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RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Defining Revitalization as the Initial Step in the Revitalization Process

Submitted to Dr. Dwight Rice,
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by

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Liberty University Rawlings School of Divinity

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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The revitalization of churches that are either plateaued or declining is a daunting task for any pastor. The idea for this thesis project arose when this researcher engaged in his first revitalization program as a Senior Pastor. This researcher noticed that many people in the church were confused about what revitalization meant which led to confusion and mistrust in the revitalization process. This is when this researcher observed the need to define what revitalization means. As challenging as church revitalization is, pastors can make this process easier by knowing the first step to take in a revitalization program. This thesis project will create a working definition for the term revitalization which can be used as the first step in the revitalization process. To achieve this goal, this project examines the current literature concerning revitalization, as well as surveying pastors who have experience in leading a church through a revitalization program. The definition that this project creates contains four parts that can be used in any church context.

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Chapter One:

Introduction

What does the term revitalization mean? This is the question that every leader who seeks to bring a church back to being healthy and growing must answer. Pastors that choose to implement a church revitalization program must have a starting place for the revitalization process. Although each church is different, and each church has its own unique set of challenges, defining what is meant by revitalization should be the first step that leaders take in the revitalization process. The natural tendency of any organization is to drift away from their original intentions. The church is no different. Churches that have been in existence for a long period of time have a natural tendency to drift away from the core values of Christianity, and the core mission of the church. As a church drifts away from its core mission and values it inevitably heads towards plateau, then decline, and eventually death.¹

Established churches tend to drift in two areas. First, these churches drift towards complexity, and second, they drift from their original mission.² Churches that drift towards complexity have programs that have compounded throughout the church's history. These churches attempt to multi-task various programs and ministries without ever realizing that the complexity is hindering the work of the church. Such complexity in the church can cause resources to quickly dwindle as well as causing people to burn out.

The second area that churches tend to drift away from is the original mission of the church. When churches become overly complex, then the resources needed for missions begins

¹ Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 246-250.

² *Ibid.*, 245.

to decrease. People who could be otherwise engaged in missions work are fatigued from meetings, programs, and endless church ministries that yield little to no spiritual fruit in the church.³

Churches that have drifted from their original mission need some form of revitalization that will help them to become healthy and growing once again. Leaders who choose to revitalize a church must have a starting point. Leaders who choose to engage in revitalization must be able to define revitalization and to communicate this definition to the church. Too often, pastors enter a revitalization program without ever knowing what revitalization really means.⁴ Are pastor's clearly articulating what is meant by revitalization to the church body? Or are pastor's leaving the church body confused about what revitalization means? By defining revitalization as a first step, the pastor, church leaders, and the church body will have clarity from the beginning of the revitalization process to the end. Defining revitalization will also help leaders to provide direction to the church's revitalization efforts.

Ministry Context

Church revitalization is a process that this writer was introduced to in 2017. In December of 2016, this writer became the Senior Pastor of a church that needed revitalizing. After accepting the call to this church, this writer quickly became aware that the church was suffering from years of decline. The church had not experienced any new growth through baptisms as well as through new members joining in several years. WBC is a traditional Southern Baptist church that averaged 50-60 people each week in attendance. The first time that this writer saw the

³ Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 246-251.

⁴ Cheney and Rials, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Revitalization* (Orlando, FL: Renovate Publishing Group, 2015), 20.

church looking empty with only a handful of pews being filled was an eye-opening experience. It also served as a catalyst for helping this writer to understand the need for revitalization at WBC. Looking at WBC one will see that this is a church that is predictable in its actions and very ritualistic in its programs.

After evaluating the church's programs and structures, this writer learned that very little had changed in the church over the last forty years. The church was still running programs and ministries that were adopted in the 1970's. The worship services at WBC are what one would expect from a traditional Southern Baptist church. Sunday services were conducted with Sunday School followed by a morning worship service. The church had an evening worship, as well as a Wednesday evening prayer service.

For most people at WBC being a good church member meant coming to church for all three services, as well as attending Sunday School and supporting the church financially. Another characteristic of the church is that the people viewed the church as a country club with perks rather than seeing it as a mission field to serve on. These were the common characteristics for WBC members. The issue that arose from this consumer culture at WBC is that the church failed to reach out to the community and intentionally make new disciples. These failures led WNC to decline from an average of 300 in attendance on Sunday mornings to less than 60.

When this writer began to examine the life cycle of WBC, it became apparent that the church was passing the point of decline and approaching death. Figure 1 by Malphurs explains how churches go through cycles of growth and decline. After learning the history of WBC, this writer learned that the church was in desperate need of revitalization. The church had lost nearly two thirds of its regular attendees either through membership transfer, or death of a member. The church was losing members faster than it was replacing them with new believers and new

members. According to Malphurs without creating a new s-curve and re-establishing the vision for the church, then death is inevitable.⁵ If the church did not engage in a revitalization process, the doors would have closed permanently in less than five years.

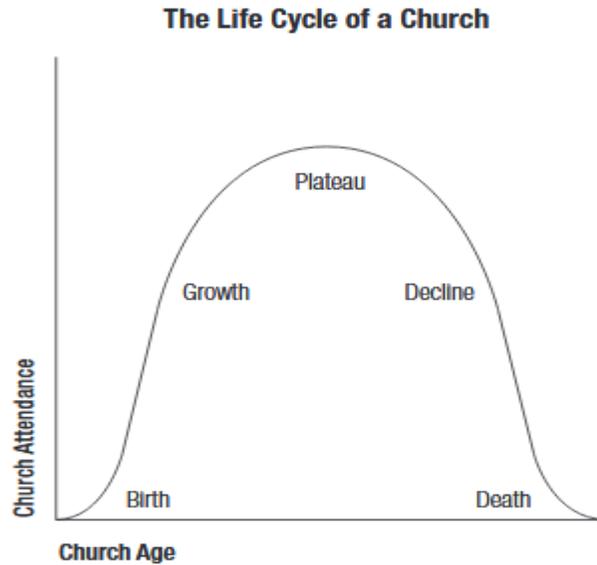


Figure 1: Malphurs Life Cycle of a Church⁶

WBC is located on the outer parts of the city limits which has approximately 43,055 people. The street that the church is located on accounts for a population of 2,822 people. The northern side has an average age of 47.3 years with an annual household income of \$47,200. The southern part has an average age of 52.2 and an annual household income of \$49,928.⁷ The community surrounding WBC is composed of middle age, blue collar workers. WBC used to average around 250-300 people back in the early 2000's. As the church lost its vision and neglected to reach out to the community, the church began to decline in attendance. With so

⁵ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 14.

⁶ Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 9.

⁷ City-Data.com, Accessed November 1, 2019, .<http://www.city-data.com/city/Danville-Virginia.html>.

many people living within ten minutes from WBC the fact that this medium sized church only averaged 50-60 in attendance was staggering.

In February of 2018 WBC was invited to become a partner in the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia revitalization cohort. This program is built upon the pillars of strategic relationships and a personalized plan for revitalization. To help churches revitalize strategic relationships are developed between partnering churches, regional missionaries, strategy leaders, and church healthy consultants. The personalized plan is specific for each church and focuses on re-engineering the structures and ministries of an individual church.⁸ Each church that is involved in the revitalization program provides status updates to the Executive Board of the SBCV several times throughout the year.

The goal of the revitalization cohort is to help churches become healthy and growing again through strategic partnerships. WBC has been active in the revitalization efforts of the SBCV since February of 2018 and has experienced a time of growth and re-engaging the community. WBC is currently partnered with another church which helps provide resources needed for the revitalization efforts. WBC has also made several significant changes that have helped the church to grow in attendance and to start making a significant impact in the community.

Since February of 2018, WBC has experienced a significant increase in worship attendance. WBC went from averaging 50-60 people on Sunday mornings to 100-110 during the mornings worship service. The church has been able to revamp its worship services to include

⁸ Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia, Revitalizing Churches, accessed November 3, 2019, <http://www.sbcv.org/revitalizing-churches/>.

contemporary and traditional worship. The church also started a new children's program and was able to hire a part-time minister of youth and children.

The greatest area of growth in the church came when a tornado came through the community in April of 2018. This gave the church a chance to engage the community and to help people rebuild their lives. The people of WBC were excited to see new people coming to church, and to see new baptisms. The goal of the revitalization efforts, however, was not to just develop new programs and a fresh vision, but rather to re-engage the church in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Statement of the Problem

When this writer began the process of revitalization at WBC people became excited about the possibility of the church becoming healthy and growing again. The people of WBC began to ask questions about the nature of revitalization and what all was involved. That is when this writer noticed an issue with how people defined or understood what he meant by the term revitalization. This writer had read multiple books and articles on revitalization, attended revitalization conferences, and spoke with different pastors about how they had revitalized the church where they were serving. While this writer learned a great deal about the process of revitalizing a church, no one ever really offered a definition of what revitalization meant. This quickly became an issue when people started expressing their own concept of revitalization at WBC.

As previously stated, WBC is a traditional Southern Baptist church. The church used to conduct an annual revival service but ceased doing so sometime in the early 2000's. When this writer began talking about revitalization some of the older members were excited as they envisioned a resurgence of days gone by. This group of members was expecting old fashioned

revivals and bringing back to life the programs that were deemed effective in years past. The other concept of revitalization that was being discussed was from the younger generation of the church. This group was expecting to see the church adopt modern programs that other successful churches were using, as well as WBC becoming more contemporary in its style of worship. Both above perceptions were becoming roadblocks to being able to successfully revitalize WBC.

Ed Stetzer points out that the perception of programs being an end to a means can cripple a church from being revitalized.⁹ By returning to a program that worked many years ago, the church runs the risk of placing their faith in the program for revitalization instead of God. The church also runs the risk of causing further decline by reinstating programs that are ineffective and costly.

Another roadblock that was being experienced was the idea that calling younger pastor and changing the worship style would magically change the church.¹⁰ This was one of the reasons that this writer was called to WBC. The idea that a young pastor would be able to attract and retain younger members which would help the church to grow. However, this concept is flawed in that the changes are only experienced on the inside of the church without engaging those on the outside. As this writer worked through defining revitalization to the church, the lack of knowledge that people had was becoming an issue that was keeping the church from moving forward.¹¹

To combat these growing issues, this writer began to develop a working definition of what was meant by the term revitalization. By defining revitalization this writer seeks to help

⁹ Thom S. Rainer, "10 Roadblocks to Church Revitalization," ChurchLeaders, July 24, 2017, accessed July 11, 2018, <http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/306949-10-roadblocks-church-revitalization-thom-rainer.html>.

¹⁰ Stetzer, 10 Roadblocks to Church Revitalization, 3.

¹¹ Stetzer, 10 Roadblocks to Revitalization, 3.

pastors and church members alike understand what is meant when pastors speak of church revitalization. Defining revitalization as the first step in the revitalization process will help pastors enlist the support of the church body. Malphurs points out that without communicating where a church is going, the leadership should not expect the church to willingly follow.¹²

The concept of revitalization in plateaued or declining churches has become a popular topic in recent years. As the Senior Pastor of a Southern Baptist church, this writer was introduced to the process of revitalization in 2017. When this writer accepted the call to WBC, he did so with the understanding that the church was in a state of decline and that it had only a few years to become healthy and growing before it would permanently close its doors. Through this process, this writer has become aware of the challenges of revitalization. He has also become aware that many times, people are confused about the revitalization process, and that by defining this process, churches and leaders will have a greater chance of success in the revitalization process.

In his blog post *Dispelling the 80 Percent Myth of Declining Churches*, author Thom Rainer states that his latest research indicates that 65 percent of churches are either plateaued or declining.¹³ With 65 percent of churches facing closure, it is no wonder that a wave of revitalization is expected. Thom Rainer states that the concept of revitalization is a popular topic among many churches. He also points out that many of the churches that are plateaued, or declining are finally facing reality and making the changes necessary to become healthy and

¹² Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 106.

¹³ Thom S. Rainer, “*Dispelling the 80 Percent Myth of Declining Churches*,” Churchanswers.com, June 28, 2017, accessed November 7, 2019, <http://www.churchanswers.com/blog/dispelling-80-percent-myth-declining-churches/>.

growing.¹⁴ With the topic of revitalization becoming so popular, and this wave of revitalization among churches coming, pastors will be faced with a tremendous challenge of defining revitalization to their congregations.

Regardless of size, location, or denomination, leaders must be able to communicate what is meant by revitalization to the church body. Although the revitalization process may differ from one congregation to another, the first step that any leader should take in the revitalization process is to define what they mean by revitalization. Defining revitalization as the initial step in the revitalization process will serve as a catalyst in bringing revitalization to a plateaued or declining church.¹⁵

Providing the church with clarity will provide leaders with tremendous benefits in the revitalization process. Mancini states:

Clarity is good news because it is so catalytic. A chemical catalyst by nature speeds up the reaction between compounds in a way that preserves the natural dynamics of a reaction. In other words, a catalyst never forces something unnaturally. Rather, it frees up organic movement. In this way, clarity becomes critical for shaping culture. It does not force ideas, values, attitudes, and action onto people but allows them to be naturally captured. It speeds up the process of enculturation. People belong sooner and participate faster. Barriers and “initiation energy” are removed, freeing people to become stakeholders in the cause-based community of Jesus.¹⁶

When leaders provide their congregations with a clear definition of the revitalization process, they are laying a foundation to build the rest of the process upon. Mancini points out the multiple benefits of providing clarity to congregations. He first points out that clarity helps make the direction of the church unquestionable. When this writer first began the revitalization process

¹⁴ Thom S. Rainer, “*Five Reasons a Wave of Revitalization of Churches Is Likely*,” Churchanswers.com, July 11, 2018, accessed November 7, 2019, <http://www.churchanswers.com/blog/five-reasons-wave-revitalization-churches-likely/>.

¹⁵ Will Mancini, *Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement* (Jossey-Bass A Wiley Imprint: San Francisco, CA, 2008), 53.

¹⁶ Mancini, *Church Unique*, 53.

at WBC, he did not initially provide a clear definition of revitalization. This led to confusion as to what revitalization was and the direction that I felt God was leading the church. By defining revitalization, leaders will make the process of revitalization definable and obvious. The second benefit of clarity is that it makes enthusiasm transferable. Henard states that for a church to successfully revitalize, they must “buy-in” to the revitalization process. Without the support of the church and the commitment of all the people, then the work of the leadership will be in vain and will ultimately fail.¹⁷

Mancini also points out that clarity in the revitalization process will help make synergy possible. He states that a lack of strategic clarity will increase the chances of multiple ministries working against each other. Leaders who provide clarity in the revitalization process help to create an environment of collaboration within the ministries of the church. The fourth benefit of defining the revitalization process is that it will help to make success definable. Providing clarity helps people to not only understand the revitalization process, but to have a standard by which to measure whether the revitalization efforts are effective. When people have a clear picture of what a win looks like, then their motivation is accelerated to achieve a victory.

The fifth benefit of providing clarity is that it will help keep the church focused during the revitalization process. Churches are notorious for having multiple ministries that conflict with one another and that do not support the overall vision of the church. Beginning with a clearly defined process helps to re-align ministries that support the overall vision of the church. Instead of building a revitalization process around the church programs, leaders must start with defining revitalization and then build programs that support this process.

¹⁷ Bill Henard, *Reclaimed Church: How Churches Grow, Decline, and Experience Revitalization* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 139.

The next benefit of defining revitalization is that it will help give the leadership credibility to the congregation. Churches that have experienced failed revitalization attempts are cautious when new leadership makes attempts at revitalization. Years of confusing revitalization attempts that are connected with failed ministries leave church members disillusioned and leery of new leadership initiatives. Pastors who present a visionary idea that involves clarity and definition earn the confidence and trust of the church body. Leaders who define revitalization to their congregations help to provide clarity with creativity, which helps to build momentum in the church and confidence in the pastor.

Finally, by defining revitalization, pastors will help make uncertainty approachable to their church members. One of the greatest fears that church members face is the fear of the unknown. The fear of uncertainty can grip a congregation and cause them to become stagnant and afraid of change. Leaders who choose to provide clarity by defining revitalization will replace uncertainty with hope and expectation. This will ultimately lead people to confidence in investing in kingdom focused initiatives with courage.¹⁸

Purpose Statement

This thesis project will develop a working definition for pastors to use as the initial step of a revitalization process. Using surveys, current literature, journal articles, and scripture, this writer is seeking to define revitalization so that pastors, and other church leaders can use it as the first step in the revitalization process. The purpose of this paper is to provide the reader with a Biblical and Philosophical definition of revitalization as it pertains to the church revitalization

¹⁸ Mancini, *Church Unique*, 53-55.

process. This definition will assist pastors communicate with the church as they navigate their way through the revitalization process.

This writer began the process of revitalization at WBC without providing a clear understanding of what was meant by the term revitalization. While the church embraced the ideas that were being presented to them, many were left to define what was meant by revitalization on their own. By not defining revitalization as the first step, some of the church members were hesitant to engage in the revitalization process.

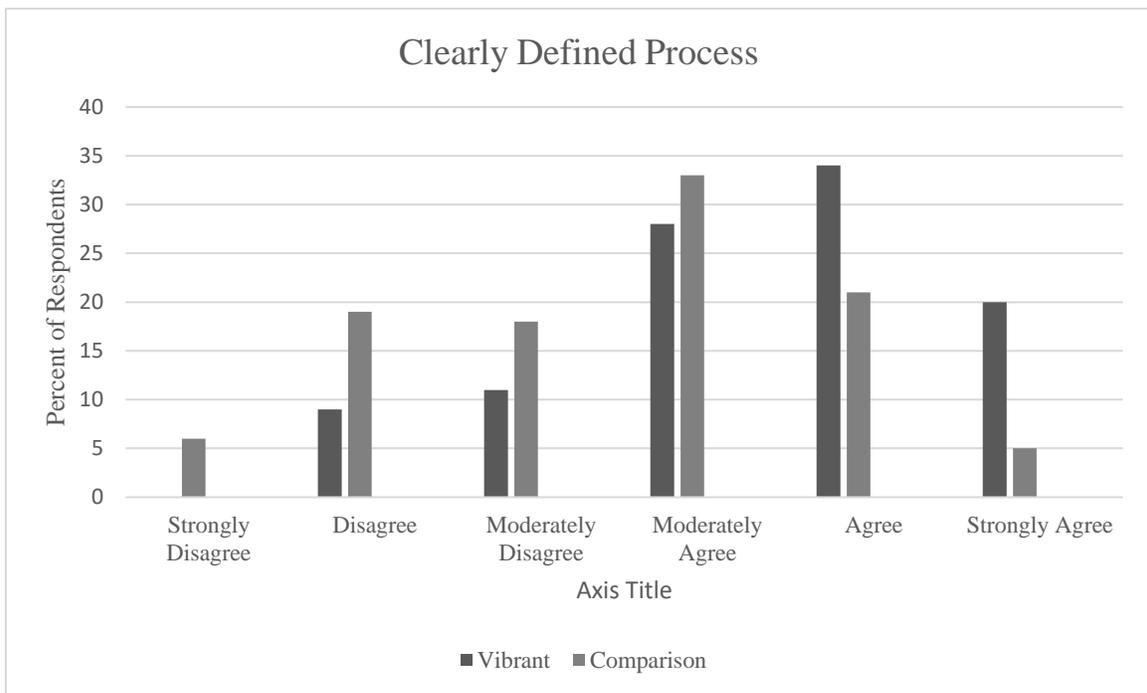


Table 2: Vibrant Church vs. Comparison Church¹⁹

According to a survey conducted by Thom Rainer, 53% of vibrant church leaders believed that having clearly defined process in the church helped their churches to navigate through the revitalization process. Rainer goes on to point out that churches that have a clearly

¹⁹ Adapted from: Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 112.

defined process from the beginning are more likely to become vibrant and growing.²⁰ The purpose of this paper is to help pastors and other church leaders begin the process of revitalization.

Assumptions

The effort to determine if a viable definition for church revitalization exists comes with certain presuppositions that this writer has about the church revitalization movement. This writer holds the assumption that church revitalization is a biblical concept that is rooted in both the Old and New Testaments. The OT book of Judges records the continual cycle of rebellion, repentance, and restoration of Israel. The nation of Israel would rebel against God then follow in repentance as they experienced His judgements. God would then send a judge who would lead the nation through a restoration of walking with God. The book of 2 Chronicles records revivals under King Asa (2 Chronicles 14-16), King Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20), King Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 30), and King Josiah (2 Chronicles 34).²¹ In each of these OT accounts, God's work of revitalization is evident as He works in the lives of the people of Israel to renew their relationship with Him.

In the NT Jesus promises that He will build the church and that the gates of Hades will not prevail against it, signifying that He fully expected the church to be healthy and growing. (Matthew 16:18) In Revelation 2 and 3, Jesus implores five of the seven churches to listen and follow His instructions so that they may experience a revitalization in their relationship with Him.²² In Acts 15:41 and 18:23 the Apostle Paul visits Syria, Cilicia, Galatia, and Phrygia so that

²⁰ Rainier and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 112.

²¹ Gary L. McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church: First Steps to Restoring Health and Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 23.

²² McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church*, 23.

he can strengthen the disciples and help them continue in being fruitful in their kingdom mission of making disciples.²³ By examining both the OT and NT, one can see that it is God's desire for His church to be healthy and growing.

Definitions

This thesis project will seek to create a viable definition for revitalization. According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, the word revitalize means to give new life to. The term revitalization is the noun of revitalize and conveys the idea of an act or instance of revitalizing.²⁴ The question that is being addressed is whether a viable definition of revitalization can be created. This definition can then be used by church leaders as the first step in leading their congregations through the revitalization process. To accomplish the goal of creating a viable definition for revitalization, this project will compare and contrast the various definitions of revitalization that exist. Using current literature (books, journal articles, and blogs), and surveys, this project will seek to define revitalization by looking at common themes that exists among the above-mentioned resources. This project will also include the definition for revitalization that was created by this writer as he led WBC through the revitalization process.

Limitations

The first limitation to this study arises from the issue of churches not recognizing the need for revitalization. While this thesis project will seek to define revitalization as the first step in the revitalization process, doing so will not guarantee that leaders will be successful in leading the church to renewed health and growth. Henard states that the greatest obstacle that exists in

²³ Harry L. Reeder and David Swavely, *From Embers to a Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 19.

²⁴ Merriam-Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus (Springfield, MA, Meriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2007), 694.

hindering the revitalization is the refusal of the people to see the need for revitalization. Henard goes on to state that while many churches are in a state of plateau or decline, a great number of them refuse to see the need for revitalization.²⁵ Because churches may not see the need for revitalization, this project cannot guarantee that pastor's will be successful in a revitalization process in the local church.

Delimitations

Church revitalization is complex, and the methods used can vary greatly between churches. Churches that are engaged in the revitalization process may require a restart, a replant, a sponsoring church, or targeted revitalization.²⁶ Every church has a culture that is unique and encompasses the values, traditions, thoughts, attitudes, and actions that define the uniqueness of the church. The unique culture of each church will help define not only the areas that need to be revitalized, but the methods that will be used.²⁷

Due to the complexity and uniqueness of each individual church, this thesis project will not offer a step-by-step guide to revitalization. Rather, this thesis project will seek to define the term revitalization so that church leaders will have a starting point for revitalization. This definition is intended to help pastors, and church leaders communicate what is meant by the term revitalization so that churches will begin the process with clarity and understanding.

²⁵ Bill Henard, *Can These Bones Live: A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2015), 48.

²⁶ Henard. *Reclaimed Church*, 107.

²⁷ Mancini, *Church Unique*, 7.

Thesis Statement

This thesis project will create a working definition for the term revitalization which can be used as the first step in the church revitalization process. With only 15% of SBC churches being healthy and growing, the need for revitalization is great.²⁸ Unfortunately, most pastors are ill equipped to lead the local church through the revitalization process. Many do not possess the knowledge or courage to bring about the necessary church for the church to become healthy and growing again. Many of these pastors do not know what to do, and few if any can effectively communicate to their congregations what revitalization means.²⁹ It is this writer's opinion that by defining what is meant by revitalization, leaders will be better equipped to lead their congregations through the revitalization process. This writer also believes that defining revitalization as the first step in the revitalization process will help church members to embrace the revitalization process.

²⁸ Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 5.

²⁹ Tom Cheyney and Terry Rials, *The Nuts & Bolts of Church Revitalization* (Orlando, FL: Renovate Publishing Group, 2015), 20.

Chapter Two:

Review of Literature

The Nuts and Bolts of Church Revitalization by Tom Cheney and Terry Rials

The first book that has helped this writer to understand revitalization is *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Revitalization* by Tom Cheney and Terry Rials. The authors point out that many pastors do not know where to begin when initiating a revitalization strategy. The author's also state that many pastors are fearful of starting a revitalization movement due to insecurity and lack of training. By not being able to properly define revitalization as a starting point, pastors are failing in their attempts to revitalize plateaued or declining churches.³⁰

Cheney and Rials do offer the reader some insights that helped this writer to understand what is meant by revitalization. For instance, the authors state that revitalization encompasses two parts. In describing church revitalization, the authors differentiate what is meant by renewal and revitalization. Renewal is the act of experiencing a spiritual refreshing from God that takes place in the individual church member. Revitalization, on the other hand, describes the overall experience of a spiritual refreshing that takes place in the corporate church body.³¹

This writer found the author's clarification between renewal and revitalization helpful in defining what is meant by church revitalization. By differentiating between renewal and revitalization, the authors help the reader to understand that revitalization is more than a process to help churches grow, but rather it is a spiritual movement that begins within the heart of individual believers. This renewed passion is then reflected within the local church body. While there are many resources that incorporate vision casting and a renewed purpose for the corporate

³⁰ Cheney and Rials, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Revitalization*, 20-21.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

church, Cheney and Rials separate themselves from other works by adding that renewal within the individual must come before revitalization of the church.

***The Seven Pillars of Church Revitalization and Renewal* by Tom Cheney**

In his book *The 7 Pillars of Church Revitalization and Renewal*, author Tom Cheney uses the seven churches in the book of Revelation to build what he calls “the pillars” of church revitalization. Cheney uses the strengths and weaknesses of each of the seven churches to provide the reader with the components of revitalization. Cheney provides the reader with the following chart to help them understand that during the revitalization process, they will encounter each of these pillars at some point:

1. Revitalization and Realignment: Revelation 2:1-7
2. Re-visioning: Revelation 2:8-11
3. Re-focusing: Revelation 2:12-17
4. Renewing: Revelation 2:18-29
5. Restarting: Revelation 3:1-6
6. Reinvention: Revelation 3:6-13
7. Restoration: Revelation 3:14-22³²

Cheney helps the reader to understand that revitalization is a process that pastors must work through in different stages. One thing that this writer found interesting is how Cheney uses the word “realignment” to describe revitalization. The author points out that realignment means to put something back into its proper order by readjusting, restructuring, reorganizing, or rearranging. He continues by pointing out that churches that are experiencing a plateau or a

³² Tom Cheney, *The 7 Pillars of Church Revitalization and Renewal: Biblical Foundations for Church Revitalization* (Columbia, SC: Renovate Publishing Group, 2016), 12.

period of decline are in spiritual trouble and need realigning.³³ This writer found Cheney's comparison of revitalization and realigning helpful in defining what revitalization is. Pastors who choose to lead a church through the revitalization process must be able to communicate to the church body that revitalization includes realigning the church with God's mission.

Depending on where a church is spiritually this realignment may take place in different areas of the church's ministries. The reader will also learn through Cheney's work that although every church is unique in its needs, the concept of revitalization or realignment is the same. Cheney points out that while each of the churches in Revelation 2-3 were given different warnings, the common issue was that they all had areas that needed to be improved upon. The challenge that pastors will face is determining where their church is spiritually, and what areas of the church need to be realigned so that they may continue to fulfill the Great Commission.

***Reclaiming Glory* by Mark Clifton**

Author Mark Clifton offers a unique perspective in defining church revitalization in his book *Reclaiming Glory*. Clifton draws several comparisons from scripture to describe what revitalization looks like. Clifton uses the parable of the vine dresser in Luke 13 to make his point. In this parable, the vine dresser is told to cut down one of the trees since it is not producing any fruit. The vine dresser does not offer any excuses for the fruitless tree, but rather, he asks for one more year before the tree is removed. The author likens this passage to church revitalization in that God is not receiving any glory or honor from a dying church, and that the task of the revitalization pastor is to bring the church back to health. In doing this, God will receive glory and honor as the church re-engages in the mission that is set before them.³⁴

³³ Cheney, *The 7 Pillars of Church Revitalization and Renewal*, 13-14.

³⁴ Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 8.

Clifton continues by pointing out that revitalization encompasses two main areas. First, he states that the pathway to new life in the church includes repentance. The author points out that in Revelation 2, the church of Ephesus was chastised for abandoning their first love. He also points out that revitalization in the church begins with the church repenting of abandoning Christ. Clifton goes on to state that revitalization also means remembrance. This remembrance is not a nostalgic return to the past, but a call to remembering the mission that birthed the church in the first place.³⁵

Clifton's work helps to define revitalization from a unique perspective. Clifton states that he was a church planter before becoming involved in a revitalization project. He also stated that he believed that it was easier to give birth to new life, then to resurrect the dead.³⁶ His insight into "replanting" a dying church helps this writer to define revitalization as a process that involves repentance and remembering.

***Re-Focus* by Dr. Dave E. Cole**

Another resource that has helped this writer to define what is meant by revitalization is – *Re-Focus* by Dave Cole. *Re-Focus* addresses the issue that is plaguing many of the churches in America, namely that of being inward focused. Cole states that whether intentionally or unintentionally churches have a high tendency to stop focusing on the community and to stop serving those outside of the church. He even points out that sixty-five percent of churches in America are either plateaued or declining.

The driving factor behind this shift in focus, according to Cole, is that pastors are being forced to use most of their resources and time to meet the overwhelming demands of church

³⁵ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 14-15.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

members. This in turn leads to a country club mentality of the church where perks and privileges take the place of missions and servanthood. According to Cole, a church is out of focus when they are striving to maintain ministry to those on the inside first before fulfilling missions to those on the outside.³⁷

Re-Focus helped this writer to understand that revitalization is a process that includes leading the church towards a renewed call to missions. Although other areas of the church may need to be addressed, Cole points out that a lack of missional clarity is one of the major areas that a church must address if they are to be revitalized. He states that “crystal clear vision is the starting point for avoiding mission fog. If you cannot see where you are going any road will get you there”.³⁸ The point is that for revitalization to begin, a church must have a clear vision of where they want to go. The responsibility of the pastor is to paint a clear vision, and to lead the church to the necessary steps to fulfill that vision.

Another area of Cole’s work that helped this writer to define revitalization is how he challenges the reader to discover the disconnect that exists between the church and the community. Cole states that a church that has been inward focused is out of touch with the community. For the church to experience revitalization the church must discover where the disconnect exists and then refocus its missional opportunities around the needs of the community.³⁹

The overall theme of Cole’s book is that churches in need of revitalization must be willing to shift their focus from the comfort of those on the inside to the needs of those on the

³⁷ Dave E. Cole, *Re-Focus: Creating an Outward-Focused Church Culture* (Duvall, WA: Outward-Focused Network LLC), 27-30.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 64-69.

outside. Like other authors, Cole helps the reader to understand that revitalization is a process that include a refocusing of the church. This refocus means that leaders must address areas of worship, teaching, fellowship, service, and missions. This book also has also helped this writer to further define revitalization as a process where the leadership must be willing to ask two important questions.

The first question that pastors and other church leaders must be willing to ask is: Why are we doing what we are doing? The goal of this question is for the leader and the church to bring clarity to their missional goals. This serves as an opportunity for the church to re-evaluate is goals, and to discover issues that are leading the church to be plateaued or declining.

The second question that pastors and other church leaders must be willing to ask is: What are we doing as a church? The purpose of asking this question is for the church to understand whether their activities or programs are effective in meeting the needs of those on the outside of the church.⁴⁰ Like other authors, Cole points out that part of the revitalization or refocusing is for the church to take a look at its purpose, its goals, and its vision. If a church is to experience revitalization, they must be willing to take an honest assessment of how they are perceived by the community, and then be willing to make whatever changes are necessary to make a positive impact on the community around them with the gospel message.

***Biblical Church Revitalization* by Brian Croft**

According to author Brian Croft, most pastors who enter a revitalization effort fail simply because they do not know where to begin. This lack of understanding according to Croft, causes pastors to listen to unwise voices. As a result, these pastors have miscalculated reactions, and

⁴⁰ Cole, *Refocus*, 79-80.

makes unwise choices in their leadership efforts.⁴¹ Croft defines revitalization by comparing it to the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37. He states that revitalization has two parts. The first part of revitalization is when God begins to breathe life where there is no life. The second part of defining revitalization according to Croft is that God unites where there is enmity.⁴² The point that Croft is making is that revitalization is a movement of God where new life is breathed into the church, and that unity of the church body is restored.

The author continues by stating that engaging in revitalization is not something that a pastor should start immediately. Croft states that a pastor first needs to spend a couple of years shepherding the congregation and gaining the trust of the people before attempting to revitalize the church.⁴³ Croft's book differs from other sources in that he mainly addresses the "how" of revitalization and not the "methods" of revitalization. Croft describes how God works through circumstances, people, and His word to revitalize a church. Croft doesn't present a growth plan, or other any pre-determined steps that can be used to revitalize a dying church. The author shares his experiences in revitalization and offers key points to help the reader understand how revitalization comes to a dying church.

***Revitalize* by Andrew M. Davis**

Revitalize by Andrew Davis has helped this writer to gain a different perspective on what the term revitalization means by combining theology and practice. Davis states that he uses the term revitalization to describe the efforts to biblically restore a church that is riddled with spiritual disease back to a state of being healthy according to the Word of God. He qualifies this

⁴¹ Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying and Divided Churches* (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications Ltd., 2017), 34.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 25-30.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 35.

statement by differentiating between a healthy and unhealthy church. He states that a church in need of revitalizing is one that is filled with toxic demonic forces that make ministering there particularly challenging. Davis believes that these churches will suffer and die if revitalization is not experienced within the congregation.⁴⁴

Davis continues to expound upon the term revitalization by comparing it to the word revival, which is the traditional word used by many churches. He states that the word revitalize can also mean to “make alive again.”⁴⁵ He also states that revitalization is the process of God restoring a church that is experiencing decline and spiritual death back to the state of being healthy and growing. According to Davis, this process can only be completed by God since He alone is the giver of life.

Davis continues by pointing out that the process of bringing a church back from the point of death is a sovereign act that only God can complete. Comparing this to the word revival that most traditional churches use, Davis points out that both terms describe a sovereign act of God where the hearts of people are changed, and new life is experienced.⁴⁶ Finally, Davis points out that both revitalization and revival are essentially the same thing, except that revitalization takes dedication and evangelistic outgrowth to a higher level.⁴⁷

***Can These Bones Live?* by Bill Henard**

The next book that this writer found insightful on defining revitalization was *Can These Bones Live* by Bill Henard. Henard begins with the presumption that God has a desire for His

⁴⁴ Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 20.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

church to grow and to fulfill His kingdom mission of reaching the lost. Henard goes on to state that he finds it concerning that pastors believe it is better for a church to close than to experience revitalization. This statement according to Henard is not biblical, and he uses the illustration of the Valley of Dry Bones in Ezekiel 37 to build on his theory that God can bring new life to churches that have been labeled as dead.⁴⁸

One of the issues that this writer found interesting in Henard's work, is that the author does not offer a concise definition of the word revitalization. Henard does offer the reader a few key components that must be taken into consideration before engaging in the revitalization process. Henard states that church health results in the revitalization of the church. He goes on to point out that too many pastors have engaged in church growth without ever mentioning the name of Jesus. Henard believes that these churches while growing in numbers are dying spiritually. He believes that pastors need to focus on the health of the church instead of focusing on numbers.⁴⁹

This writer finds Henard's point interesting because it makes church health and revitalization intrinsically linked. The author states:

Revitalization becomes a viable means of church growth because it necessitates church health. Many churches fall into decline because they have become unhealthy, so a prospective pastor will never accomplish church turnaround if church health is not achieved. The two go inseparably together.⁵⁰

Henard also provides the reader with a description of the Holy Spirit's role in the revitalization process. He states that if God has a desire for His church to grow, then one should

⁴⁸ Bill Henard, *Can These Bones Live? A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 7-8.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

expect that He will provide the power that is necessary for revitalization. The author points out that methodologies, programs, and mission statements are useless if they are not guided by the Holy Spirit. According to Henard, many of the obstacles that pastors and churches will face in the revitalization process can be overcome by the power of Holy Spirit.⁵¹

Finally, Henard points out that for a pastor to lead a church through the revitalization process, he must first experience revitalization in his own life. Henard helps the reader to understand that revitalization pastors must be diligent in seeking out the Lord and connecting with the power of the Holy Spirit daily.

Pastors must be consistent in their own spiritual formation and continue to grow in their walk with the Lord. He also points out that pastors may experience growth and success without relying upon the Holy Spirit, but this lack of revitalization will eventually catch up with them and lead to failure.⁵² Overall *Can These Bones Live?* has helped this writer to understand that revitalization is a process that involves the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church, and in the life of the revitalization pastor as God seeks to bring what was once dead back to being healthy and growing.

***ReClaimed Church* by Bill Henard**

Reclaimed Church is another source that has helped this writer to better define what is meant by the term revitalization. In this book author Bill Henard draws comparison between revitalization and the verb reclaimed, which according to Henard means to retrieve, recover, or to gain back something that has been lost, given, or paid.⁵³ He uses the illustration of reclaiming

⁵¹ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 13.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵³ Bill Henard, *ReClaimed Church: How Churches Grow, Decline, and Experience Revitalization* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 1.

or repurposing old wood to help the reader understand how a church can be reclaimed like a valuable piece of wood.

Henard continues by pointing out that not all churches begin with a vision. He states that while some churches are the result of an intentional plant, or the vision of a community of people, he also reminds the reader that there are other reasons why a local church emerged. He states that while many churches start from a desire to reach a certain group of people, or the vision and dreams of a group of people, there are churches that begin as the result of splits, racism, or religious bias.⁵⁴

This point differs from other writers by pointing out the fact that there are churches who begin without ever having a vision. Shortly afterwards, these churches can get off track and begin to decline. Henard also states that whether a church began with a vision or some other reason, both can fall into decline and death with poor decision making and immature leadership.⁵⁵ Henard helps the reader to understand that for revitalization to be effective, a church must understand the life stage of the church and how it was founded.⁵⁶

Reclaimed Church draws the same conclusion that other works on revitalization do when it comes to beginning the revitalization process. Henard states that a church must not only understand their history, but they must also re-evaluate the vision for the church. He points out churches in decline have strayed from their original vision and that for revitalization to take place, a new vision and strategy must be developed.⁵⁷ Henard goes on to state that a vision is a desired future or who the church aspires to be.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 7-8.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 7-8.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁷ Henard, *ReClaimed Church*, 13-14.

Henard also points out that for a church to grow and be effective in revitalizing, then they must have a specific strategy for making their vision become reality.⁵⁸ Henard's work has helped this writer to understand the beginning stages of revitalization as vision casting and strategic planning. *Reclaimed Church*, like other works that this writer has reviewed continues the theme of vision casting and strategic planning as essential parts of the revitalization process.

***Church Unique* by Will Mancini**

Church Unique is another source that has helped this writer to understand the process of revitalization. In this book, author Will Mancini gives four imperatives that help the reader to understand how to prepare for developing a vision for the church. Since vision casting is an essential part of revitalization, this writer found Mancini's four imperatives essential to defining revitalization. Mancini first states that for a vision to be properly cast the leadership needs to develop a framework for the statement.⁵⁹ This framework, according to Mancini helps to bring clarity to the vision by answering questions regarding the measures, values, strategies, and missions of the vision.⁶⁰

This writer feels that if vision casting is an essential part of revitalization, then developing this framework will help ensure that leaders can properly define what is meant by revitalization to their congregations. The second imperative that Mancini offers is that leaders need to discern the future by seeing what they already have around them. Mancini's point is that

⁵⁸ Henard, *ReClaimed Church.*, 14.

⁵⁹ Will Mancini, *Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 63.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

for a leader to develop a vision, they need to be willing to look around them at the resources that a church already has.⁶¹

The third imperative that Mancini offers is leaders need to incorporate the church body in the vision casting process. Instead of being a one-man team, Mancini encourages the leadership to enlist help from the church body so that people will feel involved and take ownership of the vision.⁶² Finally, Mancini states that leaders need to enlist help from an outsider. He states that doing so will provide the church with a realistic view of who they really are in the eyes of the community.⁶³

Each of these imperatives is essential to developing a fresh vision for the church. Although Mancini does not offer a definition for revitalization in *Church Unique*, he does help the reader to understand that for revitalization to take place, a fresh vision must be captured by the church. As with other authors who have written about revitalization, Mancini sees revitalization as a process that includes vision casting.

***There's Hope For Your Church* by Gary L. McIntosh**

In chapter five of *There's Hope for Your Church*, author Gary McIntosh helps the reader to understand that a vision is essential for revitalization. The author's position is that revitalization begins by being able to recognize two things. First, he states that a church must know where they are. McIntosh states that the leadership must take an honest look at the current situation in the church and assess whether the church is worth saving.⁶⁴ This means that the

⁶¹ Mancini, *Church Unique*, 64.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 65.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁶⁴ Gary L. McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church: First Steps to Restoring Health and Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 73.

leadership and the church body must be honest in evaluating their faults and failures. McIntosh continues by stating that once the leadership determines that the church is worth saving, they must then decide where they want the church to go. He also points out that a vision is simply a description of hope for the future of the church. A vision according to McIntosh is what God wants to accomplish through the church.⁶⁵

McIntosh continues by defining the different components of a vision. According to McIntosh, a vision is a culmination of passions and gifts of the pastor, the church, and the needs of the community. He points out that where these three areas meet is where the vision of the church arises from.⁶⁶ The material that McIntosh presents is supportive of this writer's thesis in that it helps to define revitalization as a process that includes developing a fresh vision for the church. McIntosh points out that that the major difference between growing churches and declining churches is that churches that are experiencing revitalization have taken the time to develop a new vision for the church.⁶⁷ Like other authors who address revitalization, McIntosh holds that vision casting is essential to revitalization.

***From Embers To A Flame* by Harry L. Reeder**

In his book *From Embers to a Flame* author Harry Reeder provides a unique approach to church revitalization. Reeder states that before a church should be concerned about growth, it must first be concerned about its health. The author uses the term "recovery" to draw his comparison between the human body and the body of Christ. He continues by stating that when properly nourished and cared for, the human body naturally grows and develops into a strong,

⁶⁵ McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church.*, 74.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

healthy, maturing adult. Likewise, when a church needs revitalization, Reeder points out that the church must first become healthy and experience a period of spiritual growth.⁶⁸

Reeder also makes the point that just because a church body is large, that it does not mean it is necessarily healthy. He continues by stating that the term revitalization places the focus not on programs or methods, but on the individual members of the body. According to Reeder, church revitalization is the process of the Holy Spirit where spiritual health and vitality are restored in the individual believers that make up the church body.⁶⁹ The concept that Reeder is presenting is that as the individual believer experiences revitalization, the church as a whole will become spiritually stronger. Reeder also states that while growth will naturally occur in this process, the real measure of spiritual revitalization is the functional ministry of the church.⁷⁰

Reeder differs from other writers in that he believes that revitalization is a process that leads to an event. He also believes that the starting place for revitalization is with the current members of the church. Reeder points out that a pastor needs to start with the people who are present when the revitalization process begins. These people become the foundation for the work of revitalization to build upon. Reeder warns that if revitalization and growth is attempted before the health of the present members is dealt with, then failure will inevitably follow. This writer found Reeder's work helpful in defining revitalization as a process that begins within the heart of the individual believer. Reeder's work was also helpful in that it helps the reader to understand that a renewed call to discipleship and evangelism are essential parts of the revitalization process.

⁶⁸ Harry L. Reeder III, *From Embers to A Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 29.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

***ReMission* by Gary Comer**

Another resource that has helped this writer to define what is meant by revitalization is *Remission* by Gary Comer. The author of remission takes a different perspective than other authors who have dealt with the issue of church revitalization. Comer looks at church revitalization as the process of remissioning the church. Comer points out that the word remission is used to describe the restoration of something to its former status or condition. He continues by stating that his focus of this book to help church leaders understand that remissioning is the process of restoring the local church to a place of being healthy and growing once again.⁷¹

One area that this writer found interesting was how Comer differs from other authors concerning revitalization verses remissioning. Comer holds the position that church missions and fulfillment of the Great Commission do not flow out of a healthy church, but rather, church health is a by-product of a church that engages in missions as they focus on the Great Commission. According to Comer if a church engages in missions, regardless of their size or abilities, then discipleship will occur, and church health will follow. The author points out that this methodology differs from many pastors who believe that a church must first become healthy before it can engage in missions.⁷²

For Comer, church revitalization does not begin with addressing the issues of health, but rather, he believes revitalization begins with addressing the lack of missions in plateaued and declining churches. Finally, concerning the concept of remission, the author states that remission

⁷¹ Gary Comer, *ReMission: Rethinking How Church Leaders Create Movement* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2018), 26.

⁷² Comer, *ReMission*, 27.

seeks to “restore the status and conditioning of church membership as a movement.”⁷³ The overall theme of Comer’s book can be summed up in his statement that if you “give your people a viable mission, and you will have given them a means to spiritual life and health as they become true disciples of Jesus.”⁷⁴

In addressing the issues of attempting to remission the church, Comer points out that the idea of discipleship that Christ taught, and the type of discipleship that the modern church practices are not the same. He states that while Jesus viewed that discipleship had occurred when His followers replicated His heart, actions, skills, and fruit, the modern church has made discipleship about knowledge, behavior, and fellowship.⁷⁵ This comparison has helped this writer to further define revitalization as a process that brings people back to a biblical concept and practice of discipleship. Comer continues by pointing out that the modern church’s concept of discipleship has led to “a pandemic of isolated Christians feverishly studying their bibles but neither living what their bibles are calling them toward nor seeing scripture through a lens that distinguishes Jesus’ methods in a transferable way”.⁷⁶

The issue that Comer points out is that too many churches are making discipleship a process that teaches the heart and mind of Christ without ever making any significant changes in one’s life that reflect what has been learned. Comer’s point is that for a church to experience what he calls “remission” or revitalization, then the church must return to a biblical process of discipleship that takes people out of the pews and mobilizes them for missions that occur outside of the church walls. Comer’s work on remissioning the church has also helped this writer to

⁷³ Comer, *ReMission*, 26.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

understand that revitalization is a process that leads to a renewed call of discipleship that involves mobilizing the church for missions.

Theological Foundations

Biblical Framework

There are limited resources available to help pastors communicate what they mean by the word revitalization. If a pastor wants to revitalize a church in a manner that is honoring to God, then it must be rooted in the Word of God. Concerning the issue of biblical church revitalization, author Bill Henard states:

In our world today, we have learned how to grow churches through a variety of means. We have become so concise and advanced in our methodology, technology, and programming that a church leader can grow a church and quite possibly never have to mention the name of Jesus. Through research, we have learned what the unchurched wants, and we have built churches that have gotten out of balance in their approach in catering to what people do not like about church. As a result, many pastors are fearful of church revitalization because of the onslaught of blogs, ads, and publications that promote “a new church for people who do not like church” as though there is something anathema about the established church.⁷⁷

The point that Henard is making is that pastors need a better reason for church revitalization than numerical growth. Church revitalization must be biblically grounded if it is going to be God honoring and bear eternal fruit. The theological foundation that this writer will provide will examine key passages in the Old and New Testaments. These passages will show that revitalization is at the heart of God, and that His desire is for his church to be healthy and growing, so that the Great Commission can be fulfilled.

⁷⁷ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 8-9.

Old Testament

Ezekiel 37

The first passage that this writer is using to build the theological foundations for this project is Ezekiel 37. First and foremost, church revitalization must be a sovereign act of God, where He is the one who brings about renewal and life among His people. In Ezekiel 37:1-14 the prophet Ezekiel is led into the midst of a valley that was filled with dry bones. In this passage the prophet learns that the power of God can bring life to even the deadest of people. As Ezekiel is led into a valley that is filled with bones that are described as being very dry, he is faced with the same situation that every pastor of a dying church is faced with, the question of whether new life can spring forth from what is apparently dead?

As Ezekiel is walking amid this valley, he surveys the land and sees that death is all around him. Ezekiel describes the bones as being not just dry, but very dry. These bones that were dried, bleached, and scattered had apparently been there for a while. To think that there was any hope of new life springing forth from these bones would be ludicrous. But Ezekiel is going to learn the same lesson that every pastor who seeks to bring new life to a dying church must learn, which is, only God can bring new life to that which is dead.⁷⁸

Ezekiel stood in the valley of dry bones experiencing the hopelessness of Israel being in exile. When asked if the bones could ever live again, Ezekiel responded by telling God that only He knows. Ezekiel understood that if Israel were to ever live again, God would have to intervene by bringing new life to them. Although the valley was a place of hopelessness, Ezekiel knew that God alone had the power to restore to life the dry bones. During the time of Ezekiel's prophecy,

⁷⁸ Lamar Eugene Cooper, Sr. *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of the Holy Scriptures*, vol. 17, *Ezekiel* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 323.

Israel was in exile. God had judged the people for turning their backs on Him and following their own hearts. Ezekiel's prophecy was God telling the people that His desire was to be in a covenant relationship with His people.

The vision that Ezekiel was given from God envisioned more than just the rising of dead bones. God gave Ezekiel a vision where the nation of Israel was reconciled back to God as they turned from their sins. Ezekiel was given a vision where a transformation of the heart would have to take place for Israel to be restored to her former glory. As the people of God turned back to Him, they would experience a new heart, and a new spirit.⁷⁹

Ezekiel 37 has helped this writer to understand that the revitalization process by teaching him of three principles for revitalization. The first principle that this writer learned from Ezekiel 37 is that revitalization is a sovereign act that only God can complete. When Ezekiel was led to the valley of dry bones, he realized that only God could bring new life to something that was dead. Ezekiel was asked if these bones could live, and in his response, Ezekiel stated that only God knows whether the bones could be resurrected. Pastors and churches who wish to start a revitalization project must keep in mind that God is the only One who can bring new life to His people. In his book *Revitalize*, author Andrew Davis states that:

Every revitalization of a church from dying or dead is an act of the sovereign God of the universe who speaks the powerful, life-giving word to the church: "Live!" or "Be Revitalized!" And since God alone can do this, the first human action in this work must be a prayer to God to work this miracle: "Revitalize, O Lord!"⁸⁰

Davis understands what all pastors who engage in revitalization must understand, which is, God alone is the One who can bring life to the dead. Pastors and churches must echo the response of Ezekiel who called out to God "only You know!" Pastors and churches can engage

⁷⁹ Cooper, *New American Commentary*, vol. 17, *Ezekiel*, 322.

⁸⁰ Davis, *Revitalize*, 31.

in revitalization, draw a crowd, and even see the numbers in the church begin to increase. The issue that arises is that although the church may look alive, it can still be dead. This example is seen in verses seven through nine of Ezekiel 37.

In verse seven, Ezekiel speaks to the bones and immediately they come together and are covered with flesh. However, in verse eight, Ezekiel points out that while the bodies looked restored, there was still no life in them. In verse nine Ezekiel is told to prophesy to the breath. Ezekiel then tells the breath to breathe life into these bones so that they may live. The Hebrew word that is used for breath is *ruah* and can be translated as either breath, wind, or spirit. The context of the passage allows for any of the three translations to be used, and it could be that the writer had in mind Genesis 2:7 where God breathed the breath of life into man. Regardless of whether the word is translated as breath, wind, or spirit, the principal remains the same, that only God can breathe life into something that is dead.⁸¹

The second theological premise that arises from this passage is that revitalization is a process that must be guided by the Word of God. The fact that God told Ezekiel to preach to the dry bones had to seem absurd. Preach to something that is dead? What do you preach? What passage do you select? These had to be questions that were running through Ezekiel's mind as he was standing in the middle of the valley. However absurd it may have seemed; Ezekiel began to preach. Ezekiel did not have to craft a catchy sermon, or spend hours developing his introduction.

Ezekiel spoke a simple, yet profound truth; "Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." Ezekiel's obedience produced immediate results. Before Ezekiel finished speaking, the bones

⁸¹ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty: Old Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1983), 1298.

were already beginning to come together and be covered with flesh. Ezekiel was commanded to preach “breathe into these slain, that they may live.” As Ezekiel obeyed the voice of Lord, he was able to see the mystery and power of God’s word bring life into the dry bones.⁸²

Pastors and other church leaders who wish to engage in revitalization must be willing to follow the Word of God is revitalization. Ezekiel learned what every pastor must learn, that is, the Word of God is has the power to transform the lives of people who are dead in their trespasses and sins. According to 2 Cor. 5:17, the Word of God makes those who were dead into new living creatures in Christ.⁸³ Ezekiel had to trust in God’s word no matter how unusual it may have seemed. Pastors who engage in revitalization must be willing to trust in God’s word and in His directions regardless of how unusual they may seem. God may be calling a pastor to make changes or implement new strategies that have never been tried before. Revitalization pastors must remember that God is the one who directs the revitalization effort, and the pastor is responsible for leading the people to what God wants for them.

In their book *Spiritual Leadership* authors Henry and Richard Blackaby remind the reader that the responsibility of the pastor is to move people forward to God’s agenda.⁸⁴ The point that the authors make is that pastors are not only responsible as leaders for moving people, but they are responsible for moving people under the direction of God. Pastors must remember that God sets the agenda for the church and that they are responsible for leading the people

⁸² Cooper, *New American Commentary*, vol. 17, *Ezekiel*, 324.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 325.

⁸⁴ Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God’s Agenda* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 36.

towards fulfilling that agenda. Therefore, as pastors engage in revitalization, they must do so according to the Word and God and be continually seeking God's guidance.⁸⁵

Judges 16:20

The second passage that this writer has chosen to provide a theological foundation for this project is Judges 16:20 which states "And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Sampson!" So, he awoke from his sleep, and said, "I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!" But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him." This writer chose this passage because it reveals a critical issue that many churches in need of revitalization are facing. They are continuing to do ministry as they always have, not realizing that the glory of the Lord has long departed from them.

Is it possible that the modern church is experiencing the departure of the Glory of the Lord and not even realizing it? This writer believes so. Sampson was greatly blessed by the Lord and God's presence in Sampson's life was evident as Sampson exercised his authority as a Judge. However, sin crept into Sampson's life through a series of compromises, which eventually led him to break his Nazarite vow of not cutting his hair. Sampson did not know that the glory of God had departed from him and as he went out to fight the Philistines he was defeated, and eventually died because of his sins.

Too often, sin in the church is overlooked and is swept under the rug as if the sin had never occurred. The problem with sweeping sin under the rug is that eventually the rug becomes so high that the church is no longer usable. For the church to be used again, someone must come along and clean-up the mess that was created. Only then can the church be used for its intended

⁸⁵ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 37-42.

purpose of glorifying God and fulfilling the Great Commission. Churches have two options when sin is committed in the church. They can choose to cover-up the sin or confess the sin to God.⁸⁶

Churches that choose to cover-up their sins often experience turmoil and decline, but even worse, they experience the departing of the presence of God. In chapter seven of the book of Joshua Achan has committed a sin against God by taking from the wealth of Jericho that was to be given to God. Achan took the treasure to his tent and attempted to cover-up his sin. However, the people of Israel came under judgement from God and the people suffered because of Achan's sin. Only when the sin was confessed would God remove His judgment from the people. The sin of Achan serves as a reminder to the church that sin in the camp will affect the entire church's relationship with God and can lead the church to a period of decline.⁸⁷

On the other hand, churches that make the choice to repent of their sins have an opportunity to experience the forgiveness and grace of God. Churches that wish to experience revitalization must be willing to humble themselves, pray, and seek the Lord as outlined in 2 Chronicles 7:14. While this passage is a promise made to Israel, it provides the modern church with the same promise of God's blessing if they follow Him in obedience.

In Proverbs 28:13, the writer Solomon states that: "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." Churches that wish to engage in revitalization must be willing to look back on their past sins and confess them before God. They must also be willing to repent of these sins and make the commitment to wholly following the Lordship of Christ over His church.

⁸⁶ Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame*, 49.

⁸⁷ Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame*, 53.

2 Chronicles 7:14

The next passage that this writer has chosen for the theological foundations of defining revitalization is 2 Chronicles 7:14. During the dedication of Solomon's Temple, God answers Solomon's prayer with the warning of a curse or judgement if the Israelites turned their hearts from God. While this passage contains specific warnings and promises concerning the nation of Israel, there are a few key principles that can be taken away concerning revitalization for the local church. If the church desires to see the blessings of God, they must first return to Him, admitting that they have departed from Him, and have sinned against Him. Second, churches must return whole heartedly. Churches desiring revitalization must remove any obstacles that will prevent God from being first in their lives.

Finally, this passage teaches that sin must be confessed and turned away from before revitalization will take place.⁸⁸ Addressing this issue, Reeder points out that too many churches are tempted to overlook sin while attempting to seek revitalization. He continues by stating that this is an opportunity for the church to experience the grace of God as He does a new work in their midst. Reeder points out that many churches are not experiencing revitalization because God is waiting for them to repent of past sins.⁸⁹

New Testament

James 4:7-10

In James 4:7-10, the writer James provides the reader with the spiritual parameters of how to experience revival, or revitalization. This passage helps to provide a theological

⁸⁸ Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Fresh Encounter: God's Pattern for Spiritual Awakening* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2009), 228.

⁸⁹ Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame*, 47-48.

foundation for defining revitalization because it addresses the need for individual repentance in the life of a believer. Before a church can experience revitalization as a corporate body, they must first experience revitalization on an individual level. Regarding this passage, Richardson states that at one point or another all believers will fall into sins that will undermine their faith and lead to a strain in their relationship with God.⁹⁰

James understood that there were conflicts in the community to whom he was writing and if reconciliation were to take place the people needed to turn to God first. James is implying that conflict with one another in the church is symptomatic of conflict in one's relationship with God.⁹¹ Before the church can experience healing and revitalization with each other and the community, they must first experience repentance and renewal in their relationship with God.

James continues by admonishing the believer to draw close to God, and is reminded that in doing so, God will draw close to them. Churches that need revitalization have shifted their focus from God to themselves. If they are to ever experience revitalization, they must be willing to turn their hearts and their attention back to God. Churches tend to abandon biblical principles and enter a time of spiritual degradation. In the Old Testament, Israel and Judah would both experience times when they would turn their eyes from God and separate themselves from Him.

This spiritual separation led them to experience decline and apostasy. The New Testament church is no different. Many of the NT writers addressed the issues of organizational decay and abandonment of the faith in the early churches. Churches that wish to experience

⁹⁰ Kurt A. Richardson, *The New American Commentary, vol. 36, James* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1997), 183.

⁹¹ Richardson, *The New American Commentary: James*, 184.

revitalization must first be willing to repent and draw near to God. For it is in His presence that the church will come to know His will and be empowered for service to Him.⁹²

Matthew 28:18-20

The next passage of scripture that this writer has chosen as a biblical foundation for revitalization is Matthew 28:18-20. This passage is commonly referred to as the Great Commission for the church. In Jesus' final moments He issued the command for His disciples to "go and make disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them." This command was given to the early disciples and Christ meant for it to be obeyed throughout the church age. By reproducing disciples' churches can help ensure that God's kingdom will continue to grow and that the church will be healthy and growing as well. Churches that need revitalization must be willing to admit that they have failed at this most basic of tasks for the church. Churches must be willing to make the necessary changes to get back to the basics of making disciples and sharing the gospel.

In his book *Comeback Churches* author Ed Stetzer points out that churches that have experienced revitalization made the effort to make evangelism and discipleship a priority.⁹³ Clifton points out that while the Great Commission is almost always part of an established church's mission statement or core beliefs, many of these churches actually struggle to implement an effective strategy for reproducing disciples.⁹⁴ Finally, in his book *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* author Thom Rainer points out that one of the commonalities that dying churches have with one another is that they have neglected the Great Commission.⁹⁵ Rainer goes

⁹² Cheney and Rials, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Revitalization*, 44-45.

⁹³ Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 99.

⁹⁴ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 73.

⁹⁵ Thom S. Rainer *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 40.

on to state that churches in need of revitalization commonly live in the past and recall how good things were way back when. He points out that many of these churches had a past of:

- A high attendance Sunday that often marked the peak of the church.
- Dozens of new members every year.
- Vibrant ministries in the community.
- Recognition for their growth by the denomination or some similar body.⁹⁶

The problem that Rainer points out is that these churches all have a history of growth but have failed to see any new growth in years, even decades. He also states that as these churches experienced growth, they church moved from focusing on the Great Commission to focusing on keeping people comfortable. The focus then shifted from external to internal and the Great Commission was neglected. So, whether intentional or unintentional, the neglecting of the Great Commission has led many churches into a period of decline. Many of these churches wanted the growth, but only if those who came in would reflect the membership and not Christ.⁹⁷

Revelation 2 – 3

The final passage that this writer has chosen is Revelation 2-3. In these two chapters the writer John addresses seven different churches, five of which need to experience revitalization. The first church that needed revitalization was the church of Ephesus. John rebuked the church of Ephesus for turning away from their first love, which was Christ Jesus. Although the church at Ephesus still possessed a love for God, they lacked the fervency and passion for Christ that was a distinguishing characteristic of earlier believers. The church of Ephesus continued to labor for Christ, but with hearts that were cooled and with a spiritual apathy that diminished their

⁹⁶ Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 43.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

testimony of the love of Christ. The church has lost its spiritual influence due to the loss of their first love.⁹⁸

Reeder points out that for a church to experience revitalization they must be willing to repent and return to their first love. He goes on to point out that this first love is the gospel of Jesus Christ, where each person must make Christ the focal point of their salvation and recognize Him as the Lord of their life. Reeder also points out that the gospel of grace is a personal faith, and that each member of the body must have a relationship with Christ where He is the priority of their lives.⁹⁹ The main idea that this writer takes away from this passage is that revitalization begins in the heart of the individual. If a pastor desires to lead a church through revitalization, then he must understand that the issues the church is facing is only a symptom of a deeper issue, which is the fact that the hearts of the people have turned from God.

The second church that John writes to is the church of Pergamos. The church of Pergamos was compromising their faith by allowing false teachings and sexual immorality to continue in the church. The church was allowing the immoral actions of the world around them to creep into the church, which led the church to lose its influence on society. The church of Pergamos was taking Christian liberty too far and was failing to live differently from the rest of the world. The issue that arises from this passage is that the church of Pergamum was focused more on the world than they were on Christ. This led to compromise in the doctrine and practices of the church. To keep from facing persecution, pain, suffering, or failure, the people were committing spiritual adultery and were abandoning God.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary by John F. Walvoord* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989), 56.

⁹⁹ Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame*, 57.

¹⁰⁰ Cheney, *The 7 Pillars of Church Revitalization*, 22.

The church of Pergamum was warned to refocus their attention to God, and to repent from their immoral practices. Revitalization of this church could only occur when the people turned from their sins, first as individuals, and then as a corporate body of believers. Churches that are not focused on God cannot produce the fruit that God desires. These churches are ineffective in reaching the world with the message of redemption that is needed. Like the church of Ephesus, the people of Pergamum had departed from their relationship with Christ and desired a relationship with the world.

The third church that John was instructed to warn was the church of Thyatira. The Church at Thyatira was commended for their faith, service, and love, but they were also rebuked for their tolerance of sin, and unwillingness to repent. The people of Thyatira allowed a false prophetess to gain influence in the church and to lead people astray. Christ was no longer the head of the church and the church was losing its influence on the pagan culture around them. The principle that is taught in this passage is that when a church knowingly allows sin and refuses to repent, then they are at risk of being judged and of Christ's presence being removed from the church.¹⁰¹ For churches to experience revitalization, they must be willing to repent of unbiblical teachings and to deal with immorality in the church body.

The fourth church that John wrote to concerning revitalization was the church located in Sardis. Jesus tells the church that although they have the reputation of being alive, they are spiritually dead. The story of the church of Sardis is the story of many of the churches in North America that are in desperate need of revitalization.

The issues in the church of Sardis stand out from the issues within the other churches that Jesus addresses. In Sardis, there is no mention of false doctrine, no rebuke for sexual immorality,

¹⁰¹ Cheney, *The 7 Pillars of Church Revitalization*, 41-43.

and no allusion to outside persecution for their faith in Christ. The church at Sardis was still going through the motions of having church, but they no longer possessed an evangelistic zeal for the lost. Their witness to the community was minimal at best. The fact that they were known as being alive speaks to the religious activity that continued, but spiritually speaking, the hearts of the people had grown cold.¹⁰²

While the church of Sardis was spiritually dead in the eyes of God, there remained a small remnant of people who still had true life and spiritual vitality. The churches of North America are currently repeating the story of Sardis in that, while many churches are riddled with activity, they are spiritually dead. Like the church of Sardis, these churches need to repair their current situation by restoring their witness, by replacing their comfort with evangelistic zeal, and by making mature followers of Christ.¹⁰³

The final church that Jesus rebuked in this passage was the church of Laodicea. The church of Laodicea was in a wealthy city that was known for its prosperity and self-sufficiency. This prideful attitude of the city had apparently crept into the church and had caused the church to rely upon itself and not Christ. Jesus used the illustration of the hot springs located to the northwest in Hierapolis, and the cold springs located ten miles to the south in the city of Colossae. Although Laodicea was a rich and prominent city, their water supply was known for being lukewarm and mineral laden, unlike the water supplies of the cities around them. When Jesus rebukes them for being lukewarm, they would have understood that spiritually they were neither a place of healing like a hot mineral bath, nor a fresh, life-giving drink of cold water.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Cheney, *The 7 Pillars of Church Revitalization*, 66-67.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁰⁴ Paige Patterson, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, vol. 39, Revelation (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 136-140.

The church of Laodicea had become vile and disgusting like lukewarm water because they no longer depended upon God for their needs. The church had become self-sufficient and had replaced the tenants of their faith with the values of the world. This departure from the Lord had caused the church to decline and to be chastened by Christ. Many of the modern churches in North America are comparable to the Laodiceans in that they have become self-sufficient or have relied upon a program or pastor to supply their needs. If these churches desire revitalization, they must return spiritually to Christ, and become dependent upon Him. Like the Laodiceans, only when these churches have returned to Christ can they experience His presence and power in the church.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Cheney, *The 7 Pillars of Church Revitalization*, 59-62.

Chapter Three

Methodologies

Chapter three of this thesis project will present the methodologies that this researcher is using to define the term revitalization. The idea for this project began when a meeting occurred between this writer and several other pastors who were engaged in a church revitalization project. During this meeting, this researcher asked if anyone could define what they meant by revitalization. To this writer's surprise, none of the pastors in the room could provide a definition for revitalization, and some even stated that it was impossible to define what revitalization is.

For this researcher, the issue that came to mind was "if revitalization cannot be defined then how does a pastor or a church know when revitalization has been achieved?" The other issue that arises from not defining revitalization is, how do pastors communicate with their congregations about revitalization, and how to these pastor's gain support for something that they cannot define.

Chapter three of this project will also address the plan of action this researcher will implement to help other pastors define revitalization. This chapter will use the philosophical, theoretical, and theological foundations from chapter two and present a survey method that will help to define revitalization. In this chapter, this writer will inform the reader of the methodologies for selecting survey participants, the procedures for data collection, permissions for conducting research, and the survey that was used for surveying participants. Finally, this chapter will present the reader with the implementation of how this researcher will present his findings on defining revitalization as the initial step in the church revitalization process.

Research Method

To achieve the goal of defining what is meant by the term revitalization, this writer is using a combination of literary research and qualitative research. Literary research is defined as research that looks to materials that have already been printed either online, or books, and articles. The purpose of literary research is to seek answers to a question or an issue that is not being addressed in what people are saying. The goal of literary research is to fill in the blanks by seeking answers from multiple literary resources.¹⁰⁶ The literary research that this writer conducted is outlined in chapter two of this project. This researcher surveyed the most current literature at the time of this project. During the survey of literature this researcher examined the common themes that existed between each book that dealt with defining revitalization.

The second part of this writer's research method was to utilize qualitative research in defining revitalization. Sensing states that qualitative research is used to systematically answer questions by investigating the different social settings of the individuals involved who occupy these settings. Sensing also states that qualitative research uses the experience of individuals to seek answers to a specific issue.¹⁰⁷ This researcher chose these two methods to help pastors be more successful in leading a church through a revitalization plan.

This researcher is also using a phenomenological approach because it allows this researcher to build a definition of revitalization that is reflected in both practical experience and literary analysis. This approach will involve the interpretation of data that is collected as well employing a natural approach to defining this term. Qualitative research allows this researcher to

¹⁰⁶ Nancy Jean Vyhmeister, and Terry Dwain Robertson, *Quality Research Papers for Students of Religion and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 23.

¹⁰⁷ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Thesis*, (Eugene, Wipf and Stock, 2015), Kindle Edition, 57.

study church revitalization in his current setting, as well as examining the setting of other pastors engaged in a church revitalization program. Finally, this research method allows for this writer to use personal experiences, literature reviews, surveys, biblical concepts, and ministry context to define what is meant by the term revitalization.¹⁰⁸

Sensing points out that the method for data collection should be designed so that another researcher can easily reproduce the methods used.¹⁰⁹ The methods that this researcher is using to define revitalization has three approaches. The first approach of this researcher in defining what is meant by revitalization included a survey of the most current literature concerning church revitalization. This writer surveyed various authors who are considered experts in church revitalization and looked for common themes in their writings. This researcher also examined some of the biblical foundations for revitalization and the common themes that were present in the selected passages.

The second step in this researcher's method of defining revitalization is surveying eight pastors who have experience with church revitalization. The purpose of this survey is to examine if pastors who are currently engaged in revitalization have experienced the themes from the survey of literature in their current ministry. The third phase of this researcher's project is to take the information gleaned from the survey of literature, and the surveying of pastors to develop a definition for what is meant by the term revitalization. The third phase will be addressed in chapter four of this thesis project.

¹⁰⁸ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, Kindle Edition, 56-58.

¹⁰⁹ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, Kindle Edition, 66.

Permissions

This researcher completed the required CITI training and received approval from the Institutional Review Board at Liberty University prior to conducting any research. The IRB approval was obtained on August 18, 2020. A copy of the IRB approval letter, consent form, and survey instrument are included in appendices A, B, and C of this thesis project.

Survey Method

This researcher used an electronically based anonymous questionnaire to survey eight pastors. The participants were invited to participate in the survey via email. The email contained the invitation to participate in the survey, and the consent was also presented to the respondent in the invitation email. After the respondents read the invitation and agreed to the consent, a link was provided at the bottom of the email that led the participants to a website to complete an anonymous survey. To help ensure the credibility of the questionnaire, each respondent was given the same questionnaire without any changes of wording or any changes in the order of the questions. Sensing states that by keeping the questionnaire the same, researchers can help ensure that the survey results are accurate and credible.¹¹⁰

Survey Questions

This researcher chose to use fixed choice questions with scaled answers. Questions 1, 2, 3, and 10 of the survey were demographic questions that helped to reveal the qualifications and levels of experience that each respondent possessed. These four questions were designed to see if a correlation existed between the experience that the respondent possessed and whether they

¹¹⁰ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, Kindle Edition, 113.

were able to define revitalization in their current ministry. The results of these four questions will be further discussed in chapter four.

Question 1: How many years have you served as a Pastor?

The first question of the survey focused on how many years of experience that each participant possessed at the time of this survey. This writer wanted to know if a correlation existed between the amount of time that the respondents had spent in the ministry versus whether they could or could not define what is meant by revitalization in their ministry. This writer also wanted to make sure that each respondent was a full-time pastor with a minimum of one year of experience at the time they took this survey. This researcher felt that each respondent needed a minimum of one year of experience as the lead/senior pastor and not as a support staff. This is an important qualifier since the lead/senior pastor carries most of the responsibility in leading the church through a revitalization strategy.

Question 2: Have you ever been involved in a church revitalization effort?

The second question that this researcher presented to the participants addressed whether or not they had ever been involved in a church revitalization effort. This researcher felt that it was necessary for each respondent to have some level of experience in leading a church through a revitalization strategy. This requirement is designed to see if the common themes from the literature review matched what pastors in the field were experiencing in being able to define revitalization. The participants had to either be directly involved by leading a church through the revitalization process or be indirectly involved by assisting another pastor or sponsoring a church that was engaged in the revitalization process.

Question 3: How clearly did you define what was meant by revitalization to the church body?

In question three the respondents were asked how clearly, they communicated what was meant by revitalization to their church body. The purpose of this question was to see if pastors in the field were able to communicate what the term revitalization entailed. This question goes back to the issue that this researcher presented in chapter one of whether revitalization can be defined. In the survey of literature this researcher learned that communicating the details of revitalization to the church body was necessary to a successful revitalization strategy.

Questions 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 of the survey addressed the issue of whether or not pastors agreed with the results from the survey of literature. The rationale behind these six questions was to see if the common themes of the literature reviews matched how experienced pastors are defining what is meant by revitalization. These themes included revisioning of the church, repentance of corporate, repentance of individual sins, and a renewed call to discipleship and evangelism. The following questions were presented to each participant:

Question 4: Pastors can easily define what is meant by revitalization.

In question four of this survey the respondents were asked if they thought that defining what was meant by revitalization is an easy task for pastors to accomplish. This question is directly related to the events that led this researcher to address this topic. While leading a church through a revitalization effort this researcher was told by other leaders that revitalization could not be defined. This researcher's theory is that if revitalization cannot be defined, then how do pastors communicate their goals or expectations of revitalization to the church?

If pastors cannot define what they mean by revitalization, then how do they know if they have been successful in leading a church into revitalization? One of the common themes that this writer found in the survey of literature is that communication is essential to the revitalization

process. If pastors cannot communicate what revitalization means, then they are less likely to gain the support of the church thus leading them to a less than desirable result in their revitalization efforts.

Question 5: Revisioning of the church is a part of the revitalization process.

The fifth question of this survey addresses the issue of developing a new vision for the church as a part of the revitalization process. Another theme that this researcher noticed in the literature review was that of developing a fresh vision for the church. This researcher wanted to know if what the experts were writing matched what pastors were experiencing in developing and communicating a revitalization strategy. This researcher also felt that revisioning the church was a part of defining what revitalization means.

Question 6: Repentance of corporate sins is essential for church revitalization.

Question six of the survey asked participants if they felt that repentance of the corporate sins committed by the church as a whole is a part of the revitalization process. The rationale for this question arises from the survey of literature and from the biblical foundations for revitalization. In the survey of literature this writer found that the repentance of corporate sins was another common thread among some of the authors. The survey of biblical passages also revealed that times of revitalization or covenant renewal required the nation of Israel in the OT, or the church body in the NT to repent of sins that were committed by the church as a whole. If corporate repentance is required for revitalization to occur, then repentance should become a part of the definition of revitalization.

Question 7: Repentance of individual sins is essential for church revitalization.

Although this question is closely related to question six, it differentiates between sins committed by the church body and those committed by individual members. This question arose from the survey of biblical passages where individuals were held accountable for sins that affected the church body as a whole. This researcher also observed the development of repentance of individual sins as a common theme among some of the current literature concerning church revitalization.

Question 8: A renewed call to discipleship and evangelism is essential for church revitalization.

In question eight the participants were asked if they agreed that part of the revitalization process included a renewed call to discipleship and evangelism. The process of discipleship where the people of God are growing in their relationship to Him is essential to revitalization and was another common thread that existed among some of the current literature surrounding church revitalization. This writer also observed that discipleship is a trait of a healthy and growing church, therefore it should be a part of defining what is meant by revitalization.

Question 9: Communicating what is meant by revitalization will help pastors lead a successful revitalization effort.

Question nine is closely related to question three where the respondents were asked how well they communicated what was meant by revitalization to their congregations. Part of this researcher's hypothesis is that better communication of what revitalization means will lead to greater results in the revitalization of churches. This researcher also noticed that many of the authors from the survey of literature claimed that communication was essential to their success as revitalization pastors. This researcher wanted to see if what the experts were saying matched what pastors were experiencing in the field.

Question 10: How successful was the last revitalization effort you experienced?

Question ten of this survey asked the respondents to gauge how successful their last church revitalization effort was. This researcher wanted to see if those who were able to communicate what they meant by revitalization experienced a greater level of success as opposed to those who did not communicate or communicated little about what revitalization meant to the church body. Part of this researcher's hypothesis is that by being able to define revitalization as the first step on the revitalization process, pastors will be more successful in leading a church through the revitalization process.

Survey Participants

This researcher chose eight pastors to survey for this thesis project. The first criterion for being surveyed required having a minimum of one year of experience in full-time ministry as a lead/senior pastor. This researcher felt it was important for the respondents to have practical ministry experience to properly define what revitalization is. This researcher is acquainted with each of the respondents and was aware that each of them had different levels of experience in leading a church through a revitalization plan. This criterion will also help reveal if a correlation exists between the various authors that were examined and what pastors were experiencing in their current ministries.

The second criterion for being surveyed was to have experience in either leading a church through the revitalization process or assisting the lead/senior pastor in a revitalization effort. To help ensure that each participant was providing answers that reflected their opinions, this researcher kept the survey anonymous. The survey results were collected through a third-party website that ensured anonymity for each respondent. The website provided this researcher with the individual survey results with no identifying information attached to the results. An invitation

email with the consent form and survey link was sent to these eight pastors on August 25th, 2020.

Each of the eight participants completed their surveys by September 2, 2020.

Chapter Four

Results

Chapter four of this project will provide the results from the survey of literature in chapter two. This chapter will also outline the results from the survey of pastors from chapter three. As previously stated, there are some pastors who believe that revitalization is a term that cannot be defined. Although revitalization may look different from one church to another, this researcher believes that there are common themes which can be used to define what pastors mean when they speak of revitalization.

The survey of literature in chapter two revealed four common themes between the various written sources that this researcher studied. The four common themes that this writer discovered are Revisioning the church, Repentance of corporate sins, Repentance of individual sins, and a Renewed call to discipleship and evangelism. The pastoral surveys that this researcher conducted also supports these four areas as essential parts for defining what is meant by the term revitalization.

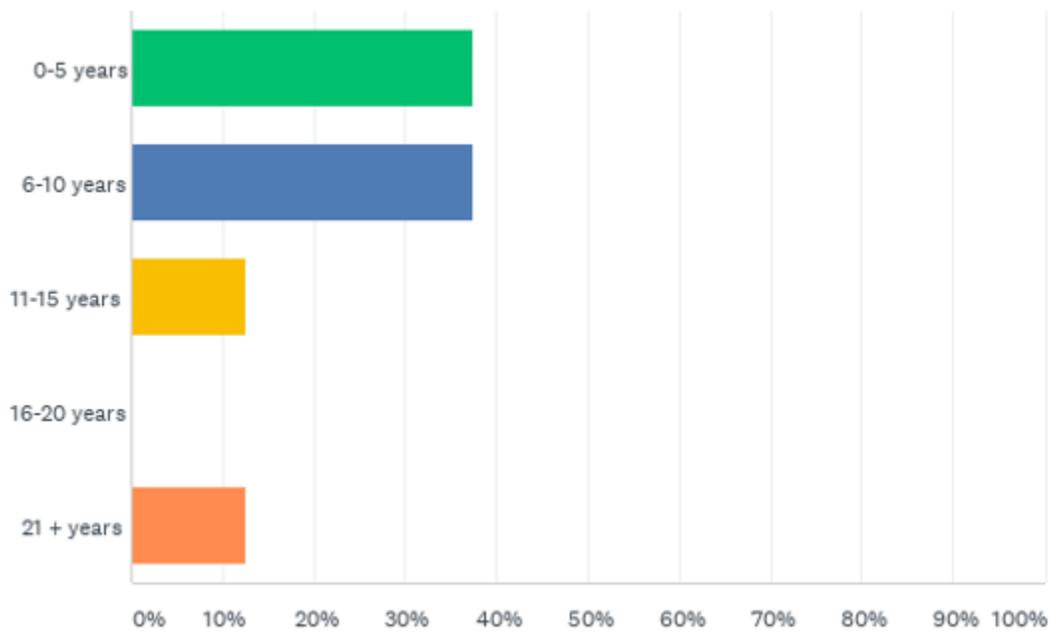
In chapter four this researcher will take the results from the survey of literature and the pastoral surveys to build a working definition of what is meant by the term revitalization. This chapter will also use the biblical and philosophical foundations that were presented in chapter two as foundational support for defining revitalization with these four terms.

Selection of Survey Participants

This researcher wanted to see if a correlation exists between what the experts in the survey of literature are saying and what pastors who have led or are leading a church through a revitalization program were experiencing. To achieve this goal this researcher designed a survey with ten questions and presented it to eight participants. This survey was sent via an email

invitation that included a link to the survey sight and the responses were gathered anonymously. The participants were picked based on meeting two criterion that helped ensure the credibility of the survey. The first criterion that the participants had to meet was having experience as a full-time pastor of a church. The first question of the survey asked each participant to select from a set range of years that they had served as the lead pastor. The following graph details the response of all eight survey participants:

Table 1: How Many Years Have You Served as A Pastor?

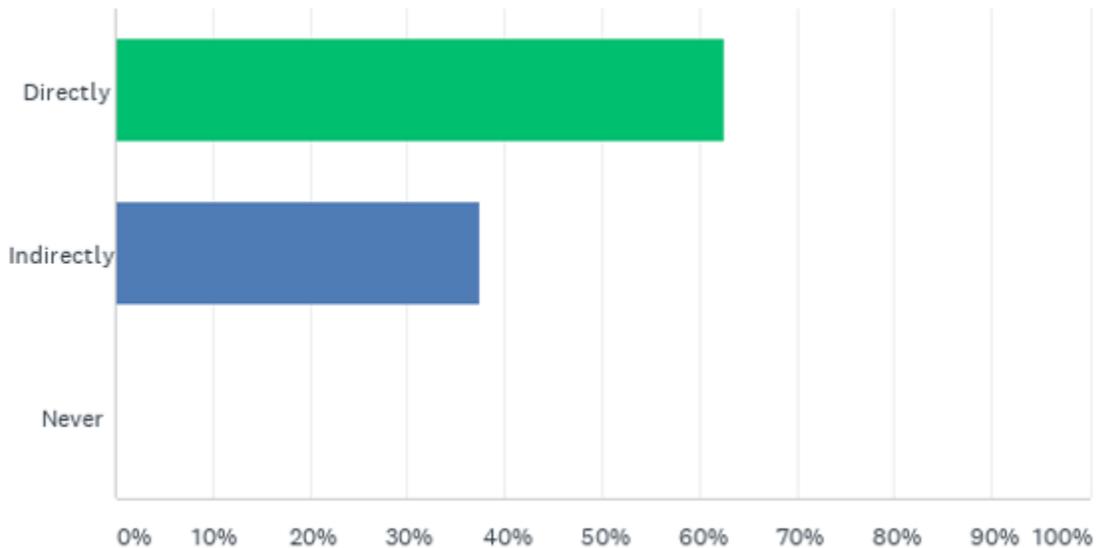


In response to the first survey question 37.5 percent of the participants possessed between 0-5 years of experience as the senior pastor of a church. Out of the eight pastor’s 37.5 percent of the participants responded that they had between 6-10 years of experience as a senior pastor, 12.5 percent stated that they had between 16-20 years of senior pastoral experience, and 12.5 percent stated that they had 21 plus years of experience as a senior pastor. This researcher felt that having full-time pastors with a broad range of experience would help establish credibility to the survey. This researcher also felt that full-time pastors with experience would help establish if

the common themes from the survey of literature matched their experience in pastoring a church in need of revitalization.

The second criterion that the participants had to meet was to have experience in leading a church through a revitalization program. This researcher wanted the participants to have this experience to see if a correlation exists between the common themes from the survey of literature and the experience of pastors who have led a church through a revitalization effort. The following graph reveals how the participants responded to the second survey question:

Table 2: Have you ever been involved in a church revitalization effort?

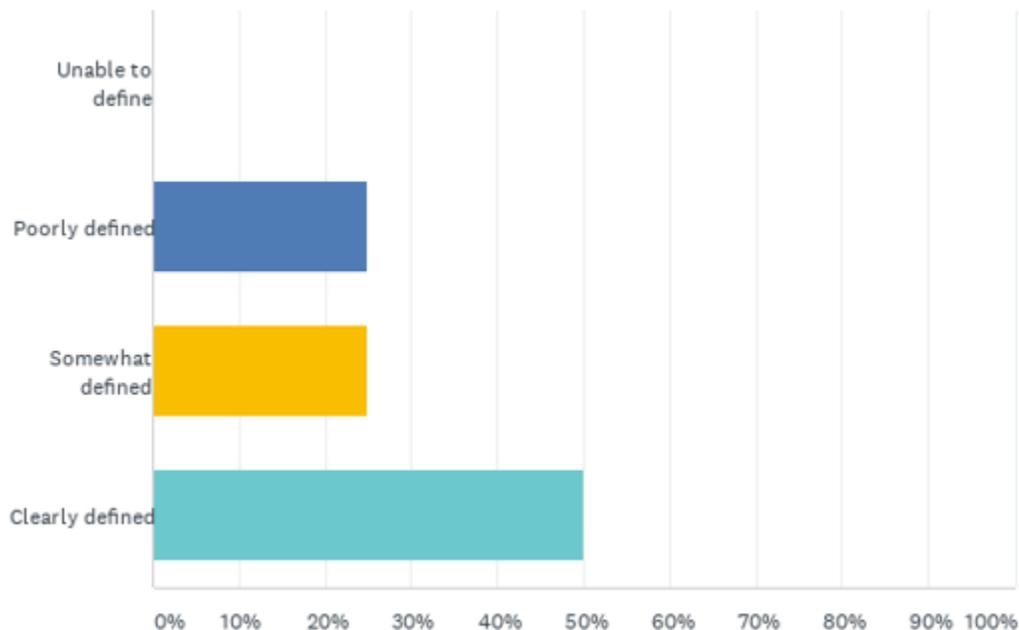


This question revealed that 62.5 percent of the survey participants had been directly involved in a church revitalization effort. It also revealed that 37.5 percent of the participants had been indirectly involved in a church revitalization effort. The pastors who were directly involved had led a church through a revitalization effort as the senior pastor of a church. The participants who had been indirectly involved were part of the pastoral leadership team that had helped lead a church through revitalization. This researcher felt that this qualification would help establish a

link between the common themes from the survey of literature and what pastors with experience in revitalization were experiencing.

The third question of this survey asked the participants how clearly, they were able to define what they meant by revitalization to their congregations. The idea for this project came about when this pastor was told that revitalization was a term that could not be defined. The issue that this pastor had with that statement was “that if leaders could not define what revitalization was, then how could they lead the church towards revitalization?” This researcher wanted to see if not being able to define revitalization was the general consensus among pastors, or if other pastors were able to communicate what they meant by revitalization to their churches. The following graph details the participants response to the third criterion:

Table 3: How clearly did you define what was meant by revitalization to the church body?



The survey question revealed that 25 percent of the participants had poorly defined what they meant by the term revitalization to their congregation. From this group of pastors, 25 percent stated that they were able to somewhat define what was meant by revitalization to their

church. The remaining 50 percent of stated that they were able to clearly define what the term revitalization meant to their church. Although two of the survey pastors were only able to poorly define the term revitalization, all the pastors were able to define this term to some extent. This researcher felt that it was important to glean from the survey participants experience is attempting to define what they mean by the term revitalization. By gleaning from the experience of other pastors, this researcher can draw a comparison between the survey of literature and the field experience of church leaders.

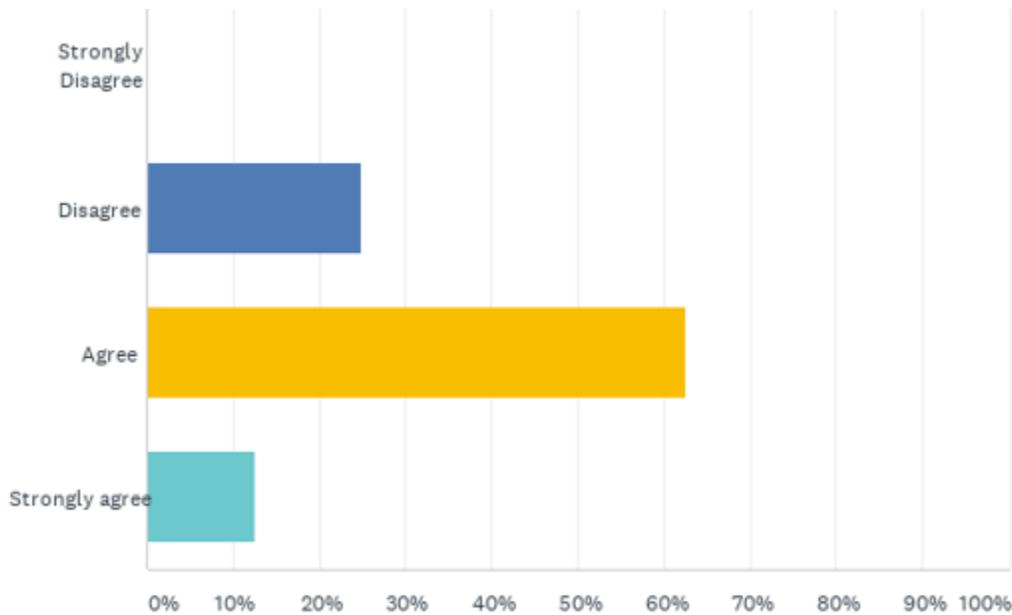
Question four of this survey was designed to see if the survey participants believed that the word revitalization could be easily defined. This researcher believes that a universal definition can be created that allows pastors to communicate what they mean when they use the term revitalization to their congregations. This researcher also wanted to see if a correlation exists between being able to define revitalization and leading successful revitalization effort. If pastors cannot define what they mean when they speak of revitalization, then church members will be less likely to support them in revitalizing the church.

In response to this question 12.5 percent of the participants strongly agreed that the term revitalization can be easily defined. Out of this group of eight pastor's 62.5 percent agreed with the statement that "revitalization can be easily defined." To this researcher's surprise 25 percent of the participants stated that they disagreed with the statement that "revitalization can be easily defined." As noted in question three, 25 percent of the participants stated that they could only poorly define what they meant by revitalization to their congregation.

Now, in question four another 25 percent of pastors stated that they do not believe that the term revitalization cannot be defined. This raises the issue of how effective a revitalization program can be if the leadership cannot define what they mean by the word revitalization.

Question ten of this survey will address whether a correlation exists between being able to define the term revitalization and leading a successful revitalization program in a local church. The following graph reveals whether the survey participants agreed that revitalization could be easily defined:

Table 4: Pastors can easily define what is meant by revitalization.



First Common Theme: Re-visioning the Church

The first common theme that this researcher noted in the survey of literature was that churches in need of revitalization needed a fresh vision. A church’s vision is essential in revitalization because it provides direction for the church. Malphurs states that a church’s vision is not static but rather it is dynamic.¹¹¹ A church needs to continually evaluate its vision to ensure that it is culturally relevant. While the mission and message of the church does not change, the

¹¹¹ Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 128.

vision of how to fulfill the mission must be adapted, adjusted, and renewed to match the surrounding culture.¹¹²

Churches will often create a vision that is compelling, but over time they will fail to evaluate its effectiveness and relevance to the culture surrounding the church. According to Malphurs a vision helps the church answer the question of what the church “could be”?¹¹³ Re-visioning the church allows people to express what they see the church looking like down the road. It helps the people to discover who they are and where they want to see the church go in the future. A vision also provides a road map to a desired destination.

According to Malphurs only about two percent of pastors can articulate the vision for the church they are leading. He also states that too often pastors are faced with conflicting visions within the church which has led to pastors being forced to resign.¹¹⁴ Malphurs continues by pointing out seven reasons why a vision is vital to church revitalization. The first reason that Malphurs provides is that a vision provides energy for the church. A fresh vision for the church provides the pastor the opportunity to stop putting out fires in the church and to start a few new fires that motivate the congregation. A compelling vision has the potential to change the church’s ministry from maintenance to missional. Instead of working to simply maintain what is left of the church a vision allows the church to become missional and bring in new life to the church body.¹¹⁵

The second reason that a re-visioning is essential to revitalization is that re-visioning creates a new cause in the church. Churches that need revitalization are filled with people who

¹¹² Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 128.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

feel like they have no purpose within the church body. The members are simply bench warmers who feel that they have no place in God's mission of reaching the lost. A new vision will help congregants feel a sense of belonging and that they are an essential part of the church's mission in reaching the lost and dying. Malphurs points out that a new vision can be the cause that leads church members to a deeper sense of commitment and dedication in serving in the church. A new vision allows church people to experience meaning and a sense of divine purpose in their lives.¹¹⁶

The third reason that re-visioning is essential to defining revitalization is that it helps to encourage risk taking. When a new vision has been cast the church becomes aware of what must happen for the vision to be achieved. Malphurs states that a vision leads people to attempt new things in the church and if failure occurs, it motivates them to attempt something else. Malphurs points out that although people know that failure may occur, a new vision allows them the freedom try something new and to experience God in a new and exciting way. Church revitalization is mostly experimental as leaders attempt to revive the church through new ideas and untested ministries.¹¹⁷

The fourth reason that Malphurs provides for re-visioning a dying church is that a new vision will legitimize the leadership of the church. Pastors who led a church through revitalization knew where they wanted the church to go. They know what the church could be, and they can clearly see the path that they must take to get there. By laying out a fresh vision for the church, leaders help ensure the people that they have a sense of direction and confidence in

¹¹⁶ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 130.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 130.

their call to lead that church. This vision also allows the leaders and the church to focus on God and where He is taking them.¹¹⁸

The fifth benefit of a vision is that it helps to energize the leadership. A church that is plateaued or declining can be mundane and boring. The church will simply go through the same routines each week as it slowly dies out. Re-visioning the church excites the leadership, and it ignites a passion for those in the church body. Revisioning the church ignites passion and creates action among the leadership. Leaders who have a vision for the church move vigorously as they follow Christ in reviving the church. When a pastor leads with this type of passion, it leads the church to follow with enthusiasm and passion.¹¹⁹

The sixth purpose for revisioning the church is that it helps to sustain ministry. Leading a church that needs revitalizing can be stressful and can often be discouraging and filled with disappointment. Casting a new vision for a dying church will help leaders to see past the tedious and often painful stresses of ministry. Revisioning the church also helps the leadership and the church body to remain focused on what is in front of them instead of the failures that often distract them. God can use a fresh vision for the church to sustain leaders by reminding them of what they are attempting for Him.¹²⁰

The final reason that pastors need to revision the church as part of a revitalization strategy is that re-visioning motivates people to give financially. Church members do not get excited about paying utility bills or staff members' salaries, but they will get excited about a new vision that is designed to bring new life to the church. Ministry takes money, and pastors who understand this paint a captivating vision for the church which leads to greater giving. Church

¹¹⁸ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 130.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 130.

members want to know that their financial gifts are making a difference not just in the church, but in fulfilling God's mission of reaching the lost.¹²¹

In his book *Church Unique* author Will Mancini states that every church is unique in the eyes of God. Mancini points out that the church body is made up of numerous individuals who are uniquely created by God and as a result each church has different personalities, strengths, and weaknesses. Mancini also states that churches must first understand how they are unique from other churches when they develop a vision for revitalization.¹²² Revisioning of the church is an opportunity for the leadership to cast a vision that reflects the church's values, thoughts, attitudes, and actions. Casting a new vision for the church also allows the church to become relevant as it begins to reflect the community and culture surrounding the church. This process according to Mancini is an opportunity for churches that are plateaued or declining to embrace their uniqueness and to develop a vision that matches their current church culture.¹²³

A church that wishes to experience revitalization must address the issue of where and what the church is focused on. Cole states that:

Over the process of time, churches are tempted to spend the majority of their energy and money to care for the escalating demands of the current members. The focus of the church grows increasingly self-interested with the demands to include connections within the church, discipleship, and service ministries, while a lessened focus on evangelism or community remains.¹²⁴

Cole makes the point that churches that are experiencing plateau or decline have lost their focus on the mission that God has given to them. These churches have become inward focused

¹²¹ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 132.

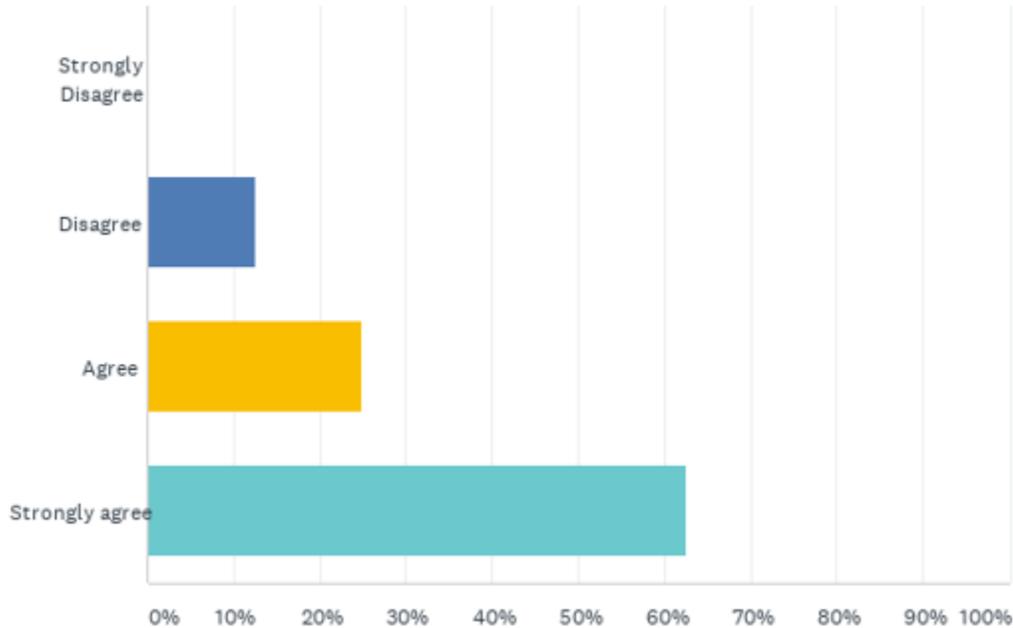
¹²² Will Mancini, *Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 6.

¹²³ Mancini, *Church Unique*, 7.

¹²⁴ Dr. David Cole, *Re-Focus: Creating and Outward-Focused Church Culture* (Duvall: Outward-Focused Network, 2018), 27.

and lost the vision of reaching the lost with gospel message. Cole helps the reader to understand that being inward focused is a fog that blinds the church to its original mission of fulfilling the Great Commission. For Cole, creating a fresh, clear vision for the church is the starting point of revitalization in the church.¹²⁵

Table 5: Re-visioning of the church is a part of the revitalization process.



The survey of pastors that was conducted supports re-visioning of the church as an essential part of the revitalization process. This researcher surveyed eight pastors who had previous experience in the area of church revitalization. Each participant was asked if they felt that re-visioning the church was a part of the revitalization process. This survey question was designed to see if pastors who had successfully led a church through a revitalization effort created a fresh vision for the church. In the survey of literature many of the writers agreed that a church needs a fresh vision in order to successfully experience revitalization.

¹²⁵ Cole, *Refocus*, 33.

This writer wanted to see if a correlation existed between what the experts were stating matched what pastors were experiencing in church revitalization. According to the survey 62.5 percent of pastors strongly agreed that revisioning the church was a part of the revitalization process. In response to this question 25 percent of the survey participants agreed that re-visioning the church was essential to defining revitalization. The survey revealed that 12.5 percent disagreed that revisioning the church was a part of the revitalization process. The following chart provides a breakdown of the participants responses:

Re-visioning the church is an essential part of defining what pastors mean when they use the term revitalization. Pastors who desire to see the church become healthy and growing must present the church with a compelling vision that motivates people out of the pews and into the community. Pastors are the spiritual leaders of the church and they bear the responsibility of leading people onto God's agenda.¹²⁶ Churches begin out of the visions, dreams, or desires of a group of people who want to come together and worship the Lord. These churches begin with a desire to reach a particular group of people which leads to the birthing of a church body.

Other churches began as the result of a split from another church, or through theological biases. In either case churches begin to lose focus on their original vision and become inwardly focused. Churches may start out strong and experience tremendous growth but inevitably they will experience decline or plateau as time moves on. The stages of plateau may come as the result of poor leadership choices, and failure to be strategic in bringing new people into the church.

¹²⁶ Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* 33.

The OT and NT both provide examples of God providing leaders a vision for leading the people of God into fulfilling God's agenda. In Deuteronomy 8:7-10 Moses shares God's vision with the people of Israel:

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper. When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you.

This passage is reflective of Moses being the leader of the people and sharing with them a vision of what God has in store for them as a nation. Moses' role as a leader was to move the people from wondering in the wilderness to the fulfillment of a God's promise to them. Israel wondered for forty years in the wilderness with no direction. Churches that are in of revitalization are similar to Israel in the wilderness in that they have no direction, and no vision of a future. These churches are simply going through the motions of surviving and living in the past.

In the NT, the Apostle Paul provides an example of a time in his ministry of where he wanted to travel and minister for God was vastly different than where God wanted Paul to travel and minister. In Acts 16:6-10 the Apostle Paul recounts the vision that was given to him:

Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. So, passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him saying "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

The above passage is a reminder that it is possible for the vision of the church to not be in align with God's vision. The Apostle Paul recounts how he desired to travel to various regions and was interrupted by the Holy Spirit. Paul was given a vision that led him to travel to

Macedonia and join God in what He was doing. Paul could have chosen to reject God's vision and continued to minister in the regions that he desired to travel to. Churches that need revitalization must make the same decision as Paul. This means that the church must seek God's vision for them, and they must be willing to join God even if it means abandoning things that they have done for years. Concerning the tendency of churches to continue doing what they have always done, Blackaby states the following:

Christian organizations should note that in the Scriptures and throughout history that God rarely worked the same way twice. God's activity was always unique to the people with whom He was dealing and the time in which he was working. God's activity cannot be reduced to a formula because God is more concerned about relating to His people than He is with a specific task or program. Churches erroneously assume that because God worked mightily in a particular way in the past, He will work in exactly the same way today. Many organizations are locked into routines not because they are effective but because they were effective yesterday.¹²⁷

Churches that have experienced plateau and decline must evaluate whether they are carrying out God's vision or continuing in their traditions. Pastors who desire to lead a church through the revitalization process will ultimately be faced with the decision to follow the path that God is leading the church down, or to continue on the path that has led the church into decline. The survey of pastors revealed that 87.5 percent of pastors who had successfully led a church through a revitalization effort agreed that casting a new vision for the church was essential to the revitalization process. For this reason, revitalization can be partially defined as a process that involves the re-visioning of the church.

Second Common Theme: Repentance of Corporate Sins

The second common theme that arose from the survey of literature and the survey of pastors is the repentance of corporate sins of the church body as an essential part of leading a

¹²⁷ Blackaby, spiritual leadership. Page 89

church through a revitalization effort. Ed Stetzer points out that 14 percent of revitalization pastors felt that dealing with sinful attitudes in the church was essential to bringing the church back to being healthy. Churches that have entered a stage of plateau or decline as the result of splits or chaotic relationships with pastors, need to repent and experience reconciliation before growth can occur. When churches refuse to repent of their corporate sins, they will face God's judgment for their unfaithfulness and disobedience to Him. When a spirit of judgment permeates the church body newcomers will sense the tension and be less likely to return.¹²⁸

In Daniel 9:7, the prophet Daniel states: "O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us shame of face, as it is this day – to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those near and those far off in all the countries which You have driven them, because of the unfaithfulness which they have committed against you." Daniel understood that the nation of Israel was facing God's judgment for refusing to follow His will, and to live by the standards that He had set for them. The concept of corporate repentance can be seen in the NT as well. In the book of Revelation five of the seven churches were found guilty of committing various sins as a corporate body of believers. The corporate body at Ephesus had forsaken their first love with God and were carrying out their responsibilities as Christians with apathy towards God and the lost.

The church of Pergamum was tolerating false teachers in the church as well as allowing non-Christian practices and sexual immorality to permeate the church body. The church of Thyatira allowed members to commit sexual with a false teacher. Jesus rebuked the church of Sardis for acting like they were alive, when in reality the church of Sardis was only playing

¹²⁸ Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007), 73.

church and was dead in the eyes of God. The church of Laodicea was smug, self-righteous, and found their security in the material things of the world.¹²⁹ Jesus warned each of these churches to repent of their sins and to turn back to Him. Jesus also warned these churches that if they did not turn from their sins, then they would face His judgment. Too many of today's churches reflect the issues that Jesus warned the early church about. These sins will hinder the work and the growth of the church and will ultimately lead to God's judgment.

Churches love to celebrate their past, but not everything in their past is worthy of celebrating.¹³⁰ Many established churches have a history of arguments, splits, power struggles, unbiblical practices, and other sins that lead the church to being spiritually unhealthy. Churches that choose to deal with these sins instead of covering them up understand that doing so leads to greater church health and spiritual maturity. However, churches that choose to cover up their sins inevitably become spiritually unhealthy, and the church begins to plateau and eventually decline.

Pastors who choose to confront sinful attitudes and patterns of disobedience understand the connection between sin and decline in the church. As pastors begin to look into the history of the church corporate sins such as apathy towards evangelism, failure to minister to the community, wrongful termination of pastors or staff members may begin to emerge. Addressing these corporate sins may seem like a daunting task, but it serves as an opportunity for the church to experience God's grace and forgiveness.

In this writer's own experience in leading a church through a revitalization campaign the need for repentance of corporate sins is essential. This history of WBC was riddled with power struggles between families, wrongful termination of pastors, and sexual scandals that caused the

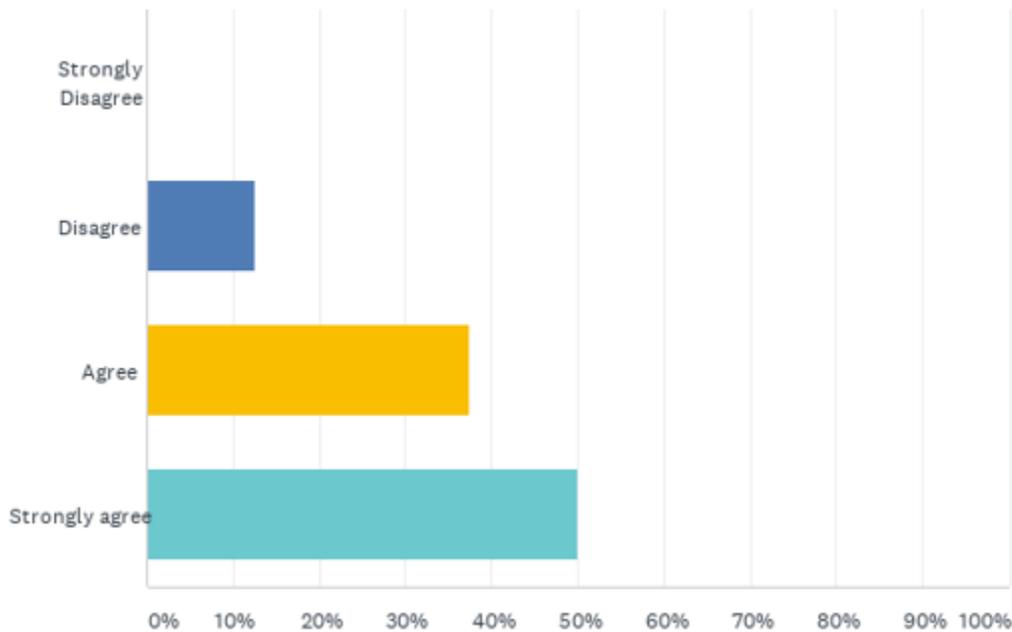
¹²⁹ Anderson, church makeover, 175-176

¹³⁰ Harry Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2008), 47.

church to split on several occasions. The four previous pastors of WBC left under unfavorable circumstances when they attempted to deal with the sins of the church. It is inevitable that churches who cover up their sins will stumble and fall over them continually until they have repented and sought forgiveness. As the writer of II Chronicles points out, in order for God’s people to experience revitalization, then they must respond to God in humility, and through prayer confess their sins and turn away from the wickedness that has entered the church body.

In the survey that was presented to eight participants, this writer made the statement that “repentance of corporate sins is essential for church revitalization.” Each participant had to decide if they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with this statement. Only one participant stated that they disagreed with the above statement. However, the other seven participants either agreed, or strongly agreed that the repentance of corporate sins was essential to defining revitalization.

Table 6: Repentance of corporate sins is essential for church revitalization.



The participants response to this question revealed that 87.5 percent of pastors with experience in the area of revitalization believe that the repentance of corporate sins is essential to revitalizing a church. Sins in the church are like garbage that poisons the body with suspicion, divisiveness, conflict, and rumors. Pastors who lead a church through the revitalization process must examine the sins of the church and respond to Christ's invitation to repent and experience His blessings upon the church.¹³¹ In this researcher's own experience, leading a church through the process of confessing and repenting of corporate sins is a difficult challenge. However, if a church desires to see spiritual growth and revitalization, then repentance of these corporates sins is essential.

Third Common Theme: Repentance of Individual Sins

The third common theme that this researcher noticed in the survey of literature was the need for the repentance of individual sins as a part defining revitalization. Chapter seven of the book of Joshua provides a great example of how the sins of one person can affect the entire body. The children of Israel suffered defeat at Ai because of the sins of one person. In their previous battle the people had been warned not to take any of the accursed things from the city of Jericho. Achan, an Israelite had taken some of the accursed things and hid them in his tent. During Israel's next battle, God judged the nation and allowed Israel to be defeated. The sins of one individual cost the lives of numerous soldiers. God held the sins of Achan against the entire nation of Israel and pronounced judgment on them.

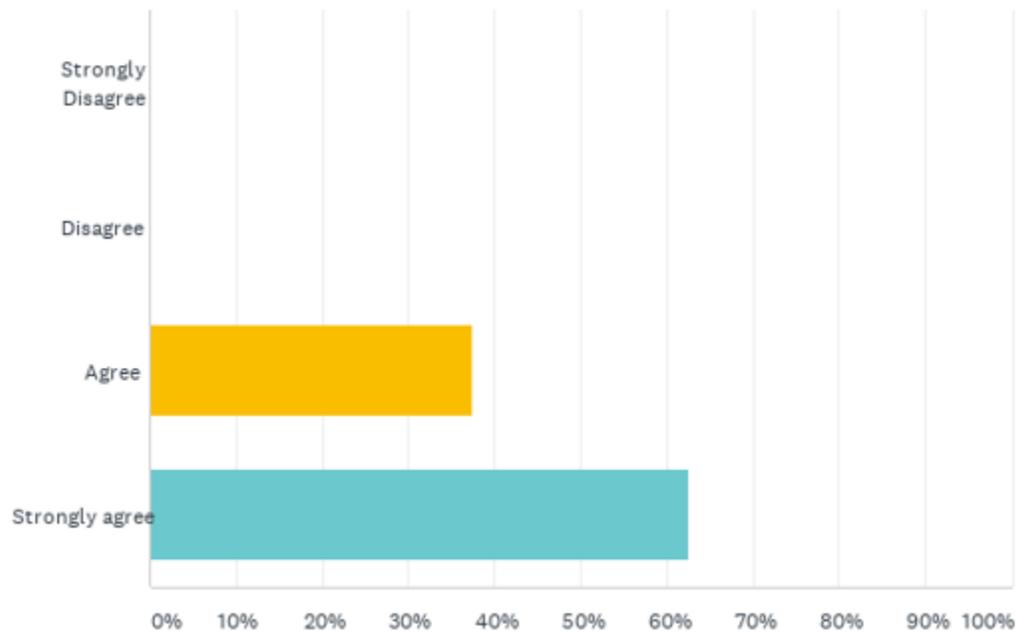
In 1st Corinthians chapter five the Apostle Paul warns the Corinthian believers against allowing sexual immorality to enter the church. He warns them that by allowing people to

¹³¹ Anderson, church makeover, 177-186

engage in sexual immorality that it will affect then entire church body. He even states in verse six “that a little leaven leavens the whole lump.” Paul urges the Corinthian believers to turn those engage in such behavior over to the devil so that the whole body will not suffer. In Matthew 18:15-20 Jesus provides the disciples with instructions on how to deal with a sinning brother or sister in the church. The point of dealing with these individuals is for repentance, forgiveness, and restoration to take place. By doing so, the church will continue to be healthy, and they will no longer be subject to God’s judgment for allowing sin in the church body.¹³²

The need for individual repentance is different from the repentance of corporate sins committed by the church. Corporate sins are the sins that the church body has committed out in the open and as a collective body. Individual sins are the sins that people commit behind closed doors with few if any people knowing they are being committed.

Table 7: Repentance of individual sins is essential for church revitalization.



¹³² Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying & Divided Churches* (Gaines House, Fern, Ross-Shire: Christian Focus Publications Ltd.), 78.

In response to this question 37.5 percent of those surveyed stated that they agreed that the repentance of individual sins was essential to the revitalization process. The other 62.5 percent of participants strongly agreed with the statement. None of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the question. The overall response to this question helps to solidify that at least part of defining what is meant by revitalization is the need for individuals in the church to repent of their sins so that the entire church does not suffer.

Pastors who have successfully led a church through the revitalization process understand that churches must abide by God's standard of holiness at both the corporate level and the individual level. Church members must be willing to ask God to search them and to reveal any sin that is within them so that they may be able to walk in the light of Jesus and to lead others to that light. A church that chooses to repent and walk in holiness is a church of irresistible influence and is a church that is alive, healthy, and thriving as God intended.¹³³

Fourth Common Theme: A Renewed Call to Discipleship and Evangelism

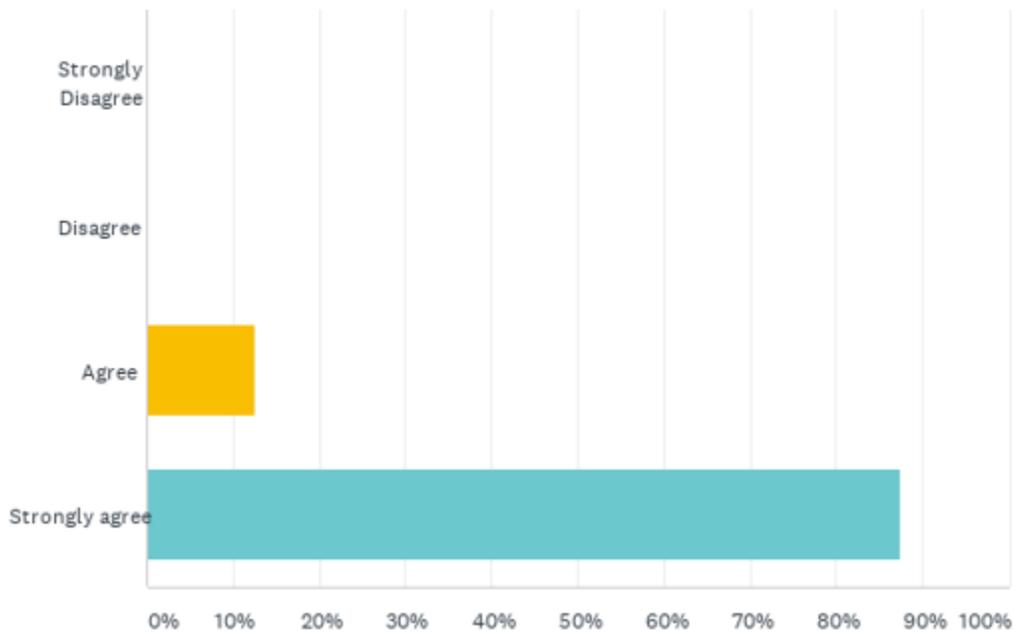
The fourth common theme that this researcher noted from the survey of literature was a renewed call to discipleship and evangelism. The last command that Jesus gave His disciples was to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." These were some of the last words that Jesus spoke and as such they reveal the priority and passion of Jesus. This command to go and make disciples was repeated on three separate occasions and they are the only commands of Christ that are recorded in all four Gospels.¹³⁴

¹³³ Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 67-69.

¹³⁴ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, Broadman and Holman, 2013), 2.

Many of the authors stated that churches in need of revitalization often had inadequate discipleship models and little if any evangelism occurred. In his book *Comeback Churches* author Ed Stetzer points out that churches who experienced revitalization not only thought about evangelism, but they lived it out.¹³⁵ Stetzer also points out that churches who developed a strategic plan for discipleship and evangelism were able to overcome their status of being plateaued or declining. Question eight of this researchers' survey addressed whether pastors felt that a renewed focus on discipleship and evangelism was essential in the revitalization process. The following graph outlines the participants responses:

Table 8: A renewed call to discipleship and evangelism is essential for church revitalization.



¹³⁵ Ed Stetzer, *Comeback Churches*, 99.

In response to whether a renewed call to discipleship and evangelism is essential for church revitalization, 12.5 percent of the participants agreed with the statement. However, 87.5 strongly agreed that discipleship and evangelism are necessary for a church to experience revitalization. None of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the question. Pastors who wish to define revitalization for their church should include the concept of renewing the church's process of making disciples and sharing the gospel. This means that pastors and other church leaders will have to evaluate their process of disciple-making and determine where changes need to be made.

If churches wish to experience revitalization, then they must have programs in place that help move people from being immature followers of Christ to mature believers who are actively engaged in the mission of the church. During this evaluation, churches that are experiencing plateau or decline will see that they have little if any of their focus on reaching out and sharing the gospel with the community.¹³⁶ Biblical discipleship is learning from Jesus and following Jesus at all costs. Churches that are plateaued or declining want to reap the harvest of discipleship while being lazy and expecting others to do the work.¹³⁷

Davis takes the concept of discipleship further by stating that embracing discipleship means that the church must focus on two areas. The church must focus on making mature followers of Christ who not only experience justification, but proceed to sanctification, and ultimately to glorification. This aspect of discipleship focuses on the inner person and helps them to be imitators of Christ. The area that churches must focus on is helping people to develop their

¹³⁶ Gary L. McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church: First Steps to Restoring Health and Growth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 120-124.

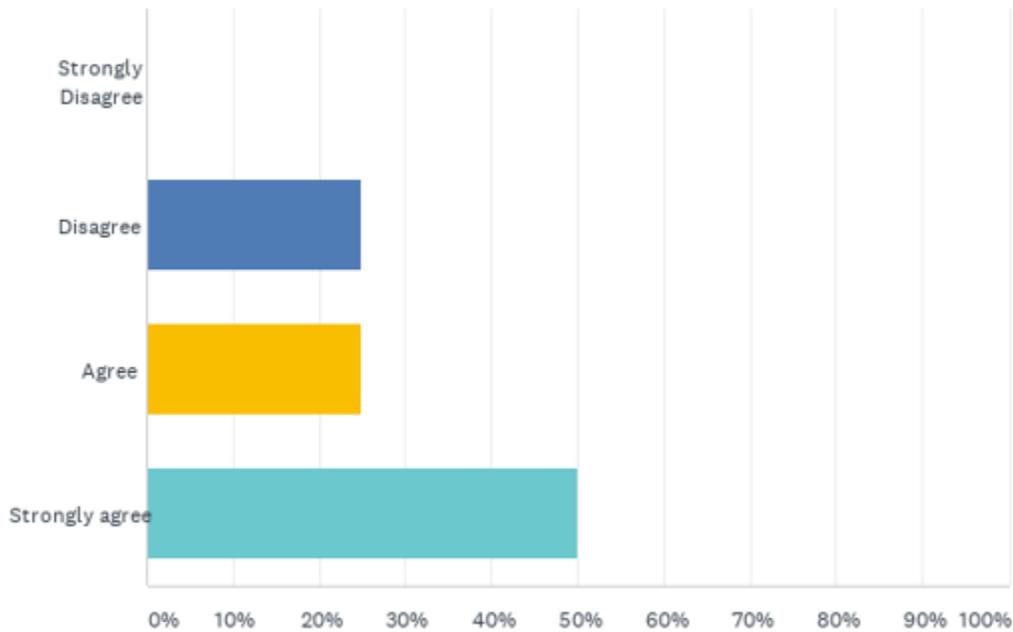
¹³⁷ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 24-25.

outward walk with Christ by actively engaging in sharing the gospel with lost people. This allows people to grow to become missional believers who put into practice the things that they are learning. If a church desires true revitalization, then they must have a balance between internal journey of discipleship and the external journey of evangelism.¹³⁸

Communicating What is Meant by Revitalization

In the survey of literature many of the authors stated that communication between the pastor and the congregation was essential for revitalization. In this own pastor’s experience communicating what he meant by the term revitalization was essential to leading the church through the revitalization process. One of the top ten mistakes that pastors make is failing to properly communicate the decisions they are making and why they are making them. Whenever people are left in the dark they tend to conjure up rumors and that can lead to disaster.

Table 9: Communicating what is meant by revitalization will help pastors lead a successful revitalization effort.



¹³⁸ Davis, *Revitalize*, 200-202.

Church members are going to talk and it is the responsibility of the leader to ensure that what they are saying to each other is accurate. Rumors will lead to mistrust and will destroy the revitalization efforts of the leadership.¹³⁹ This researcher asked the survey participants if they agreed that communicating what was meant by revitalization would help lead to a successful revitalization program.

Of the eight pastors that were surveyed, 25 percent agreed that communicating what the word revitalization means will help pastors lead a successful revitalization campaign while 50 percent strongly agreed with the same statement. Only 25 percent disagreed that communicating what is meant by revitalization would help them in leading a successful revitalization campaign. The participants that either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement understand the importance of communicating with the church body. Pastors should never assume that the people know what is going on in the church. When pastors leave people in the dark, miscommunication will occur, and frustration will kill the revitalization program.¹⁴⁰

Defining Revitalization and Leading a Successful Revitalization Program

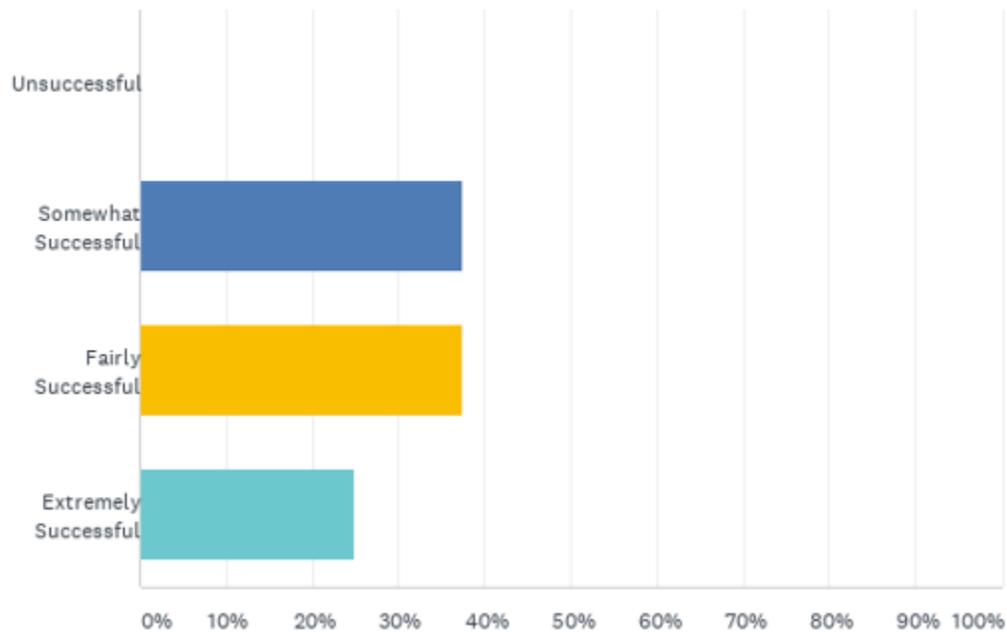
The final question of this survey is designed to see if a correlation exists between being able to define what is meant by the term revitalization and leading a church through a successful revitalization program. This researcher believes that being able to define what pastors mean by revitalization will help them be more successful as a revitalization leader, and it will help the church body understand what all the term revitalization encompasses. In question ten the survey participants were asked how successful was the last revitalization program that they led a church through.

¹³⁹ Hanz Finzel, *The Top Ten Mistakes that Leaders Make* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2007), 150.

¹⁴⁰ Finzel, *The Top Ten Mistakes that Leaders Make*, 149.

In response to question ten 25 percent of the participants stated that the last revitalization effort they were involved in was extremely successful. Out of the eight pastors surveyed 37.5 percent stated that they were fairly successful in their last revitalization effort, while another 37.5 percent stated that they were somewhat successful. In questions three and four of this survey 25 percent of the participants stated that they poorly communicated what they meant by revitalization and another 25 percent stated did not believe that revitalization could be easily defined. It is interesting to note that out of the eight pastors surveyed that 37.5 percent of the participants stated that they had only experienced a “somewhat successful” revitalization effort. The following graph displays the survey participants response to question ten:

Table 10: How successful was the last revitalization effort you experienced?



On the other hand, 75 percent of the survey participants agreed to some extent that revitalization could be easily defined, and that they had communicated a clear definition of revitalization to their church during a revitalization program. Question ten revealed that 67.5 percent of the participants had experienced either a fairly successful, or extremely successful

church revitalization effort. The results of the survey support this researcher's theory that the term revitalization can be defined, and that in doing so, pastors will be more successful in leading their church through a revitalization program.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Revitalizing a church that is either plateaued or declining is a daunting task for any pastor. As daunting as revitalization is, pastors can help ensure the success of the revitalization program by communicating to their congregation what the term revitalization means. The first time that this pastor attempted a revitalization program, the first thought that entered his mind was “where do I even begin with revitalizing a church?” This writer turned to popular authors who gave sound advice on how to revitalize a church. Armed with lots of information this pastor went to the deacons of the church and “pitched” the idea of revitalization to them. The deacons were excited and wanted this pastor to present the revitalization program to the church.

As this pastor stood before the congregation during a Wednesday night business meeting in which he was presenting the church with a revitalization program, the church listened in anticipation. The church members were excited to see the possibility of the church becoming healthy and growing again. The thought of the church growing and experiencing new life in the church was well received. As good as the meeting went, this pastor began to notice the different expectations that people had concerning what he meant by revitalization. To some members revitalization meant going back to the good ole days of traditional hymns and revival meetings. Other church members were expecting to see the music become more contemporary and the church to begin have a younger congregation. Both groups had a complete misunderstanding of what this pastor meant by revitalization.

When this pastor began talking with other pastors about revitalization many of them shared the opinion that revitalization could not be defined. With all of the resources about how to revitalize a church, the one thing that this pastor could not find was a definition which conveyed

what he meant by revitalization. While many authors made the statement that revitalization was bringing life back to something that was dead, there was no real definition that communicated what revitalization encompassed. This is where the concept of defining revitalization as the first step of a revitalization program was borne.

This pastor assumed that his congregation knew precisely what he meant when speaking about revitalization. Hanz Finzel states that communicating clearly is the lifeblood of any organization. Everyone from those on the furthest outskirts to the top leadership must be in unison to what is being communicated.¹⁴¹ Through the survey of literature and the survey of pastors, this researcher has developed a definition for the word revitalization. This definition is designed to be used as a first step in the revitalization process so that the leaders and the church members will have a mutual understanding of what pastors mean by revitalization.

By using the common themes from the survey of literature and the responses from the survey of pastors, this writer developed a four-part definition for the term revitalization. This definition contains four elements that are biblically grounded and essential for a church to become healthy and growing. While the methods that pastors use to employ these four elements may differ, all four are designed to guide pastor's towards communicating better with their congregation.

First Element of Defining Revitalization

The first element of defining revitalization is the need for re-visioning of a church that is either plateaued or declining. One of the common themes that this writer noted from the survey of literature was that for a church to experience revitalization the leadership must develop a

¹⁴¹ Hanz Finzel, *The Top Mistakes Leaders Make* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2007), 130-131.

compelling vision for the church. In the survey of pastors' 87.5 percent of the participants agreed that re-visioning the church was essential to revitalization. Communicating to the church that one of the elements of revitalization is developing a new vision will help the church body to have a clearer picture of what to expect in the revitalization process.

In his book *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* author Thom Rainer states that one of the commonalities of churches that were forced to close was the fact that they had no clarity as to why they existed. Rainer continues by pointing out that these churches had no clear vision, purpose, or mission that guided the members.¹⁴² God has designed every church to have their own unique set of experiences, traditions, and values. Each church has to set its vision according to how God has uniquely equipped them.

The issue that arises is that over time these churches begin to lose their DNA.¹⁴³ In 1 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul compares the make-up of the church body to that of the human body which has different parts that are designed to help the body to function properly. Paul reminds the church that each of the members are uniquely equipped with differing gifts and talents that help the church to fulfill the mission that God has given to them.

Just as the people within the church body are different, each church different from one another. Concerning the uniqueness of each church, Eugene Peterson states:

In the life of faith each person discovers all the elements of a unique and original adventure. We are prevented from following in one another's footsteps and are called to an incomparable association with Christ. The Bible makes it clear that every time there is a story of faith, it is completely original. God's creative genius is endless. He never, fatigued and unable to maintain the rigors of creativity, resorts to mass-producing copies.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Rainer, Thom S., *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014. Accessed February 24, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁴³ Mancini, *Church Unique*, 9.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

Even though every church is unique and will have a different vision of what God wants the church to be, the church must have a vision to be healthy and growing. This element of defining revitalization can be applied to any church in any setting. Although two churches that set across the street from one another will have differing visions, they must have a vision none the less. Vision motivates people to get out of the pews and to utilize their gifts and talents in the church.¹⁴⁵ By clarifying that revitalization entails a new vision for the church, leaders and church members will be on the same page about what to expect in the revitalization process.

Churches that are plateaued or declining have lost their sense of mission, and they have lost the sense of God's greatness in the church. Vision gives people something to look forward to, and it helps people to see what the church could become. In Hebrews chapter eleven the reader is presented with a list of people that followed God by faith and shared the vision that He had for them with those whom they led. Revitalization pastors must take the vision that God has given to them and share it with the congregation they are leading.¹⁴⁶

Second Element of Defining Revitalization

The second element of defining the term revitalization is the need for repentance of corporate sins. In Leviticus 20:26, God tells Moses "Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy; I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine." Jesus warned five of the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 that they had to repent of their sins before they faced His judgement and discipline. The purpose behind these passages is to keep the church unspotted from sin, and to continue walking in holiness before God.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Stetzer, *Comeback Churches*, 136-137.

¹⁴⁶ Davis, *Revitalize*, 105.

¹⁴⁷ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 78.

Pastors who choose to lead their church through revitalization will, at some point have to address the sinful attitudes and actions within the church. When pastors begin to pull back the curtains of the church and get a glance at what has taken place in the past, they may be shocked to find decades of sins that are hampering the growth of the church. Revitalization means seeking God's forgiveness for sins such as the wrongful termination of pastors, unbiblical doctrines and practices, prayerlessness, and church splits.¹⁴⁸ A church may be in the right location, have the necessary facilities, and have all the right programs for growth and still experience plateau or decline. In this case, pastors must look below the surface of the church and see what is causing the church to fail to meet its mission.¹⁴⁹ Revitalization pastors understand that the glory of God can, and will depart from the NT church, just as He did with the nation of Israel in the OT.¹⁵⁰ A healthy church is one that continues to grow in its reflection of God's character as it has been revealed in His Word.¹⁵¹

Choosing to deal with the patterns of sin within the church body is a decision that is often unpopular, but it is necessary and right. In the survey of pastors' 87.5 percent of the participants agreed that defining revitalization encompasses the need for the church to repent of their corporate sins. While the church may not understand this decision at first, in the long run it will be beneficial to the church.¹⁵² In this pastor's experience, dealing with the sins of the church was difficult. At times it caused pain and a few people even left the church, but in the end the church

¹⁴⁸ Cheney, *The Seven Pillars of Church Revitalization and Renewal*, 39-43.

¹⁴⁹ McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church*, 45-46.

¹⁵⁰ Cheney, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Revitalization*, 55-56.

¹⁵¹ Henard, *Reclaimed Church*, 29.

¹⁵² Stuart, *Church Revitalization from the Inside Out*, 36-37.

was able to experience a fresh walk with God and the church was able to change its reputation within the community.

Third Element of Defining Revitalization

The third element of defining revitalization is the need for the repentance of individual sins. Individual sins differ from corporate sins in that they are committed by an individual rather than the church body as a whole. Sins of individual church members can infect the entire church body and cause strife among the church family. In Matthew 18:15-17 Jesus instructs the church on how to deal with a sinning brother or sister. He provides these instructions because He expects His bride to be spotless and untarnished from sin. In 1 Corinthians chapter five, the Apostle Paul reminds the church that a small amount of sin can affect the whole body, and the church is responsible for holding each other accountable.

In the survey of pastors' 100 percent of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that the repentance of individual sins is a part of defining revitalization. In the survey of literature many of the authors addressed the issue of how sin can affect a church's growth. Healthy churches have members who are devoted to a life of godliness by living out the Word of God and expressing a lifestyle of worship.¹⁵³

When pastors communicate with the congregation what revitalization means, they must help the church understand that revitalization means personal responsibility within the church body. In 2 Corinthians 7:10-11 the Apostle Paul states:

For Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted: but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desires, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

¹⁵³ Henard, *Reclaimed Church*, 31.

Individuals in the church can choose to cover up their sins or they can confess them to God and receive His forgiveness. When people choose to cover up their sins then they are not producing the fruits of a healthy disciple. However, those who choose to repent of their sins make themselves available to God to be used in fulfilling the mission of the church. Pastors who choose to lead a church through a revitalization program must communicate this up front with the church.

Fourth Element of Defining Revitalization

The fourth element of defining the word revitalization is the need for the church to experience a renewed call to engage in discipleship and evangelism. Churches are not entertainment centers for Sunday morning crowds, rather, they are training grounds for people to become mature followers of Christ. Pastors who choose to present a revitalization program to their church need to communicate that part of revitalization means evaluating how the church teaches people to become mature followers of Christ. Revitalization encompasses creating new methods of moving people from being a first-time visitor to becoming involved in fulfilling the mission of the church.¹⁵⁴

In the survey of literature, many of the authors point out that revitalization of a dying church involves renewing the church's process of disciple-making. In the survey of pastors' 100 percent of the participants stated that they agreed that renewing a church's process of disciple-making and evangelism was essential to church revitalization. Hull points out that mature followers of Christ submit to Him and imitate His life and character. Mature disciples learn from

¹⁵⁴ Stetzer, *Comeback Churches*, 117-118.

the words of Jesus, and they learn His way of doing ministry. Most importantly, mature followers of Christ make new disciples who follow Jesus.¹⁵⁵

Discipleship is essential to revitalization because a church will never reach its full potential without the spiritual growth of its' members. Renewing the call to discipleship means churches must ask questions such as:

- How is our church doing in the realm of spiritual growth?
- Are we as a church fulfilling God's expectations for our lives?
- Are we actively engaged in fulfilling our spiritual ministry on earth?¹⁵⁶

Churches that need revitalization have failed to help people grow spiritually and follow Christ. According to Barna, four out of every ten believers have no real sense of what they want to become or achieve for Jesus.¹⁵⁷ When a church is filled with this type of failed discipleship, then the church will inevitably suffer decline. Not only must pastors communicate a renewed call to discipleship, but they must also communicate that the church must evaluate and renew their efforts in evangelism. Discipleship and evangelism are distinctively dependent upon each other for spiritual growth. True discipleship is a process where people become replicators who share the gospel and lead other people to become disciples of Christ.¹⁵⁸

The second part of this element is the need for a renewed focus on evangelism. When pastors are communicating about revitalization to the church, they should communicate that revitalization encompasses retraining people on how to share the gospel of Jesus. The

¹⁵⁵ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 68.

¹⁵⁶ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2001), 35.

¹⁵⁷ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 36.

¹⁵⁸ Dave Earley and Dave Wheeler, *Evangelism Is... How to Share Jesus with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), viii.

expectation that pastor's need to communicate is that everyone should be involved in evangelism by either praying, inviting, and/or telling people about the gospel.¹⁵⁹ Dave Earley points out that for decades many churches relied upon evangelistic crusades, church revivals, and regular church services to do the work of evangelism. While this method was effective many years ago, Earley states that these methods no longer work in today's contemporary church.¹⁶⁰

Evangelism has declined in the modern church due to evangelism being viewed as a program or an event. Churches that need revitalization have compartmentalized evangelism into a program or Sunday School department.¹⁶¹ When a church experiences a renewed call to discipleship, they understand that evangelism is not something that occurs only in the church but is a lifestyle of proclamation and affirmation of the gospel.¹⁶²

Discipleship and evangelism are essential to a church becoming healthy and growing once again. It was the final command that Jesus gave to His disciples, and it is command to the church today. When pastors are communicating with the church about what revitalization means, they should communicate that discipleship and evangelism are essential parts of the process. This means that pastors must help the church understand that this may include revamping a Sunday School program, starting new small groups, and raising the church's expectations of what it means to be a member of the body of Christ.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Stetzer, *Comeback Churches*, 104.

¹⁶⁰ Earley and Wheeler, *Evangelism Is...*, 183.

¹⁶¹ Alvin Reid, *Evangelism Handbook: Biblical, Spiritual, Intentional, Missional* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009), 47.

¹⁶² Earley and Wheeler, *Evangelism Is...*, 185.

¹⁶³ Stetzer, *Comeback Churches*, 98.

Defining Revitalization as the Initial Step in the Revitalization Process

In chapter one the question was asked “where do pastors begin when starting a revitalization program in the church?” Numerous pastors have asked this question, including this pastor. Revitalization is a task that will test the faith and calling of a pastor, and it will test the faith and maturity of the church. While this thesis project does not address any steps or methods to bring revitalization, it does define what revitalization means. By using this definition as the initial step in the revitalization process, pastors and other church leaders will help the church to see what revitalization looks like. When pastors define revitalization to their congregations, they will gain the trust of the church and ensure a greater success in leading a revitalization strategy.

This researcher took the common themes from the survey of literature in chapter two and compared them to the experience of pastors who had led a church through a revitalization strategy. Gleaning from these two resources, this researcher developed the following definition for revitalization:

“Revitalization is leading the church back to being healthy and thriving as God designed the church to function.”

Pastors can use this definition as the initial step in leading a church towards a revitalization campaign. Although churches may vary in their approaches to these areas, every church must address these areas to become healthy and growing, and to make an impact for God in helping to build His kingdom.

Appendixes
Survey Responses

Participant One:

Question 1. How many years have you served as a Pastor?

- 6-10 years

Question 2. Have you ever been involved in a church revitalization effort?

- Directly

Question 3. How clearly did you define what was meant by revitalization to the church body?

- Somewhat Defined

Question 4. Pastors can easily define what is meant by revitalization.

- Agree

Question 5. Revisioning of the church is a part of the revitalization process.

- Disagree

Question 6. Repentance of corporate sins is essential for church revitalization.

- Agree

Question 7. Repentance of individual sins is essential for church revitalization.

- Strongly Agree

Question 8. A renewed call to discipleship and evangelism is essential for church revitalization.

- Agree

Question 9. Communicating what is meant by revitalization will help pastors lead a successful revitalization effort.

- Disagree

Question 10. How successful was the last revitalization effort you experienced?

- Fairly Successful

Participant Two:

Question 1. How many years have you served as a Pastor?

- 21 + years

Question 2. Have you ever been involved in a church revitalization effort?

- Directly

Question 3. How clearly did you define what was meant by revitalization to the church body?

- Clearly Defined

Question 4. Pastors can easily define what is meant by revitalization.

- Strongly Agree

Question 5. Revisioning of the church is a part of the revitalization process.

- Strongly Agree

Question 6. Repentance of corporate sins is essential for church revitalization.

- Strongly Agree

Question 7. Repentance of individual sins is essential for church revitalization.

- Strongly Agree

Question 8. A renewed call to discipleship and evangelism is essential for church revitalization.

- Strongly Agree

Question 9. Communicating what is meant by revitalization will help pastors lead a successful revitalization effort.

- Strongly Agree

Question 10. How successful was the last revitalization effort you experienced?

- Extremely Successful

Participant Three:

Question 1. How many years have you served as a Pastor?

- 0-5 years

Question 2. Have you ever been involved in a church revitalization effort?

- Indirectly

Question 3. How clearly did you define what was meant by revitalization to the church body?

- Clearly Defined

Question 4. Pastors can easily define what is meant by revitalization.

- Agree

Question 5. Revisioning of the church is a part of the revitalization process.

- Strongly Agree

Question 6. Repentance of corporate sins is essential for church revitalization.

- Agree

Question 7. Repentance of individual sins is essential for church revitalization.

- Agree

Question 8. A renewed call to discipleship and evangelism is essential for church revitalization.

- Strongly Agree

Question 9. Communicating what is meant by revitalization will help pastors lead a successful revitalization effort.

- Agree

Question 10. How successful was the last revitalization effort you experienced?

- Fairly Successful

Participant Four:

Question 1. How many years have you served as a Pastor?

- 6-10 years

Question 2. Have you ever been involved in a church revitalization effort?

- Directly

Question 3. How clearly did you define what was meant by revitalization to the church body?

- Clearly Defined

Question 4. Pastors can easily define what is meant by revitalization.

- Agree

Question 5. Revisioning of the church is a part of the revitalization process.

- Agree

Question 6. Repentance of corporate sins is essential for church revitalization.

- Strongly Agree

Question 7. Repentance of individual sins is essential for church revitalization.

- Strongly Agree

Question 8. A renewed call to discipleship and evangelism is essential for church revitalization.

- Strongly Agree

Question 9. Communicating what is meant by revitalization will help pastors lead a successful revitalization effort.

- Disagree

Question 10. How successful was the last revitalization effort you experienced?

- Somewhat Successful

Participant Five:

Question 1. How many years have you served as a Pastor?

- 0-5 years

Question 2. Have you ever been involved in a church revitalization effort?

- Directly

Question 3. How clearly did you define what was meant by revitalization to the church body?

- Somewhat defined

Question 4. Pastors can easily define what is meant by revitalization.

- Disagree

Question 5. Revisioning of the church is a part of the revitalization process.

- Strongly Agree

Question 6. Repentance of corporate sins is essential for church revitalization.

- Strongly Agree

Question 7. Repentance of individual sins is essential for church revitalization.

- Strongly Agree

Question 8. A renewed call to discipleship and evangelism is essential for church revitalization.

- Strongly Agree

Question 9. Communicating what is meant by revitalization will help pastors lead a successful revitalization effort.

- Strongly Agree

Question 10. How successful was the last revitalization effort you experienced?

- Fairly Successful

Participant Six:

Question 1. How many years have you served as a Pastor?

- 0-5 years

Question 2. Have you ever been involved in a church revitalization effort?

- Indirectly

Question 3. How clearly did you define what was meant by revitalization to the church body?

- Clearly Defined

Question 4. Pastors can easily define what is meant by revitalization.

- Agree

Question 5. Revisioning of the church is a part of the revitalization process.

- Strongly Agree

Question 6. Repentance of corporate sins is essential for church revitalization.

- Disagree

Question 7. Repentance of individual sins is essential for church revitalization.

- Agree

Question 8. A renewed call to discipleship and evangelism is essential for church revitalization.

- Strongly Agree

Question 9. Communicating what is meant by revitalization will help pastors lead a successful revitalization effort.

- Strongly Agree

Question 10. How successful was the last revitalization effort you experienced?

- Extremely Successful

Participant Seven:

Question 1. How many years have you served as a Pastor?

- 6-10 years

Question 2. Have you ever been involved in a church revitalization effort?

- Indirectly

Question 3. How clearly did you define what was meant by revitalization to the church body?

- Poorly defined

Question 4. Pastors can easily define what is meant by revitalization.

- Disagree

Question 5. Revisioning of the church is a part of the revitalization process.

- Agree

Question 6. Repentance of corporate sins is essential for church revitalization.

- Agree

Question 7. Repentance of individual sins is essential for church revitalization.

- Agree

Question 8. A renewed call to discipleship and evangelism is essential for church revitalization.

- Strongly Agree

Question 9. Communicating what is meant by revitalization will help pastors lead a successful revitalization effort.

- Agree

Question 10. How successful was the last revitalization effort you experienced?

- Somewhat Successful

Participant Eight:

Question 1. How many years have you served as a Pastor?

- 11-15 years

Question 2. Have you ever been involved in a church revitalization effort?

- Directly

Question 3. How clearly did you define what was meant by revitalization to the church body?

- Poorly defined

Question 4. Pastors can easily define what is meant by revitalization.

- Agree

Question 5. Revisioning of the church is a part of the revitalization process.

- Strongly Agree

Question 6. Repentance of corporate sins is essential for church revitalization.

- Strongly Agree

Question 7. Repentance of individual sins is essential for church revitalization.

- Strongly Agree

Question 8. A renewed call to discipleship and evangelism is essential for church revitalization.

- Strongly Agree

Question 9. Communicating what is meant by revitalization will help pastors lead a successful revitalization effort.

- Strongly Agree

Question 10. How successful was the last revitalization effort you experienced?

- Somewhat Successful

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August 18, 2020

Bradley Childres
Dwight Rice

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY19-20-430 Defining Revitalization as the Initial Step in the Revitalization Process

Dear Bradley Childres, Dwight Rice:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46: 101(b):

Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP