Many local churches in need of revitalization are like that, just longing for a glimmer of hope, a taste of life once again. Many churches across our land and especially in rural towns like ours have been declining for quite some time, many have even died. And yet God has the power to give new life to spiritually dead individuals, to revive morally bankrupt nations, and to revitalize local churches all for the sake of his name. And what is even more wonderful is that he uses people, yes, you who once lived through the glory days of this church and have witnessed its gradual erosion. Revitalizing a church is not easy, reformation never is. But when we submit to the will of God, trust in his sovereign purposes, and devote ourselves to prayer; nothing is impossible with God.

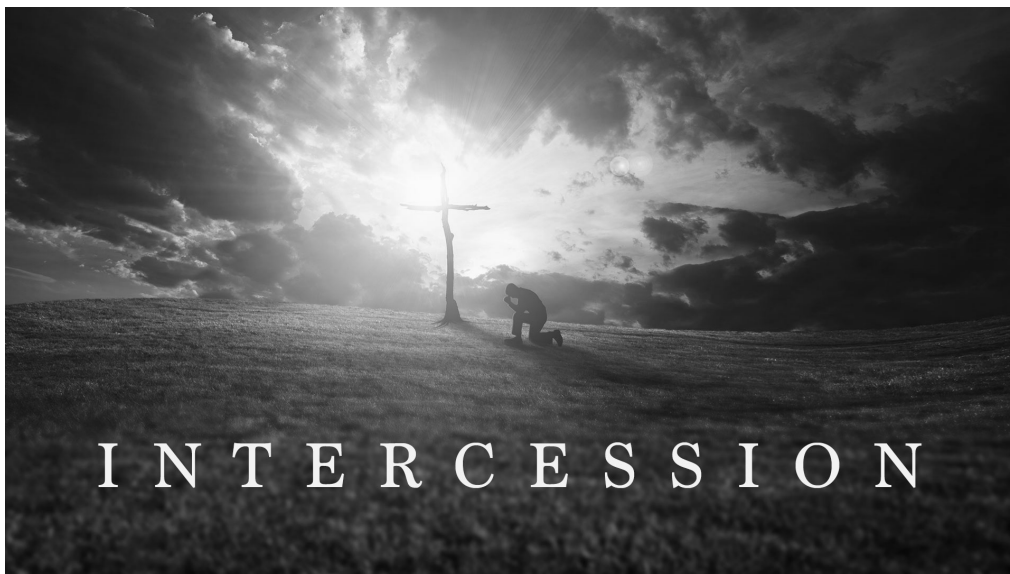
BECAUSE WE LOVE OUR COMMUNITY WE ARE PRAYING FOR OUR COMMUNITY!!!



March 19, 2023

The Presbyterian pastor and missionary A.T. Pierson said, "There has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer." Jonathan Edwards, arguably the greatest theologian every produced in America, believed in the power of prayer as foundational to the great revivals that spread across colonial America during the 1730s and 40s. Even Billy Graham, considered by many as the greatest evangelist since the Apostle Paul, knew that the power of prayer was vital to his over fifty years of worldwide evangelistic crusades. Prayer has been at the heart of revival movements, and that is no different when it comes to local church revitalization. Corporate prayer was vital to the unity and growth of the early church as they faced tremendous hostility and persecution. Yet their prayers focused less on their individual needs and more on spiritual needs of others. It is important that we pray for the physical needs of others because we believe that God is the great physician and he can heal us from any and all physical problems. We want people to know that we care for them deeply, so we pray for God to bring healing or comfort during the physical suffering. But if we want the lost to be spiritually redeemed; if we truly care about where people spend their eternal destiny, then we need to intercede on their behalf and pray for the Spirit to move in the lives of unbelievers and save them. If we want to see our churches revitalized, we have to move beyond merely praying for our own needs, and passionately seek the spiritual wellbeing of others. The Apostle Paul throughout his letters models for us what it means to passionately pray for others. When we intercede on behalf of others and lift them up to the Lord not for our praise all for God's glory, we will make an eternal impact in our community, we will witness a nation revived, and will surely experience true local church revitalization.

BECAUSE WE LOVE OUR COMMUNITY WE ARE PRAYING FOR OUR COMMUNITY!!!



March 26, 2023

From Pastor Daniel,

Over the course of this series on prayer, I hope we have all been encouraged, challenged, refreshed, and dedicated to the purpose and power of prayer both in our daily individual times and as a corporate body when we come together. God alone has the power to bring about personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization, yet he graciously invites us to pray in the name of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit and he uses our faithful, persistent, and humble praying as a catalyst to accomplish his purposes. And we may never live to see the seeds of our prayers germinate into a bountiful harvest, but we trust in what the Lord will do through his sovereign and supernatural purposes. We serve as his watchmen, not that the Lord doesn't already know what is on our hearts and what needs to be prayed for, but he still appoints his church as watchmen on the walls over a community and a nation, interceding on behalf of others, praying for the salvation of unbelievers, pleading with those who have walked away from the church to return again, calling on people to confess and repent, and praying for the physical and spiritual needs of a declining and dying community. We serve as watchmen as we kneel beside the bed praying for our children and grandchildren; we serve as watchmen when we take a drive across the county and call on God to care for our citizens; we serve as watchmen when we take a walk in a neighborhood and pray for the spiritual and physical needs of each household; we serve as watchmen when we lift up our political and educational leaders; we serve as watchmen when we as a church are filled with the power of the Spirit and we show this community that because we love them we are praying for them. Be God's persistent watchmen, and give the Lord no rest in prayer.

BECAUSE WE LOVE OUR COMMUNITY WE ARE PRAYING FOR OUR COMMUNITY!!!



APPENDIX 7

FLYER PROMOTING COMMUNITY EASTER EVENT

LIVE WELL TWIGGS

The City of Jeffersonville & Live Well Twiggs presents



HEART HEALTH WALK
SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2023
JEFFERSONVILLE CITY PARK
11 A.M.

FOOD TRUCKS- HEALTH PARTNERS- FREE

Amerigroup RealSolutions
in healthcare

COME OUT & WALK FOR YOUR HEALTH
BEFORE THE EGG HUNT!

KIDS ARE WELCOME TO PARTICIPATE!

THE EASTER BUNNY WILL BE PRESENT
FOR PICTURES!!



SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2023
JEFFERSONVILLE CITY PARK
12 P.M.

FOOD- LIVE MUSIC-EGGS



APPENDIX 8

FLYER PROMOTING COMMUNITY MIDWEEK
EASTER PRAYER SERVICE

Join us Wednesday evening, APRIL 5th @ 7pm

PRAY & GO
PRAYING FOR
REVITALIZATION



BECAUSE WE LOVE OUR COMMUNITY
WE ARE PRAYING FOR OUR COMMUNITY



APPENDIX 9

COMMUNITY PRAYER SERVICE ORDER OF WORSHIP SERVICE

April 5, 2023, Jeffersonville Baptist Church

Holy Week Prayer Service

“⁶ Will you not revive us again, so that your people may rejoice in you? ⁷ Show us your faithful love, LORD, and give us your salvation.”—Psalm 85:6–7

Order of Worship Service

- 1) Prelude
- 2) Opening Scripture (John 17:1–5) and Prayer
- 3) Opening Hymn #445; Sweet Hour of Prayer
- 4) Scripture and Prayer of Praise
- 5) Hymn of Praise #203; His Name is Wonderful
- 6) Scripture and Prayer of Confession
- 7) Hymn of Confession #300; Without Him
- 8) Scripture and Prayer of Intercession
- 9) Hymn of Intercession #469; Revive Us Again
- 10) Scripture and Prayer of Thanks
- 11) Hymn of Thanks #550; I’d Rather Have Jesus
- 12) Final Prayer/7 For 7 prayer card; (Softly play #294; Have Thine Own Way, Lord)
- 13) Final Hymn #253; Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow

APPENDIX 10

PRAYERWALKING JEFFERSONVILLE PRAYER CARDS

**Prayerwalking
Jeffersonville**

List 3-5 homes or locations you will prayerwalk for 7 weeks.

**Prayerwalking
Jeffersonville**

List 3-5 homes or locations you will prayerwalk for 7 weeks.

**Prayerwalking
Jeffersonville**

List 3-5 homes or locations you will prayerwalk for 7 weeks.



APPENDIX 11

FLYER PROMOTING PRAYERWALKING
JEFFERSONVILLE STUDY



APPENDIX 12

PRAYERWALKING TEACHING SERIES

In order to help our people understand the ministry of prayer walking, a teaching series was created and implemented during the Sunday evening worship services. This teaching series utilized Randy Sprinkle's book, *Follow Me*.¹

Over the course of six-weeks, we walked through different aspects of humble, Spirit-led prayerwalking and how we as a church can implement a ministry of prayerwalking throughout Jeffersonville. Below is an outline of each of the six teaching sessions building up to a community-wide evangelism family weekend event on June 2–3. During weeks 3–6 of the teaching outline, the congregation was encouraged to take their cards and prayerwalk locations they recorded. At the conclusion of the teaching series, the congregation completed a prayerwalking self-reflection questionnaire.

¹ Randy Sprinkle, *Follow Me: Becoming a Lifestyle Prayerwalker*, revised ed. (Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 2013). 13–19.

Teaching Outline

Name: Daniel Wright

Date: April 16, 2023; 6pm worship service

Title: "Prayerwalking Jeffersonville"

Text—Genesis 13:1–17

CIT—Abraham obeyed God's call and began the long journey of walking with the Lord in the land that would be promised to God's covenant people.

CIS—As we prayerwalk Jeffersonville, we are humbly and wholeheartedly interceding on behalf of our community as we unceasingly walk with the Lord.

Introduction

1. Illustration about prayerwalking.
2. Central Idea of the Text, some background about the text.
3. God graciously uses faithful praying followers of Christ to bring about personal renewal, national revival, and local church revitalization.

Body

1. What is prayerwalking? Some helpful definitions
2. Dan Crawford and Calvin Miller's definition—"Prayerwalking is intercession on location with information in cooperation against opposition for glorification."
3. Prayerwalking is not a substitute for personal and corporate prayer; it is not a replacement for the prayer meeting; it is a strategy to get out in the community and see the community through God's eyes.
4. The four foundations of prayerwalking (Hibbert)—Identificational Repentance; Inspired Revelation; Spiritual Warfare; Territorial Possession
5. What does it look like to "Prayerwalk Jeffersonville?" Were the prayer cards helpful?

Conclusion—The Big Idea is this—As we prayerwalk Jeffersonville, we are humbly and wholeheartedly interceding on behalf of our community as we unceasingly walk with the Lord.

Teaching Outline

Name: Daniel Wright

Date: April 23, 2023; 6pm worship service

Title: “Unceasingly Prayerwalking with God”

Text—Micah 6:1–8

CIT—The Lord stated his case against his rebellious people and instead of accepting their corrupt offerings and sacrifices, he expected them walk humbly with their God.

CIS—Prayer is not incessantly talking with God, it is unceasingly walking with the Lord. Prayer walking is more than just praying and walking, it is a life of wholehearted spiritual transformation following the Lord.

Introduction

1. Illustration about my impatience.
2. Central Idea of the Text, some background about the text.
3. God created us in his image and he has a grand purpose for our lives.

Body

1. God created us in His image for the purpose of walking in close fellowship with Him (Gen 5:19–24; 6:7–9; Heb 11:6–7).
2. Sin prevents us from living out the high purpose for which God created us, yet he made a way for us to be redeemed through His son Jesus Christ (Rom 5:6–11)
3. Prayer is not primarily about asking God for things, it is about being with God (1 Thess 5:17).
4. The indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives transforms us from being a Christian to acting like a Christian (John 14:15–17; John 16:5–15)
5. As we follow Jesus and we begin prayer walking we are daily abiding in Him fulfilling the purpose we were meant to have all along (Matt 4:18–19; John 15:1–8)

Conclusion—The Big Idea is this—Prayer is not incessantly talking with God, it is unceasingly walking with the Lord. Prayer walking is more than just praying and walking, it is a life of wholehearted spiritual transformation following the Lord.

Teaching Outline

Name: Daniel Wright

Date: April 30, 2023; 6pm worship service

Title: “Spiritually Transforming Jeffersonville One Prayerwalking Step At a Time”

Text—Deuteronomy 11:18–32

CIT—Before entering into the Promised Land, Moses spoke to the people and called them to dedicate themselves to obeying God’s law as they take possession of the land.

CIS—The Lord has given his people clear and specific instructions. We are commanded to GO and make disciples of Jesus, to proclaim the gospel to a spiritually lost and broken world. As we prayer walk Jeffersonville, we declare through the presence and power of the Spirit our steadfast commitment to uplift every square inch of territory to the Lord, and that he would transform our community for his name and glory.

Introduction

1. Illustration of the soldiers who guard the tomb of the unknown soldiers at Arlington.
2. Central Idea of the Text, some background about the text.
3. The power and presence of the Holy Spirit empowers and compels us go into the areas of our community and pray for Christ’s lordship to reign over the territory.

Body

1. The life of following Jesus is a prayerwalk because as we follow Christ, His purpose for coming to earth becomes our purpose for living on earth (Matt 16:24–25; Luke 9:23; Luke 19:10; John 10:10; Matt 28:19–20).
2. As we walk with Jesus daily, the pinnacle of our cooperation with him is prayer and our desires become harmonized with His desire (Luke 11:1–4).
3. Jesus taught us that we are to pray that Christ’s kingdom will come in place of the chaotic kingdoms of this sinful world (Col 4:2; Luke 10:1).
4. Nothing is more important than nurturing our walk with God (Ps 119:105; Isa 59:1–3).
5. Our faithful intercession is never the end, but the means to God’s end (Mark 16:15)

Conclusion—The Big Idea is this—The Lord has given his people clear and specific instructions. We are commanded to GO and make disciples of Jesus, to proclaim the gospel to a spiritually lost and broken world. As we prayer walk Jeffersonville, we declare through the presence and power of the Spirit our steadfast commitment to uplift every square inch of territory to the Lord, and that he would transform our community for his name and glory.

Teaching Outline

Name: Daniel Wright

Date: May 7, 2023; 6pm worship service

Title: "Prayerwalking God's Will into the World"

Text—John 5:1–30

CIT—Jesus healed a lame man on the Sabbath, and when confronted by the Jewish religious leaders, he claimed to be the Son of God, and that he and his Father were always working in order to bring about the fulfillment of salvation.

CIS—As we prayerwalk Jeffersonville and Twiggs County, we recognize that God is the initiator and we are his faithful responders. While God is sovereign and can accomplish all he wants, when he wants, how he wants; he graciously chooses to make his divine work dependent upon our prayers as a catalyst for accomplishing his purposes.

Introduction

1. Illustration about sleeping elderly women given two oranges by an agnostic.
2. Central Idea of the Text, some background about the text.
3. Just as Jesus reminded the religious elites that his work was never done apart from his Father, we as Christians carry out the Great Commission in partnership with the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

Body

1. Because God is the initiator and we are the responders, we are to walk in the work that God is about (John 15:5; 1 Cor 3:9).
2. Hearing God is often a result of prayerwalking, not a prerequisite (John 16:7, 13; Ps 106:13).
3. Our world is grossly at cross purposes with God's desire and plan for it (Luke 9:23; Galatians 2:20).
4. God assures us that praying according to his will brings answers (2 Pet 1:4; Rom 4:20).
5. As we prayerwalk, our prayers prepare the way for God to bless, we become a blessing, and people receive a blessing (Ps 129:8; Luke 10:5).

Conclusion—The Big Idea is this—As we prayerwalk Jeffersonville and Twiggs County, we recognize that God is the initiator and we are his faithful responders. While God is sovereign and can accomplish all he wants, when he wants, how he wants; he graciously chooses to make his divine work dependent upon our prayers as a catalyst for accomplishing his purposes.

Teaching Outline

Name: Daniel Wright

Date: May 14, 2023; Wednesday evening

Title: “Prayerwalking Jeffersonville with Christ Exalting Love”

Text—1 Corinthians 13:1–13

CIT—The Apostle Paul explained that the only proper way to utilize the spiritual gifts we have been graciously given for ministry is through Christ-exalting love.

CIS—God wants to do, through each of us, a powerful work in the lives of the lost, broken, and hurting. For that to happen, God must first do a powerful work in us.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that love is at the heart of God’s nature, and what we do as his faithful prayerwalkers.

Introduction

1. Illustration about a wife’s love for her husband about to be executed by Cromwell.
2. Central Idea of the Text, some background about the text.
3. There are many incredible and noble things the church does, but none of it matters if it is not motivated through Spirit-filled, Christ-exalting love.

Body

1. In prayerwalking our service is always to God first and then to others (Ps 34:1–3; Acts 13:1–3).
2. When we live looking at life from a heavenly viewpoint, we see situations and circumstances from God’s perspective (Eph 2:4–6).
3. God brings freedom from sin to all who humbly repent of their sin and trust by faith; as prayerwalkers we are laborers to that end (Luke 7:13).
4. As we engage in prayerwalking, our intercession is an act of love (Luke 19:9–10).
5. God is delighted to bless others as we pray in the course of our daily activities (Luke 9:57).

Conclusion—The Big Idea is this—God wants to do, through each of us, a powerful work in the lives of the lost, broken, and hurting. For that to happen, God must first do a powerful work in us. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that love is at the heart of God’s nature, and what we do as his faithful prayerwalkers.

Teaching Outline

Name: Daniel Wright

Date: May 21, 2023; 6pm Sunday evening service

Title: "Prayer That Wins the War"

Text—Ephesians 6:10–20

CIT—The Apostle Paul concluded his letter to the church in Ephesus by encouraging them to remain strong in the Lord because there is an evil and powerful enemy waging spiritual warfare, and in order to wage this war effectively they must put on the full armor of God and pray without ceasing.

CIS—All intercession is spiritual warfare. Throughout the New Testament, the theme of spiritual warfare is resisting Satan and his schemes. To intercede is to do battle with the enemy and prayerwalking is invasionary intercession. Critical to our success is being laser-focused on Christ, so the enemy does not deceive us.

Introduction

1. Illustration about Japanese surprise attack on U.S. at Pearl Harbor 1941.
2. Central Idea of the Text, some background about the text.
3. We must recognize that there is a real and dangerous enemy who seeks to destroy our faith in God and deceive us into thinking our prayers are useless. But continue in fervent, humble, rock-solid, steadfast, faith enduring, and God-honoring prayer, trusting in the power and the presence of the Spirit to strengthen you and encourage you as you pray.

Body

1. The enemy cannot stand or stay where there is God focused praise (Acts 4:24–30).
2. Spiritual warfare involves faithful living, praying, and proclamation (Acts 1:14).
3. When we engage in spiritual warfare we are graciously given the armor that God first wore in our place (Eph 6:14–17).
4. As we walk in the Spirit, our flesh seeks to exert its power (Eph 2:1–3).
5. To follow Jesus in this world is to walk into warfare that can oftentimes be overwhelmingly intense, but unceasing Spirit-led prayer assures us victory (Eph 6:18-19).

Conclusion—The Big Idea is this—All intercession is spiritual warfare. Throughout the New Testament, the theme of spiritual warfare is resisting Satan and his schemes. To intercede is to do battle with the enemy and prayerwalking is invasionary intercession. Critical to our success is being laser-focused on Christ, so the enemy does not deceive us.

Teaching Outline

Name: Daniel Wright

Date: May 28, 2023; Wednesday evening

Title: “Praying for the Good of Jeffersonville”

Text—Jeremiah 29:1–14

CIT—The Jewish people have been conquered and exiled by the Babylonian Empire under King Nebuchadnezzar, and Jeremiah was commanded by the Lord to write to the exiled elders encouraging them to seek the spiritual good and prayer for the foreign city

CIS—It is no accident that God has placed our church in this specific location. The circumstances are hard and at times discouraging, but we are called to impact town for the glory of Christ. Prayerwalking finds our hearts bound closely to God and to the people of Twiggs County.

Introduction

1. Illustration about missionary to Africa who responded to question about being in that tough location.
2. Central Idea of the Text, some background about the text.
3. Jesus wants to give us his boundless love for our town, a love that has filled our hearts for him and spills over into this community that desperately needs to know his love for them.

Body

1. Prayerwalking is not a replacement for the traditional prayer meeting, instead it is another powerful way to lovingly intercede for others; seeing our community through heavenly eyes (1 Sam 1:11–18).
2. Prayerlessness is not an option; Christ wants his church to touch to shape this world for his name and his glory (Matt 6:10).
3. Faithful prayerwalking not only brings us closer to God but draws us closer to the people of this community and their great spiritual need (Matt 18:19; Acts 1:14).
4. Spirit-led praying on-site prepares the way for the Lord (2 Pet 3:9).
5. Christ leads faithful prayerwalkers out to the enemy-held strongholds of the earth and captives are set free (Mark 16:15; Matt 24:14; Rev 7:9)

Conclusion—The Big Idea is this—God wants to do, through each of us, a powerful work in the lives of the lost, broken, and hurting. For that to happen, God must first do a powerful work in us. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that love is at the heart of God’s nature, and what we do as his faithful prayerwalkers.

APPENDIX 13

PRAYERWALKING THE PARK COMMUNITY
WORSHIP SERVICE



PRAYER AT THE PARK

Wednesday, May 31st at 7pm at the City Park of Jeffersonville

APPENDIX 14

TWIGGS COUNTY FAMILY WEEKEND
EVANGELISM EVENT



Twiggs County Family Weekend
City of Jeffersonville Park

June 2nd—Community Cookout & Worship Service, 5:30-8pm
June 3rd—Vacation Bible School BLITZ, 9am-12:30pm

Hosted by Jeffersonville Baptist Church
and Jeffersonville Church of God

BECAUSE WE LOVE OUR COMMUNITY
WE ARE PRAYING FOR OUR COMMUNITY



APPENDIX 15

7 FOR 7 PRAYER CARD SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of this 7 for 7 prayer card self-reflection questionnaire is to provide the members an opportunity to reflect on their experiences praying for individuals and families. The purpose of the prayer card was to encourage and challenge the members to list up to seven names of individuals or families who are unbelievers and/or not committed to a local church, to intercede for them over seven weeks, and to intentionally invite them to church on Easter Sunday. The prayer card serves as a visible reminder to pray for these names daily. Our ultimate desire is to see unbelievers saved and those not in a church become committed to joining a local church and not just attend one or two major worship services each year, but leveraging significant Christian events like Christmas and Easter to provide strategic opportunities when people are most likely to attend church when invited, so we want to make sure we pray.

The following questionnaire in which you are about to participate is designed to assess your personal reflections on the 7 for 7 prayer card. This research is being conducted by Daniel Wright for the purpose of collecting information for a ministry project on prayer for revitalization. For this research, you are asked to respond openly and candidly to the following questions. Your participation is voluntary. Please answer the questions with honesty.

1) Did you receive a 7 for 7 prayer card and did you list any names on your card?

2) For the names you listed on your card, what was your relationship to those names (i.e. family, friend, co-worker, neighbor, etc.)?

3) Why did you choose these specific names for your list?

4) Describe your routine in praying for these names. (In other words, did you pray for one name each day of the week or did you pray for each name daily or weekly; how much time did you devote to praying for these names; did you pray more for certain names over others?)

5) Did you intentionally invite any of these names to attend church on Easter Sunday?

6) What new lessons did you learn about intercessory prayer during this time?

7) In what ways did you find this prayer card helpful?

8) Can you provide any reflections on how God moved in your life during this time?

9) Can you describe a way God was glorified during this time of prayer?

10) What are your final thoughts about this prayer strategy?

APPENDIX 16

PRAYERWALKING SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of this prayer walking self-reflection questionnaire was to provide the members an opportunity to reflect on their experiences prayer walking in the community.¹ Members actively prayerwalked (or drove) throughout the community at least once per week for seven weeks. Our goal was for the congregation to collectively prayerwalk the community and to pray for one hundred homes. The purpose of the prayerwalking ministry was to actively engage the community through prayer. By actively engaging the community through the power of prayer, this would lead to evangelistic opportunities.

¹ Dan R. Crawford and Calvin Miller, *Prayer Walking: Prayer That Brings God's People To Their Feet* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2002), 164. This questionnaire was adapted from Crawford and Miller's prayer walking reflection guide.

The following questionnaire in which you are about to participate is designed to assess your personal reflections on the “Prayerwalking Jeffersonville” prayer card and prayerwalking in general. This research is being conducted by Daniel Wright for the purposes of collecting information for a ministry project on prayer for revitalization. For this research, you are asked to respond openly and candidly to the following questions. Your participation is voluntary. Please answer the questions with honesty.

1) How many times did you go on a prayerwalk (or prayer drive)?

2) How many homes did you pray over?

3) What other specific locations did you prayerwalk?

4) Why did you specifically choose the locations you prayerwalked?

5) How much time did you spend on each prayerwalk (or prayer drive)?

6) Describe your initial thoughts/feelings about prayerwalking.

7) How did your initial thoughts/feelings about prayerwalking change?

8) During your prayerwalk, describe some of the needs you noticed throughout the community.

9) As you prayerwalked, what specific requests did you pray about?

10) Describe an example of an opportunity you had to pray with someone?

11) What did you discover about a specific location of the community that will cause you to continue prayer walking that location?

12) What new lessons did you learn about intercessory prayer on your prayer walks?

13) What did you discern about the spiritual opposition while participating in these prayer walks?

14) Describe a way God was glorified during your prayer walks.

15) How has God shown you how on-site prayerwalking can become a beneficial part of our church's ongoing prayer ministry?

APPENDIX 17
T-TEST RESULTS

Table A1. Results of *t*-test dependent samples for pre- and post-assessments

	Pre-Test Total	Post-Test Total
Mean	66.72222222	66.11111111
Variance	73.15359477	69.75163399
Observations	18	18
Pearson Correlation	0.794297684	—
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	—
df	17	—
t Stat	0.4779421	—
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.319389676	—
t Critical one-tail	1.739606726	—
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.638779352	—
t Critical two-tail	2.109815578	—

Table A2. Results of *t*-test dependent samples for knowledge questions

	Pre-Test Knowledge	Post-Test Knowledge
Mean	26.33333333	26.5
Variance	6.117647059	5.558823529
Observations	18	18
Pearson Correlation	0.373223645	—
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	—
df	17	—
t Stat	-0.261291202	—
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.398503577	—
t Critical one-tail	1.739606726	—
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.797007153	—
t Critical two-tail	2.109815578	—

Table A3. Results of *t*-test dependent samples for prayer practice questions

	Pre-Test Practice	Post-Test Practice
Mean	40.38888889	39.61111111
Variance	45.42810458	42.01633987
Observations	18	18
Pearson Correlation	0.829019011	—
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	—
df	17	—
t Stat	0.851827304	—
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.20307517	—
t Critical one-tail	1.739606726	—
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.406150339	—
t Critical two-tail	2.109815578	—

Table A4. Results of *t*-test dependent samples for pre- and post-assessment totals (leaders)

	Pre-Test Totals Leaders	Post-Test Totals Leaders
Mean	68.66666667	68.83333333
Variance	86.66666667	92.96666667
Observations	6	6
Pearson Correlation	0.872683834	—
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	—
df	5	—
t Stat	-0.085187405	—
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.467709144	—
t Critical one-tail	2.015048373	—
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.935418287	—
t Critical two-tail	2.570581836	—

Table A5. Results of *t*-test dependent samples for knowledge questions (leaders)

	Pre-Test Knowledge (Leaders)	Post-Test Knowledge (Leaders)
Mean	26.33333333	27.83333333
Variance	9.066666667	4.566666667
Observations	6	6
Pearson Correlation	0.507669813	—
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	—
df	5	—
t Stat	-1.378915679	—
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.11320733	—
t Critical one-tail	2.015048373	—
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.22641466	—
t Critical two-tail	2.570581836	—

Table A6. Results of *t*-test dependent samples for prayer practice questions (leaders)

	Pre-Test Prayer Practice (Leaders)	Post-Test Prayer Practice (Leaders)
Mean	42.33333333	41
Variance	51.866666667	59.2
Observations	6	6
Pearson Correlation	0.844580074	—
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	—
df	5	—
t Stat	0.781464665	—
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.23494805	—
t Critical one-tail	2.015048373	—
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.4698961	—
t Critical two-tail	2.570581836	—

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aiken, Christopher Michael. "Church Revitalization and the Role of Pastoral Leadership: A Mixed Methods Study." EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017.
- Allen, Leslie C. *Ezekiel 20–48*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 29. Dallas: Word Books, 1990.
- Bakke, Robert O. *The Power of Extraordinary Prayer*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000.
- Barna. "State of the Church 2020: Signs of Decline and Hope Among Key Metrics Of Faith." Accessed December 20, 2021. <https://www.barna.com/research/changing-state-of-the-church/>.
- Beougher, Timothy K. *Invitation to Evangelism: Sharing the Gospel with Compassion and Conviction*. Invitation to Theological Studies. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2021.
- Blackaby, Richard, and Rick Fisher. *Developing a Powerful Praying Church*. Jonesboro, GA: Blackaby, 2017.
- Blomberg, Craig L. *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. New American Commentary, vol. 22. Nashville: Broadman, 1992.
- Boa, Kenneth. *Face to Face: Praying the Scriptures for Intimate Worship*. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.
- Bock, Darrell L. *Acts*. Baker Evangelical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007.
- Boice, James Montgomery. *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensible and Readable Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986.
- Bounds, E. M. *Preacher and Prayer*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1950.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Book of the Acts*. New International Commentary of the New Testament. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.
- Butts, David. *Forgotten Power: A Simple Theology for a Praying Church*. Terre Haute, IN: PrayerShop, 2015.

- C. S. Lewis Institute. "Bible Reading and Prayer Inventory." Last modified January 1, 2010. https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm_send/290.
- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Vol. 1. Edited by John T. McNeill. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Library of Christian Classics. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011. Logos Bible Software 9.
- Carson, D. A. *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014.
- Catt, Michael. *The Power of Purpose: Breaking through to Intentional Living*. Nashville: B&H, 2017.
- Chamblin, J. Knox. "Matthew," in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3, edited by Walter A. Elwell, 719–60. Baker Reference Library. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995.
- _____. *Matthew*. Mentor Commentaries. Ross-Shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2010.
- Cheyney, Tom, John Kimball, Jim Grant, Rob Hurtgen, and Chris Irving. *Church Revitalization in Rural America: Restoring Churches in America's Heartland*. Orlando, FL: Renovate, 2018.
- Cheyney, Tom, and Terry Rials. *Nuts and Bolts of Church Revitalization*. Orlando, FL: Renovate, 2015.
- Chisholm, Robert B. "The Major Prophets," in *Holman Concise Bible Commentary*, edited by David S. Dockery, 259–339. Nashville: B&H, 1998. Logos Bible Software 9.
- Clark, Dean Craig. "Transforming the Prayer Culture in Church Revitalizations: A Mixed Methods Study." EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019.
- Clifton, Mark. *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches*. Nashville: B&H, 2016.
- Cooper, Lamar Eugene, Sr. *Ezekiel: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. New American Commentary, vol. 17. Grand Rapids: B&H, 1994.
- Crawford, Dan R., and Calvin Miller, *Prayer Walking: Prayer That Brings God's People to Their Feet*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2002.
- Creswell, John W., and J. David Creswell. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 5th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2018.
- Croft, Brian. *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying and Divided Churches*. Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016.
- Crosby, Terence Peter, ed. *C H Spurgeon's Forgotten Prayer Meeting Addresses: Forgotten Prayer Meeting Addresses and Other Forgotten Metropolitan Tabernacle Sermons*. Leominster, England: Day One, 2011.

- Croston, Mark. *Big Results: Leadership*. Nashville: B&H, 2021.
- Crutchfield, Joshua A. "Divine Sovereignty." In *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, edited by Douglas Mangum. Lexham Bible Reference. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014. Logos Bible Software 9.
- Davies, W. D., and Dale C. Allison, Jr. *Matthew 1–7*. Vol. 1 of *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*. International Critical Commentary. London: T&T Clark, 2004. Logos Bible Software 9.
- Davis, Andy. "The Reform of First Baptist Church Durham." *9Marks Journal* (November/December 2011): 5–19. <https://www.9marks.org/journal/revitalize-why-we-must-reclaim-dying-churches-and-how/>.
- Deyneka, Peter. *Much Power Much Prayer: Change Your World through the Power of Prayer*. Loves Park, IL: Slavic Gospel Association, 2020.
- Doriani, Daniel M. *Matthew*. Vol. 1, *Matthew 1–13*. Reformed Expository Commentary. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008.
- Dowden, Landon. *Exalting Jesus in Ezekiel*. Christ-Centered Exposition. Nashville: Holman, 2015. Logos Bible Software 9.
- Duguid, Iain M. *Ezekiel*. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999.
- Edwards, Jonathan. "A Narrative of Surprising Conversions." In *Jonathan Edwards On Revival*. Select Works of Jonathan Edwards. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1984.
- _____. *Praying Together for True Revival*. Edited by T. M. Moore. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004.
- Ezell, Kevin. "Breathing New Life into Dying Churches." In *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, edited by R. Albert Mohler Jr., 13. Louisville: SBTS Press, 2015.
- Floyd, Ronnie. *How to Pray: Developing an Intimate Relationship with God*. Nashville: Word, 1999.
- Foster, Richard J. *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. 1992. Reprint, New York: HarperCollins, 2002.
- France, R. T. *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 1. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985.
- Franklin, John. *And the Place Was Shaken: How to Lead a Powerful Prayer Meeting*. Nashville: B&H, 2005.
- Gesswein, Armin. *With One Accord in One Place: The Role of Prayer in the Early Church*. Terre Haute, IN: PrayerShop, 2014.

- Graham, Billy. *Just as I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham*. San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1997.
- Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.
- Ham, Edward E. *The Story of an All-Day Prayer Meeting and the Revival: When Billy Graham Found Christ*. Wheaton, IL: Sword of the Lord, 1955.
- Hansen, Collin, and John Woodbridge. *God-Sized Vision: Revival Stories That Stretch and Stir*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.
- Haykin, Michael A. G. *Jonathan Edwards: The Holy Spirit in Revival*. Emmaus, Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2005.
- Hibbert, David R. *Transforming Your Territory through Prayer-Walking*. Brossard, Quebec, Canada: Destiny Media, 2017.
- Hill, Megan. *Prayer Together: The Priority and Privilege of Prayer in Our Homes, Communities, and Churches*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.
- Hudson, Steven. "A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Convention Churches: A Mixed Methods Study." PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017.
- Hulse, Erroll. *Give Him No Rest: A Call to Prayer for Revival*. Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1991.
- Huss, John E. *Paths to Power: A Guide to Dynamic Mid-Week Prayer Meetings*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958.
- Hylden, Jarrod Jennings. "Equipping the Leaders of Skrefsrud Lutheran Church of Beresford, South Dakota to Lead Prayer Meetings Based on the Lord's Prayer and the Psalms." DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022.
- Jeffersonville Baptist Church. "Pray and Go for Twiggs County." Accessed September 7, 2023. <https://www.jeffersonvillebaptist.org/copy-of-contact-us>.
- Jeffress, Robert. *Five Things I Learned from Billy Graham: And How They Can Transform Your Life*. Dallas: Pathway To Victory, 2019.
- Kaiser, Walter C., Jr. *Quest for Renewal: Personal Revival in the Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986.
- Lawless, Chuck. *Lord, Teach Us Pastors to Pray: Creating a Culture of Prayer in Yourself and Your Church*. Franklin, TN: Church Answers, 2021.
- _____. *Serving in Your Church Prayer Ministry*, Edited by Paul E. Engle. Zondervan Practical Ministry Guides. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.
- Lencioni, Patrick. *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012.

- Lloyd-Jones, Martyn. *Revival*. Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1987.
- Malphurs, Aubrey, and Gordon E. Penfold. *Re:VISION: The Key to Transforming Your Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014.
- Manton, Thomas. *Psalm 119*. Vol. 8 of *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*. 1872. Reprint, Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground, 2008. Logos Bible Software 9.
- Martin, Ronnie, and Donnie Griggs. *Pastoring Small Towns: Help and Hope for Those Ministering in Smaller Places*. Brentwood, TN: B&H, 2023.
- Matthews, Kenneth A. *Genesis 1–11:26: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. New American Commentary, vol 1A. Grand Rapids: B&H, 1995.
- Millar, J. Gary. *Calling on the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Prayer*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 38. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016.
- Miller, Paul E. *A Praying Church: Becoming a People of Hope in a Discouraging World*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.
- _____. *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2009.
- Mohler, R. Albert, Jr. “Christ Will Build and Rebuild His Church: The Need for ‘Generation Replant.’” In *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, edited by R. Albert Mohler Jr., 10. Louisville: SBTS Press, 2015.
- _____. *The Prayer That Turns the World Upside Down: The Lord’s Prayer as a Manifesto for Revolution*. Nashville: Nelson, 2018.
- Murray, Iain H. *The Forgotten Spurgeon*. 2nd ed. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1978.
- _____. *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750–1858*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994.
- Najapfour, Brian G. *Jonathan Edwards: His Doctrine of and Devotion to Prayer*. 2nd ed. Caledonia, MI: Biblical Spirituality, 2017.
- Nolland, John. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.
- O’Donnell, Douglas Sean. *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*. Preaching the Word. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.
- Onwuchekwa, Jon. *Prayer: How Praying Together Shapes the Church*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018.

- Orr, J. Edwin. "Prayer and Revival." Accessed September 14, 2023. <https://jedwinorr.com/resources/articles/prayandrevival.pdf>.
- Piper, John. *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*. 1986. Reprint, New York: Multnomah, 2011.
- _____. "Hallowed Be Your Name: The Greatest Prayer in All the Earth." Sermon preached at CROSS 2020, Louisville. February 21, 2020.
- _____. "What Is the Kingdom of God?" *Desiring God* (interview), September 8, 2017. <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-the-kingdom-of-god>.
- _____. *When I Don't Desire God: How to Fight for Joy*. 2nd ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.
- Polhill, John B. *Acts: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. New American Commentary, vol. 26. Nashville: Broadman, 1992.
- Prime, Derek J., and Alistair Begg. *On Being a Pastor: Understanding Our Calling and Work*. Chicago: Moody, 2004.
- A Puritan Mind. "The Westminster Shorter Catechism: Question 98." Accessed December 22, 2021. <https://www.apuritansmind.com/westminster-standards/shorter-catechism/>.
- Rainer, Sam. "Eight Ways Any Church Can Get the Attention of the Neighborhood." *Church Answers* (blog), July 19, 2023. <https://churchanswers.com/blog/eight-ways-any-church-can-get-the-attention-of-the-neighborhood/>.
- _____. "One of the Most Powerful Ways to Revitalize Your Church That Almost No One Does." *Church Answers* (blog), March 1, 2023. <https://churchanswers.com/blog/one-of-the-most-powerful-ways-to-revitalize-your-church-that-almost-no-one-does/>.
- _____. *The Surprising Return of the Neighborhood Church: Discover How Your Church Is Primed to Reach Your Neighbors*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2023.
- _____. "What Size Must a Church Be to Trigger the Need for Revitalization?" *Church Answers* (blog), August 24, 2022. <https://churchanswers.com/blog/what-size-must-a-church-be-to-trigger-the-need-for-revitalization/>.
- Rainer, Thom. *Anatomy of a Revived Church: Seven Findings of How Congregations Avoided Death*. Spring Hill, TN: Rainer, 2020.
- _____. *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive*. Nashville: B&H, 2014.

- _____. “Five Reasons Rural and Small Town Churches Are Making a Comeback.” *Church Answers* (blog), November 25, 2019. <https://churchanswers.com/blog/five-reasons-rural-and-small-town-churches-are-making-a-comeback/>.
- _____. *I Am a Christian: Discovering What It Means to Follow Jesus Together with Fellow Believers*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2022.
- _____. *Pray and Go: Your Invitation to Become a Great Commission Christian*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2023.
- _____. *Sharing the Gospel with Ease: How the Love of Christ Can Flow Naturally from Your Life*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2022.
- Rainer, Thom, and Eric Geiger. *Simple Church: Returning to God’s Process for Making Disciples*. Nashville: B&H, 2006.
- Reeder, Harry L., III. *From Embers to a Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008.
- Reeves, Michael. *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012.
- Reno, Loren. *10 Leadership Maneuvers: A General’s Guide to Serving and Leading*. Sisters, OR: Deep River, 2015.
- Roberts, Richard Owen. *Revival*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1982.
- Ross, Michael F. *Preaching for Revitalization: How to Revitalize Your Church through Your Pulpit*. Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2006.
- Schreiner, Patrick. *Matthew, Disciple, and Scribe: The First Gospel and Its Portrait of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019.
- Southern Baptist Convention. “2021 Ministry Report.” Accessed October 1, 2021. <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/ministry-reports/2021-ministry-report/>.
- _____. “Vision 2025.” Accessed October 22, 2021. <https://www.sbc.net/vision-2025/>.
- Spicq, Ceslas, and James D. Ernest. *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994. Logos Bible Software 9.
- Sprinkle, Randy. *Follow Me: Becoming a Lifestyle Prayerwalker*. Rev. ed. Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 2013.
- Sproul, R. C. *Matthew: An Expository Commentary. R. C. Sproul’s Expository Commentary Series*. Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2019.
- Spurgeon, Charles H. *Lectures to My Students*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979. ProQuest Ebook Central.

- _____. *Only a Prayer Meeting: Studies on Prayer Meetings and Prayer Meeting Addresses*. 2000. Reprint, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2010.
- _____. *The Pastor in Prayer: A Collection of the Sunday Morning Prayers of C. H. Spurgeon*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2004.
- _____. “The Throne of Grace.” In *Classic Sermons on Prayer*, compiled by Warren Wiersbe, 27–39. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1987.
- Stott, John. *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7): Christian Counter-Culture*. The Bible Speaks Today. Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1978.
- Strong, James. *A Concise Dictionary of Words in the Greek New Testament and the Hebrew Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software 9, 2009.
- Stuart, Douglas, and Lloyd J. Ogilvie. *Ezekiel*. Preacher’s Commentary, vol. 20. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989. Logos Bible Software 9.
- Taylor, John B. *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 22. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1969.
- Towns, Elmer L., and Douglas Porter. *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever: From Pentecost to the Present*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 2000.
- Thomas, Derek W. H. *Acts*. Reformed Expository Commentary. Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011.
- Thomson, J. William, and Trent C. Butler. “Intercession,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, edited by Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England, 828–29. Nashville: Holman Reference, 2003. Logos Bible Software 9.
- Turpie, Bill, ed. *Ten Great Preachers, Messages, and Interviews*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000, 117. Quoted in Jon Onwuchekwa, *Prayer: How Praying Together Shapes the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).
- Unknown Christian. *The Kneeling Christian*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986.
- Wenham, Gordon J. *Genesis 1–15*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.
- Whitney, Donald S. *Praying the Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.
- Wilder, Michael S., and Timothy Paul Jones. *The God Who Goes before You: Pastoral Leadership as Christ-Centered Followership*. Nashville: B&H, 2018.
- Wirt, Sherwood Eliot. *Billy: A Personal Look at Billy Graham, the World’s Best-Loved Evangelist*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997.

Witherington, Ben, III. *Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

ABSTRACT

LEADING REVITALIZATION THROUGH PRAYER AT JEFFERSONVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH IN JEFFERSONVILLE, GEORGIA

Daniel Winski Wright Jr. DEdMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
Faculty Supervisor: Dustin B. Bruce

This project seeks to lead revitalization through prayer at Jeffersonville Baptist Church. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the ministry context with a list of goals for this project. Chapter 2 examines the biblical foundations of prayer for revitalization, including an exegesis of four passages (Gen 4:17–26; Ezek 37:1–14; Matt 7:7–12; Acts 4:23–30) to show that God alone brings about spiritual revitalization, yet he welcomes his people to pray and uses the prayers of his people as a catalyst towards accomplishing his work of revitalization. Chapter 3 presents a historical overview of church revivals and how prayer undergirds revitalization. Chapter 4 details the implementation of the project itself, recounting the research methodology involved in the implementation of the project. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on the successful completion of the specific goals. Ultimately, this project seeks to strengthen the corporate and individual prayer life of the members of Jeffersonville Baptist Church that leads to revitalization.

VITA

DANIEL WINSKI WRIGHT JR.

EDUCATION

BS History Education, Georgia Southern University, 2004

MDiv, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Bi-vocational Pastor and Men's Ministry Director, First Baptist Church, Gray,
Georgia, 2015–2019

Bi-vocational Pastor, Jeffersonville Baptist Church, Jeffersonville, Georgia,
2020–