

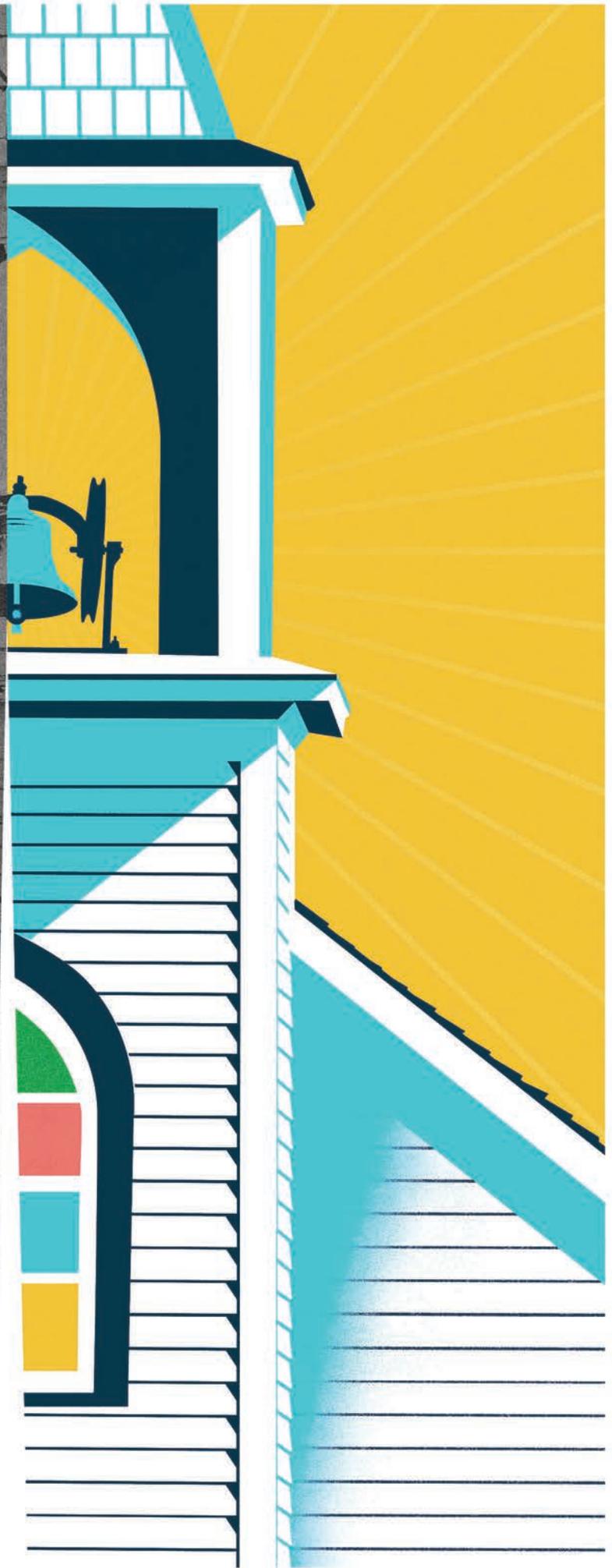


church revitalization

+ the importance
of evangelism
in revitalization

+ 7 reasons some young
pastors are returning
to established churches

+ pastoral leadership:
rethinking past
leadership



Dear Church Leader

God can make any church come alive, but its people must turn to the Lord and experience revitalization God's way. The entire Church Revitalization process of the SBTC is based on transferable principles from the Word of God for the people of God. Our desire is to come alongside the local church to join you on your journey to restore the church to be the beacon of hope for a community in need of Jesus.

Whether you are on a plateau, just beginning a slump, or faced with the uncertainty of how to continue proceeding forward, our methods and processes can assist you in determining what your next steps should be. Contact us at the SBTC. We are here to serve you.

In His Service and Yours,
Kenneth Priest

2020 Dates • Convention Strategies

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January 30

RevConference, SWBTS

March 5

RevTalk, Jacksonville

April 23

Role of the Pastor Conference

April 23-24

RevRetreat

September 24-25

RevForum

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5 Revitalization Principles every church needs to experience

- 1 A fresh, biblically based vision from the Lord
- 2 Restored unity of the people
- 3 Mobilizing members to do the will of the Lord
- 4 Renewed commitment to outreach & evangelism
- 5 Life-giving empowerment by the Holy Spirit

In order to see these things become realities, we provide help for pastors and the church as a whole.

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6 Our whole process is based on transferring the principles from the Word of God to the people of God.

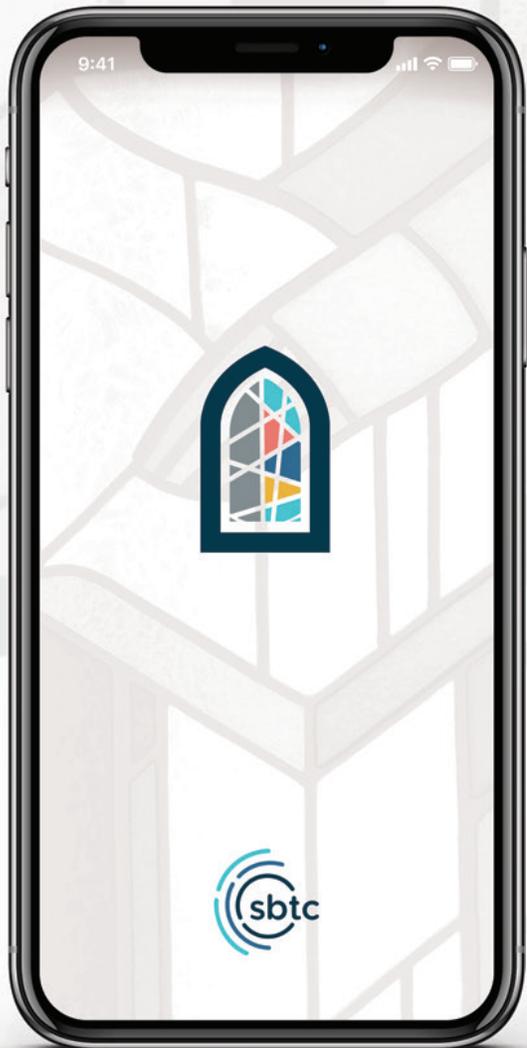


20 Many North American churches are plateaued or declining. Given that reality, church leaders need signs of hope today.



22 We must be thinking of how to make use of technology in our churches for fulfilling the Great Commission.

32-35 SBTC en Español



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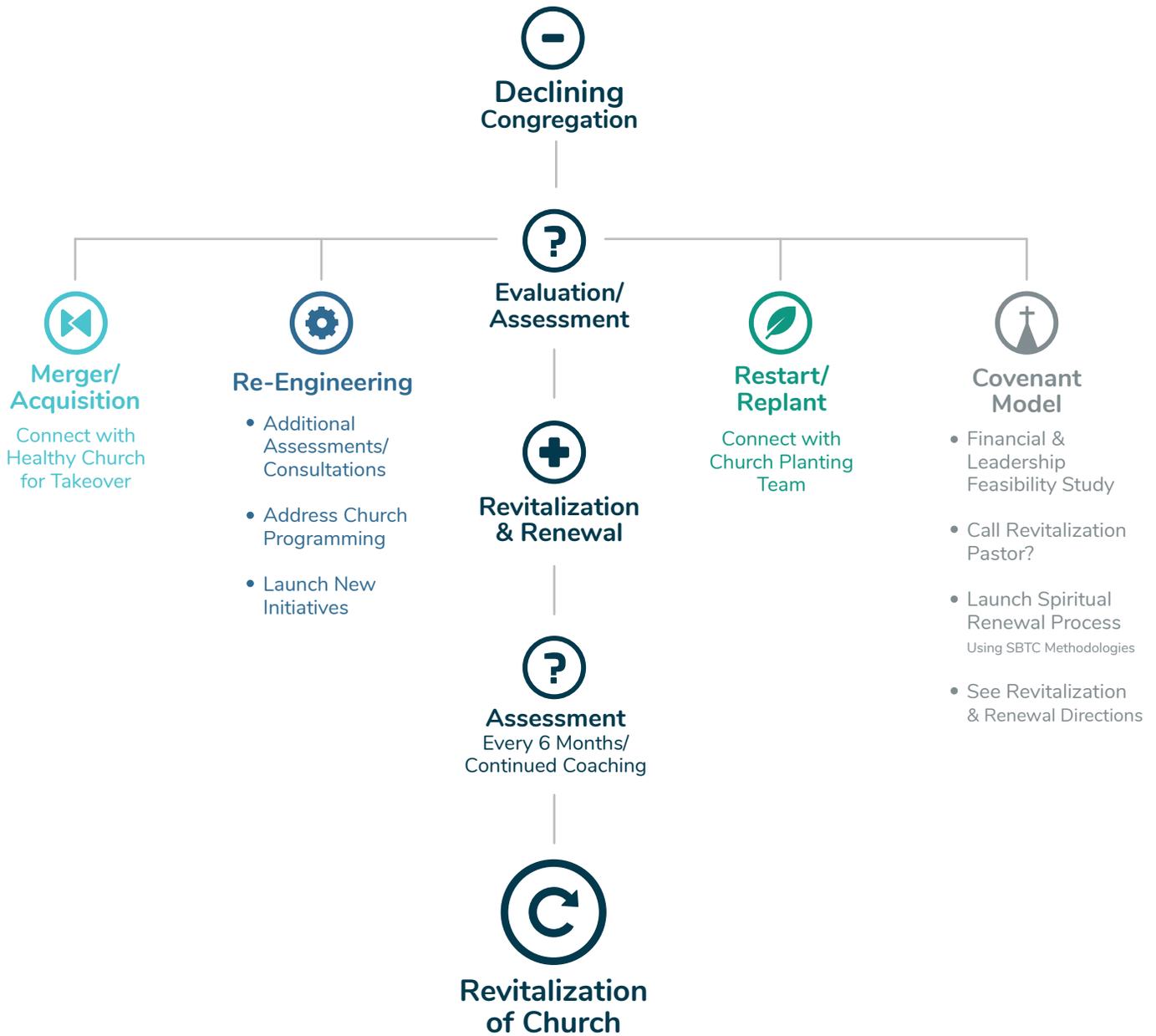
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Revitalization Process



Model & Process

God can make any church come alive, but its people must turn to the Lord and experience revitalization God's way. The five revitalization principles of church renewal that every church needs to experience are:

- + A fresh, biblically based vision from the Lord
- + A restored unity of the people
- + Mobilization of the membership to do the will of God
- + A renewed commitment to outreach and evangelism
- + Life-giving empowerment by the Holy Spirit

In order for this to become a reality in the life of the church, the SBTC Church Revitalization program partners with pastors to assist in moving the church through spiritual renewal and revitalization.

The entire Church Revitalization process is based on transferable principles from the Word of God for the people of God.

Revitalization Methods

- Revitalization
- Re-engineering
- Leadership Driven
- Renewal
- Replant/Restart
- Merger/Acquisition

Revitalization & Renewal

These approaches can take on several looks, and is encouraged for support of any method of revitalization endeavors. The SBTC uses one basic approach:

Sermon Based Small Groups: This approach is more detailed and requires more involvement from the pastor. A 13-week sermon series is preached which focuses on the specific thematic approach to revitalization. Small groups

(whether Sunday school on Sunday mornings or at another time during the week) reinforce or complement the pastor's sermon. The series is provided by the SBTC, but is designed as a beginning point for the pastor to prepare. The topic for the week is provided and the text, but it is the responsibility of the pastor to develop his own sermons contextualizing for his unique church. The small group material has a beginning commentary and questions for use, but the pastor will need to supplement the material with additional commentary and questions. Since the SBTC is not dictated specifically what to preach regarding each topic, we cannot provide a full lesson for the small group time. Additional sermon helps and teaching helps are provided through the Church Revitalization channel of sbtexas.com/online.

At the end of either series, the pastor conducts a town hall meeting with the church to discuss key ministry initiatives which the church should engage. These become the vision path for the church. No more than three should be initiated. Any above that become the future ministries of the church.

Re-engineering

This approach utilizes church assessments and consultations to determine where the church presently is and the outcomes of where it needs to go. Through this process all program ministries in the church are evaluated along with facilities and finances. The end result is a new vision path for the church with ministries re-engineered to meet the present needs of the community context in order to more effectively minister and reach the community for the cause of Christ. The church does

not look the same as when it starts the process as everything is on the table to be re-engineered for effectiveness.

Replant/Restart

This approach closes the doors of the church for a season (sometimes weeks, sometimes months). The church dissolves from existence on paper. A church planter is sent in to develop a core team. The church changes its name, new by-laws, and newly constitutes. Updates are made to the facilities as necessary. The church then relaunches with a new vision and strategy for engaging the community. A sponsor church is involved and sends in the planter (typically). The sponsor church is heavily involved to insure an effective launch. The SBTC Church Revitalization Team hands this model off to the Church Planting Team as it is a plant. Church Revitalization Team remains involved in assisting the planter in coaching the existing members for spiritual renewal.

Covenant Model

This may happen in several different models.

MODEL 1: A healthy church has a desire to assist a church in decline. The declining church comes under covenant relationship with the healthy church. The healthy church provides leadership (typically replacing the pastor with a staff member from the healthy church).

The healthy church typically sends in a core leadership team to assume, or pick-up, many volunteer positions which need to be filled. The healthy church invests in the church facilities, scheduling work projects around the campus to restore the facilities to full functionality. The declining church suspends all leadership control and agrees to function under the by-laws and constitution of the healthy church for the term of the covenant. The covenant relationship could be as short as one year, or up to five years, depending on the need of the declining church. (For this model, think the old Mission Church model. Whenever a mission church was started out of a church, it would build to a healthy position and then would spin-off. That is the goal here. Sometimes however, the church after spinning off, would go through a downturn and have to “revert back” to mission status. That is essentially this model).

MODEL 2: A declining church which is without a pastor (occasionally this is done with an existing pastor who is willing to submit to the training and development needed). The SBTC provides a list of Revitalization Pastors from which to select. These pastors have gone through training and on-going continuing education in revitalization of the local church. The church selects a Revitalization Pastor. The SBTC moves into a

covenant relationship with the pastor and the church; this is a three-way covenant agreement. The pastor implements a spiritual renewal methodology utilizing the sermon-based small group approach of the SBTC's. In this model, consultations are conducted to determine the financial feasibility of the church. If there is financial lacking the SBTC may come alongside the church and provide grant funds to assist in paying the pastor's salary for a season. The covenant agreement is for six month intervals, not to extend beyond two additional re-signs, for a total of eighteen months. At the end of the eighteen months, the Revitalization Pastor will have assisted the church in getting their search committee trained and in conducting a search for the new pastor. The end goal of this model is a revitalizing church and the new pastor being called during the eighteenth month of the process.

Merger/Acquisition

This model is where a healthy church acquires a declining church OR two churches merge together for the purpose of creating a healthy church. The SBTC philosophy is, this is a last resort model. As a matter of practice, the SBTC does not want to lose any preaching points in Texas. As the population continues to grow and the cultural diversity expands, every campus is needed to reach Texas and thereby reach the nations.

Preaching for Revitalization

Our process of revitalization at the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention is simple. We call it our 3-legged stool—preaching, evangelism and discipleship. In this article, I will focus on the first leg of that stool, preaching for revitalization. I want to look at two aspects about preaching for revitalization. The first is the priority of preaching or why we place such an emphasis on preaching and secondly, our process of preaching for revitalization.

1. The priority of preaching for revitalization

Preaching is one of the most important aspects in our revitalization process. Our whole process is based on transferring the principles from the Word of God to the people of God. We understand that for revitalization to happen, change must take place. The change has to begin in the hearts of the people of God.

I believe that the Holy Spirit works primarily through the Word of God. Since every believer is indwelt with the Holy Spirit at the point of salvation, change can and should happen where the Word is preached. When revital-

Article 1 of 3 | Preaching

Revitalization Process

A three-legged stool approach

- ▶ Preaching
- ▶ Evangelism
- ▶ Discipleship



ization becomes a work of God, it is life changing and is permanent.

All the goals of revitalization are achieved through the preaching of the Word:

- + A fresh Biblically based vision from the Lord

- + A restored unity of the people
- + A mobilization of the membership to do the will of God
- + A renewed commitment to do outreach and evangelism
- + Life-giving empowerment by the Holy Spirit

As pastors we understand the importance of preaching. In fact, most of us began our ministry journey by “surrendering to preach.” We are motivated by the scriptural imperative Paul gave Timothy in II Timothy 4:2, “Preach the Word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine.” But we still have some challenges when it comes to keeping preaching a priority in our ministries.

The first challenge is time. It has been said that the average sermon takes 20 hours of preparation. Finding the time to study is difficult with all the demands

placed upon us, especially for the bi-vocational pastor. But to be fresh, we must make the time. Pulling out an old message on Saturday night and trying to warm it up for Sunday doesn’t work well. When we spend the time in study, God speaks to our hearts. A message becomes powerful when God speaks to our hearts first, then we speak to the people. A message that has not affected us has little effect on our people.

The second challenge we face in preaching is fear. No preacher seeks to upset people with his preaching, but it does happen when the Word convicts hearts

of sin and neglect. Some will not like it when through the preaching of the truth of God’s Word, church members are pushed out of their comfort zone. Don’t be surprised that you get push back from some in the pews. Though never mean or hateful in our delivery or demeanor, we must be willing to preach the truth in love to our people. We dare not go down the path of preaching to please people. Galatians 1:10 says, “Obviously, I’m not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ’s servant.”

Another challenge is trusting

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Mike Landry
SBTC Revitalization
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Kenneth Priest
SBTC Convention
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in the power of his Word. We are reminded of its power in Hebrews 4:12, “For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” We must be confident that God’s Word will work today. We don’t need recourse; staying on the course of preaching the Word will work. A preacher who faithfully preaches the truth of God’s Word is of great benefit to the kingdom of God, and a detriment to Satan and his desire. The Word of God is still powerful and does work in impacting the hearts of people.

As we deal with these challenges, we must not forget the power and importance that the pulpit has in our Baptist churches. Even though, our church structures, governments and practices differ, one thing seems to be constant—the position of the pastor in the pulpit. A pastor can preach what God lays on his heart and no one dares tell a pastor what to preach. In Baptist life, for the most part, the pulpit still belongs to the pastor. Because of this, we must not take the responsibility of preaching lightly but reverently and in the fear of God. The pulpit is indeed a sacred place. Every time we stand behind the sacred desk, we are representing God

and his Word. People need to hear a Word from God. The awesome task of preaching demands that we are proficient in the way we handle the holy Scriptures. It is of the utmost importance that we seek God’s power, wisdom and help as we deliver his message to his people.

2. Our Process of Preaching for Revitalization.

Now let’s look at our process of preaching for revitalization. Our process helps address some of the challenges that we identified, especially the challenge of time. Our website has three-years-worth of preaching material. Each series is broken down into

weeks. In each week you will have a text that is discussed by different professors: Matthew McKellar is the chair of preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Jim Wicker is associate professor of New Testament at Southwestern, Deron Biles is professor of pastoral ministries and preaching at Southwestern and also our Old Testament professor for our series. On many

of our series, Kenneth Priest is the facilitator. So, depending on the text, you will have either a New Testament or Old Testament professor in conjunction with Dr. McKellar, the preaching professor, discussing the text and providing preaching points. Understand these videos will not tell you what to preach. You must still prepare your own message, but it will give background information and sermon tips that should cut your study time.

The series in revitalization that we highly recommend is called the “Launch” series. This 13-week series is absolutely imperative because it addresses the six elements of church health: evangelism, worship, prayer, ministry, discipleship

In Baptist life, for the most part, the pulpit still belongs to the pastor. Because of this, we must not take the responsibility of preaching lightly but reverently and in the fear of God.

and fellowship. Every church that has been successful in revitalization has preached this series.

The Launch series begins in Nehemiah for week one and two with messages about the priority of God’s Word. Then week three through week nine, the sermons are on the seven churches in Revelation. Week 10 and 11 are on listening to God. Week 12 is a message challenging the church to go and tell. The series ends on week 13 with a message on the growth of the church.

One of the great things about our series is that there are also teaching points for your Sunday School or small groups that coincide with the message each week. We find that when we focus the churches attention on the one message for the week in small groups/Sunday school, Sunday morning, evening and Bible study on Wednesday, the truth is more likely to be remembered and applied to the lives of the hearers. We also have weekly devotions available for the Launch series.

After the Launch series is preached, we encourage our

pastors to consider preaching the series, “100 Days Through the Bible.” This is a 15-week series that will take your church through the high points of scripture. It is estimated that 65 percent of the church is considered biblically illiterate. You can also encourage your people to read through the Bible during this 15-week series. Together this will increase the biblical literacy of your congregation. We have two other series that will complete your first year of preaching: the Acts series, which is 15 weeks, and the 12-week Minor Prophets series.

It usually takes three years for a church to turn around and five years to see a complete culture change. However, you will see some results sooner than this. That is why we have developed a three-year preaching program to help in this process.

Preaching is vital and necessary to the revitalization process. The convention wants to provide the tools to help equip you as a preacher. Keep preaching the truth in love, power and confidence.

The Importance of Evangelism in Revitalization

Our revitalization process at the SBTC is a three-legged stool: preaching, evangelism and discipleship. Their focus of this article will be the evangelism leg. How important is evangelism in revitalization? There will be no revitalization without it. Almost 70 percent of our churches are plateaued or in decline; we are not doing a good job of evangelizing the lost world. Look at the numbers of baptisms we have each year. This is the indication of how effective we have been in reaching people with the gospel.

Job one of the church is the Great Commission, found in Matthew 28:19-20, “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; and lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age.” At the heart of the commission is evangelism. So if reaching people is the business of the church, we have to ask ourselves, “How’s business?”

Every church that engages

Article 2 of 3 | Evangelism

Revitalization Process

A three-legged stool approach

- ▶ Preaching
- ▶ Evangelism
- ▶ Discipleship



with us in revitalization begins by doing a congregational analysis. This is a simple form that asks each person in the church to rate the health of the church on a scale of one to 10. We have never had an analysis come back to us that

didn't have evangelism or discipleship as the weakest areas of their church. We talk about evangelism, we study it, we have conferences about the necessity of evangelism, it is about time we actually start telling people about Jesus.

Now that we identified the problem and made an honest assessment about evangelism in our churches, let's go back to the early church. We need to see how we can get back on track about reaching the world with the gospel.

In Acts chapter one the early group of believers were assembled together. No doubt they were afraid. They were small in number, only 120. They were like us; so many times we are focused on the wrong things. In verse 6 they asked the Lord when he would restore the kingdom. Jesus reminded them that this was not to be what they were concerned with.

Then in verse 8, Jesus restated the Great Commission. They were to be witnesses in Jerusalem—no small task for such a little group. Jesus didn't stop there. He then said in Judea. Then Jesus included Samaria. The Jews didn't even like those folks. Finally, Jesus made an astounding proclamation—to the end of the earth!

Look at what happened next. B.H. Carroll said within the first few months after Pentecost, 60,000 people were saved. In two years they had filled Jerusalem with the gospel. Four and half years later there were multiplied churches and 19 years from Pen-

tecost the church was turning the world upside down.

Here is what is hard to believe: within 28 years the gospel had spread into the entire known world. This early group started at 120 and had no building. They had no means of fast transportation. We are hard pressed to identify the pastor. Even the Bible had not been completed yet. Money was likely an issue because we know the treasurer of the group had hung himself. Yet they accomplished with nothing what we are not doing with plenty.

Churches often complain about what they don't have—

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Everyone we come into contact with is a prospect to share the gospel with. We must be intentional in our evangelism effort. Some may feel comfortable going door to door; others will build relationships with the idea of winning them to Christ.



money, resources or people. That becomes an excuse for not reaching the world. Instead of focusing on what we don't have, let's do what they did and focus on what we do have. We have a message, we have a mandate, we have the power! We have the same life-changing, glorious message of a resurrected savior. We have the mandate to get it out to the world. We have the power, because the same power the church received on the day of Pentecost, is the same power available for his church today!

A lot of times we place our attention on the methods, the mess or the men. We need to look at the Master, the message and the masses. Many churches live in fear, friction and frustration. We

need to live in faith, fellowship and fruitfulness!

How do we create a culture of evangelism in our churches? We are talking about a culture shift from in-reach (an emphasis on us) to outreach (a focus on them). First, evangelism has to be exemplified. In other words, the pastor must lead out by being a soul winner himself. He needs to be sharing the gospel with the lost on a consistent basis. One of the greatest ways to turn a church around is for the pastor to lead someone to Christ and see that

person baptized and added to the church. Keep doing this over and over again and it will change a church.

An important element in pastoral leadership is to train others how to share their faith. The best way is one on one, taking someone with you as you go. It is also good to have special classes throughout the year. The sad truth is only 5 percent of Christians have ever shared the gospel with someone who is lost.

The second thing necessary to create a culture of evangelism is people becoming burdened for the lostness of their communities. We want to start with a program, but Jesus, Paul and Nehemiah started with a vision; Jesus saw the multitude; Paul in Acts 17 saw Athens

totally given to idols and Nehemiah heard about the condition of Jerusalem. A demographic study of your community will open eyes to the lostness and opportunities around you. Driving and walking the streets around your church can help you see and get a burden for those in need of Jesus. Whatever it takes, start seeing the need.

When Jesus, Paul and Nehemiah saw and heard it created compassion, passion and brokenness. As a church we need to pray for the lost by name. Our altars need to be filled with people praying and weeping over the souls of lost men, women, boys and girls. Remember Psalm 126:6, "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bring-

ing his sheaves with Him."

Learning what it looks like to live life on mission as a witness is the third element to creating a culture of evangelism in our churches. In Acts, chapter one, they were to be witnesses. They were to share the message of Jesus everywhere they went. That is what they did. In Acts 17, Paul preached Jesus weekly in the Synagogue. This is the key, he also preached Jesus daily in the marketplace. We do Synagogue (church, Sunday) work well. The problem is that we don't do marketplace very well. Our jobs, schools and the streets we live on are our mission field.

Everyone we come into contact with is a prospect to share the gospel with. We must be inten-

tional in our evangelism effort. Some may feel comfortable going door to door; others will build relationships with the idea of winning them to Christ. Many use service as an opportunity to be a witness. Whatever we do we do with the idea to win people to Christ. Every event the church has becomes a gospel opportunity. In every message, a plea for people to come to Christ should be given. It has to become about getting the gospel seed out to as many and as often as we can.

Let's get busy about the business of reaching others with the gospel. Keep sowing the seed. Galatians 6:9 says, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap if we faint not."

church revitalization

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The Need of Discipleship

Discipleship is one leg of our three-legged stool of revitalization at the SBTC. Evangelism and discipleship are always the weakest areas of church health identified with our congregational analysis. This comes as no surprise because evangelism and discipleship go hand in hand. In fact it is the DNA of the Great Commission.

When you look at a model of DNA, you see a double helix coiled around a single axis. The double helix is evangelism and discipleship. You can't have one without the other. Evangelism and discipleship must be done simultaneously. For a church to stay focused and not get off track, every function of the church needs to relate and connect to evangelism and discipleship.

The goal of discipleship is: Fully committed followers of Christ that embrace the message of Jesus through spiritual growth and maturity, the mission of Jesus through penetrating lostness (missions and evangelism), and the method of Jesus through life on life spiritual multiplication.

Article 3 of 3 | Discipleship

Revitalization Process

A three-legged stool approach

- ▶ Preaching
- ▶ Evangelism
- ▶ Discipleship



Let's look at the goals of discipleship. It begins with being a follower of Christ as Savior. Remember that we can love, teach, fellowship and serve the lost, but only the saved can be discipled.

The discipleship journey begins when this new follower of Christ starts to have an understanding of what it means to be a child of God, a Christian.

Another thing to consider is,

what does it mean to be committed? To whom and to what should this new believer be committed? First, they should be committed to Christ. Next they must be committed to his Word. The Bible is the holy, inspired and inerrant Word of God. It is the primary way we fellowship with him. By reading the Bible consistently we can maintain good fellowship and grow to maturity. It is important that a Bible reading and memory plan is part of a discipleship process.

Getting the followers of Christ connected and committed to the Bible is followed closely by getting them connected to a

church. This is an important step in their spiritual maturity. "A New Testament Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the Gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its

scriptural officers are pastor and deacons" (Baptist Faith and Message 2000). Understanding what a church is and what membership in the church means should create the desire to be baptized. Following the Lord in baptism is the first step of obedience in discipleship.

To sum it up in discipleship, we want to get the believer connected and committed to Christ, his Word, his church and his will.

Getting the message of the gospel is the mission of Jesus. The end results of discipleship are disciples who make disciples. It is not just about learning; it needs to become about doing.

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A true discipleship process produces disciples who live life on mission to get the message of salvation to the lost around them. What does a mature follower of Jesus look like? Jesus said in Matthew 4:19, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Any discipleship process that does not produce disciples who live on mission to make disciples, misses the mark.

We have looked at the goal of discipleship. What about the methods? How do we address discipleship in our church? When you deal with the process of discipleship, it becomes a complicated conversation. There are many

Jesus preached to the crowd. He taught the group of disciples through life stories (parables). He also spent intimate time with a choice few. Whatever we do, be consistent.

different ideas about what the discipleship program in your church should look like. Thankfully, there are a lot of good resources for you to examine. There is no doubt that you can find a process that you can make fit the culture of your church. I know every pastor and

church is different, and what works for me may not work for you.

At the SBTC, Lance Crowell's area of ministry is discipleship. He is an associate in the Church Ministries department. I can recommend the book *Rhythms*

co-authored by Spencer Plumlee and Lance Crowell. This discipleship resource is available through the SBTC.

As discipleship applies to revitalization:

1. It should begin in the pulpit. The pastor's preaching cannot be the only source of discipleship, but it is a part of the process. The pastor, also, needs to lead out in discipleship. He can example it and promote it.

2. Sunday School is still a place of connection and discipleship. It is sometimes called the university method. Classroom discipleship has fallen out of vogue to many. I believe there is a place for Sunday

School. Some people, especially men, will always feel more comfortable in a group setting. Don't discount your Sunday School as a discipleship tool.

3. Small groups are a little more intimate and therefore are valuable and important elements in our discipleship process.

4. One-on-one doing life together is the best form of discipleship.

5. Discipling is about learning together, serving together and fellowshiping together. The key is together.

Jesus preached to the crowd. He taught the group of disciples

through life stories (parables). He also spent intimate time with a choice few. Whatever we do, be consistent.

Dallas Willard, in the book, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship*, said, "The greatest issue facing the world today, with all its heartbreaking needs, is whether those who, by profession or culture are identified as 'Christian' will become disciples. Students, apprentices, practitioners of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from Him how to live the life of the kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence."

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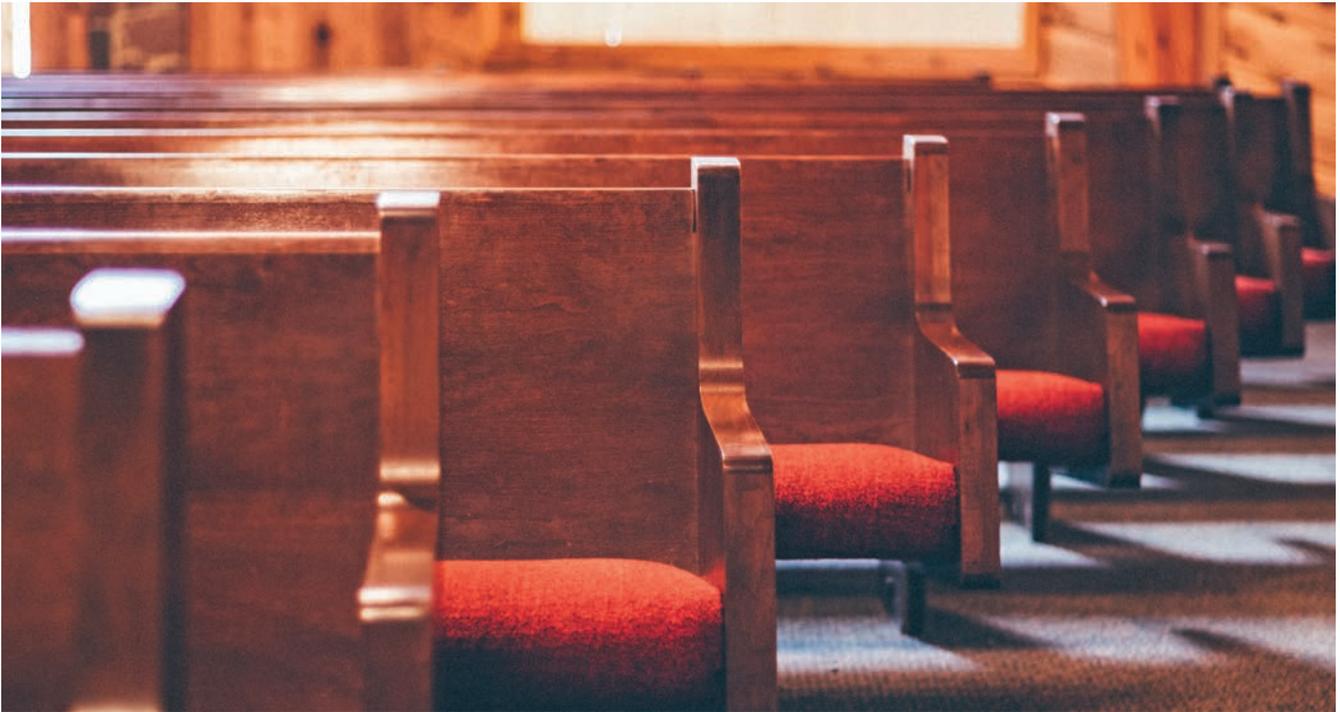


Anthony Svjada
Lead Pastor, Harvey
Baptist Church, Stephenville



Tony Wolfe
SBTC Pastor/Church
Relations Director

7 Reasons Some Young Pastors are Returning to Established Churches



Some years ago, I posted on “Reasons Young Leaders Shy Away from Established Churches.” Since publishing that post, I’ve seen more and more young leaders actually seek out established churches to lead. Here’s what they tell me when I ask about their renewed interest:

1. Church revitalization is more acceptable now.

At one time, church planting was the rage. It’s still a growing trend, but we’ve also learned that revitalization is a valid and necessary ministry. Young leaders no longer look down on that option.

2. They see the Bible Belt (where many established churches are located) as a mission field.

They recognize cultural Christianity for what it is, and they know many people are still to be reached. Plateaued established churches need gospel-centered preachers, too.

3. They want to be part of multigenerational churches.

In fact, they long to have older people in their churches. They want older heroes to look up to and those heroes are tough to find in many newer churches.

4. They’ve seen some church planting failures.

When you see some of your friends really struggle with the hard work of church planting, the established church can look more inviting. At least you’re not starting from scratch in the latter case.

5. Some have a desire to return to more traditional worship.

They don't want to go back to bad worship (of any style), but some young pastors appreciate a more liturgical style with Bible readings and God-centered hymns. They're not interested in anything that's superficial.

6. Their heroes often encourage them to be open to an established church.

Young leaders have their preferences, but many are also quite willing to listen to their mentors and pastors who push them toward the established church. At a minimum, they'll at least pray about the possibility.

7. Established churches often offer them jobs.

This reason's a pragmatic one, but it's nevertheless a real one. You'll broaden your job search when you're paying bills and supporting a family.

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11 Signs of Hope for a Declining Church



Many churches in North America are plateaued or declining. Given that reality, many church leaders need signs of hope today. Here are signs I've seen in churches that moved beyond the plateau to growth.

1. The leader is preaching the Bible.

Numerical growth can occur without preaching the Word, but genuine personal and congregational transformation doesn't happen apart from the Word. The struggling churches I've seen experience healthy change have been led by leaders who preach the Word.

2. Somebody is praying.

Sometimes it's the leader, and sometimes it's another church member—but somebody is beseeching God to help the church turn around. I've met church members who prayed daily for their church for years, and they never wavered in that commitment.

3. Leaders are willing to face the truth.

Never have I seen this kind of church experience new life unless the leaders are willing to admit, "Our future is death if things don't change."

4. The leader takes responsibility for growth.

I realize this sign is a controversial one, and I'm not suggesting that leaders can produce growth on their own. Nor am I implying that leaders are solely responsible for a lack of growth. I'm simply reporting what I've seen: turnaround church pastors determine, "It's my responsibility to lead this church out of decline."

5. The leader still has a vision for growth.

The leader's vision might be clouded by discouragement, but it's still there in his heart. His belief that Christ will build his church remains strong, even through a time of church decline.

6. Somebody is evangelizing.

Often, the leader is the primary evangelist in these churches, but not always. Sometimes a layperson whose spiritual fire is burning brightly takes the lead. As long as someone is excited enough about God and the church to tell the gospel story, hope exists.

7. The leader is investing in someone else.

Congregational decline is at times so emotionally draining that leaders fail in their personal ministry to others. In turnaround churches I've seen, though, the leader has continually invested in a few believers.

8. The church is still reaching out to the community.

The efforts may not be as strong as they once were, and congregational participation may be less, but somebody is still thinking outwardly. It takes only a few people obedient to the Great Commission to change a church.

9. Somebody has a global vision.

Years ago, I consulted with a declining church that had international partnerships, but they did little local evangelism. Several of their leaders had a passion for particular people groups around the world. When they learned through our consult that those people groups also lived in their city, the church began to think locally – and turnaround slowly began.

10. Members are still inviting friends to church.

It may be more difficult to get the guests to return, but the church folks are still excited enough to invite others to join them in worship.

11. Leaders refuse to give up.

Frankly, church turnaround is not easy. Honest evaluation is painful. Admitting failure is personal. Change can be draining, and any change may cause even more turmoil. The churches I've seen turnaround, however, have leaders that simply do not give up.

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Pastoral Leadership:

Rethinking Past Leadership

In pastoral leadership, we often times get stranded using previous strategies and methods. I hear it often in conversations with pastors of declining congregations. “I am doing everything I have done for the past 30 years of my ministry, but it’s just not working this time.” Welcome to church ministry in the digital age! When we rely on past methods, which we had seen produce previously, we are stuck with outdated ideas that might no longer work. We need to rethink our ministry practices. This is not to say what was previously done was wrong, most likely not, especially if you experience a growing church with transformed contagious Christians. However, methods and models of the 1980s are simply irrelevant and outdated. The rethinking we need to do is fully focused on understanding how to contextualize God’s Word and the work of the church in today’s ever-changing culture.



The issue? Culture shift used to be a 10-20 year process. Think about that. Ministry in the 1940s, after WWII, through the early 1960s was quite similar. Yes new ministries were developed, campaigns were launched, but all progress in that 20-year time frame was structurally similar. Then we hit the Jesus Movement in the 1970s. This brings around a seeker mindset which stayed through the 1980s. Christendom then moves out of the Seeker Movement into a Church Growth mindset, which carried us into the late 1990s. During this time, we saw a technology explosion in culture. The 1980s are when

The church is about people, therefore it is about relationships. However, we must begin to think about how we can leverage technology for the purpose of these relationships.

we saw personal computing take off. Mainframe computers are soon outdated and with the 1990s comes the widespread use of the internet and personal email—we are remember those favorite three words of AOL fame, “You’ve got mail!” Even a movie is remade to take advantage of the newfound technology of personal computing and email.

So what does all this have to do with the church and pastoral leadership? Everything!

The church is about people, therefore it is about relationships. However, we must begin to think about how we can leverage technology for the purpose of these relationships. As leaders we must rethink the strategies and methods we used for years. We must

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begin to ask, “How does this function in the digital age?” Instead of me giving answers or insights fully in this article, let me ask some questions to get you to think on this in your context.

First, how is technology used in your community? Visit stores, restaurants, cafes and schools. Has technology influenced how people are living in the community? Let me provide some examples of what I see as I travel. Been to Chili’s or Applebee’s style restaurants of late? A server takes your order, yes, but, there is a touch-screen computer on the table to pay your bill when ready. Just indicate on the screen for your bill, and slide payment right there. Some of them even have receipts within to print out, others email or wait for the server to bring it, however, no more waiting for the bill to come. Are you in a major market with an airport and have travelers in your church? Though not quite widespread but many airplanes actually have the monitors in the seat back, so you can watch television shows or movies for free, but in addition to that you can order a beverage of choice in the seatback, or even a snack or meal depending on the length of the flight. What’s my point? Technology is changing what we have seen as “service” processes. Our servers in restaurants and flight attendants on



We must begin thinking how we can make use of technology in our churches for fulfilling the Great Commission. This means it must impact our discipleship strategy.

planes are moving to more of an “on-demand” model. If you want something, ask. They may not be coming around and asking what they can provide. You have to decide to engage to receive service.

What about self-checkout at the grocery stores and hardware stores? Again, this is just another example of people engaging with technology rather than with a person. I am not advocating for the church to not have person-to-person interaction but I am saying that doing church the way you

have in the past is not the answer for the present or future.

Rethink church! The first step in rethinking is determining if you are a teachable leader. Any leader who is not teachable will struggle with revitalization. Are you open to rethinking church? This is not a time to worry with if the congregation will go for it; the first question in this process is will you go for it? Are you curious about what you could do today, different than the past, in order to impact lostness in your context? Do you

believe there could be a better answer than your own? Could there be a better alternative to your way? If you can answer yes to these questions, then you are teachable, therefore you are prepared to move forward.

There are immense challenges to rethinking church. First, we must never waiver on our faithfulness to the inerrancy of God's Word in all we do. With this as our foundation, we are prepared to step forward into a new way of church. The first step many churches take into being "21st century" in practice is livestreaming or using Facebook Live, for their worship services. We do this to connect with members who are travel-

ing or as a way to reach those who will not come to church, or even a modern day convenience for the sick. However, when we are truly rethinking church, if we are in a major city, where technology is everywhere, we must begin thinking how we can make use of technology in our churches for fulfilling the Great Commission. This means it must impact our discipleship strategy. Are you offering sermon notes, and additional commentary, to your church members via digital platforms? If we want to rethink church, we must begin looking at what students in schools are finding useful, and asking, how we can develop a discipleship path with a similar experienc-

es. Many schools are providing iPads and notebook computers for student use on lessons and instruction. Online learning is available to all generations but when they come to church, they are sitting for a lecture/lesson. We are not engaging children with the way they are learning in schools. Yes, this is costly. No, I do not have the answer. I am simply asking the question. If we want to impact the culture today, if we want to contextualize God's Word to the emerging generations, we have to rethink church. This will only occur when a pastor begins rethinking his past and addressing church in the 21st century—contextualized for his community.

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Revitalization Process

Even though I am calling these steps, you need to think more dynamic helix, than actual step one, step two, etc. These should all be integrated simultaneously.

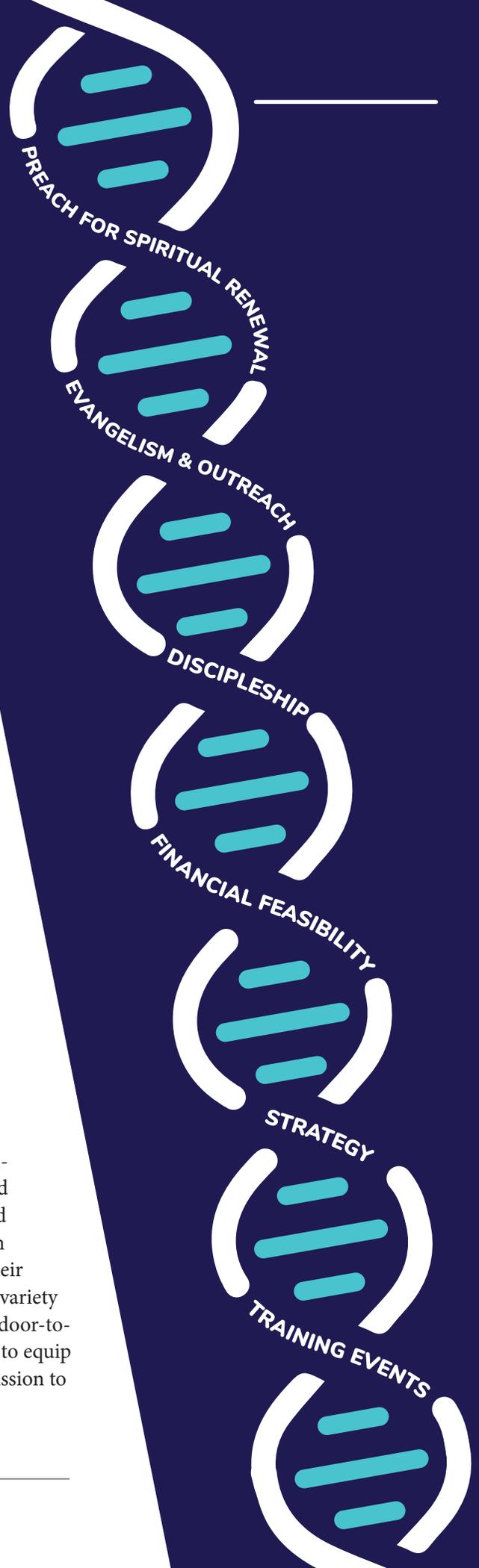
Step One: Preach for Spiritual Renewal*

Many pastors think their church is spiritually healthy because their members know the Word of God. However, if lives are not being changed, professions of faith occurring in the community, then the church is not healthy. The church exists to make Jesus known. As such, salvations are a part of any healthy church. Just because people know the Word of God, does not mean they are living the Word of God. Every church should be focused on a spiritual renewal as a part of their on-going strategy. In a declining church, the evidence is even more prevalent for this to occur.

Preaching for spiritual renewal involves text-driven, life-application oriented preaching. People do not just need to know what the Word of God says they need to know what it means in their respective lives today. How is God's Word relevant to how they live? Preaching cannot be about the past, but must be about the present and the future. Because God's Word says this, you can live today and have assurance of tomorrow.

Step Two: Evangelism & Outreach

The church must be focused on reaching the lost in their community. This can be accomplished in the two ways of this second step. First through evangelism, every member must be equipped to share his or her faith. This should be done through a focus on individual evangelistic style, meaning, allow persons to share their faith how God has uniquely created them to do this. There are a variety of styles of evangelism; relational, conversational, marketplace, door-to-door, etc. Not everyone has the same style. It is up to the pastor to equip congregants based on their style, and then send them out on mission to fulfill the Great Commission.



Second is through outreach. This is the activities of the church which are done to impact the community. These can be done on-campus and/or off-campus. Having a strategy for events is imperative. Establishing boomerang opportunities is the most effective outreach strategy a church can have. By this, every event you host, on- or off-campus, should offer another opportunity to connect...a boomerang. Here is a one-year boomerang calendar focused off of student ministry, therefore using the school calendar:

One-Year Boomerang Calendar

August: Back-to-School Party

While at this event, you promote your Fall Festival Event

October: Fall Festival

While at this event, you promote your Holiday Events; Thanksgiving through New Year's

November: Community Thanksgiving (give out the Christmas Code)

Continue promoting the Christmas and New Year's Events

December: Children's Snow Day (this is a one-day VBS type event for kids which allows working parents a few hours to go shopping).

Continue promoting other Holiday Events: you might preach the Advent, Christmas Eve Service, Christmas Day Service, & New Year's Eve Service. Also begin promoting Marriage/Parenting Conference

February: Marriage/Parenting Conference

Promote Easter Services (give out Easter Code) to include Community Easter Egg Hunt

March/April: Preach Easter Series

Promote Schools Out Party and VBS

May: Schools Out Party

Promote VBS

June/July: VBS (devote the Sunday after VBS as a special service)

On the first day of VBS, begin telling the kids they have to be there Sunday morning to sing all the songs they have learned. Notify the parents, the kids will be performing Sunday morning, you are giving the entire service to the children AND to share what the kids learned that week. Create a special service around VBS. Children will do the music, have them quote scripture they memorized, say the pledges, and then you preach a gospel message, centered on the theme from VBS. Promote the Back to School Party; and your calendar starts over.

Step Three: Discipleship

First, discipleship originates from the pulpit. Therefore all discipleship should flow through intentional proclamation of the sermon in a text-driven methodology. Second, Sunday school and small group material should be connected to the sermon for most effective discipleship of the congregation. Third, the area of discipleship should also focus on the next greatest need of the church. As a pastor, you should be discipling your people based on the areas which need to be addressed in the church through additional teaching opportunities. If you need more Sunday school/Bible study teachers, then create a prospective teachers process and equip leaders in this area. If you need qualified deacons, then invite prospective men to go through a process of discipleship. Focus on one or two needs at a time, go slow, do it right. Whatever your church need is, focus on it.

Step Four: Financial Feasibility

An outside consultant should evaluate the financial position of the church. Determine are best practices in place and are funds being used to the best of their abilities. Just because you have a CPA handling your finances, does not mean this person understands what you should really be spending resource funds on. Allow a consultant to offer guidance on your budget expenditures. Often times in revitaliza-

tion work, the church continues to operate a benevolence ministry. If the church is cutting the pastor's salary, and cannot afford to pay the electric bill, but you are writing a check to someone who came in with a need, your priorities are out of order. An outside perspective can offer best guidance on this.

Step Five: Strategy

Work groups (not committees) should be assembled through the church to accomplish on-going needs. Each work group should have a strategy process for accomplishing the needs of the church. Example: to save money on cleaning the church a Building and Grounds work group, could develop a cleaning schedule and recruit volunteer families to be responsible for a week. Same for lawn care. An Evangelism and Outreach work group can assist the pastor with creating the boomerang calendar; consideration should be given to what is actually possible for this church to do.

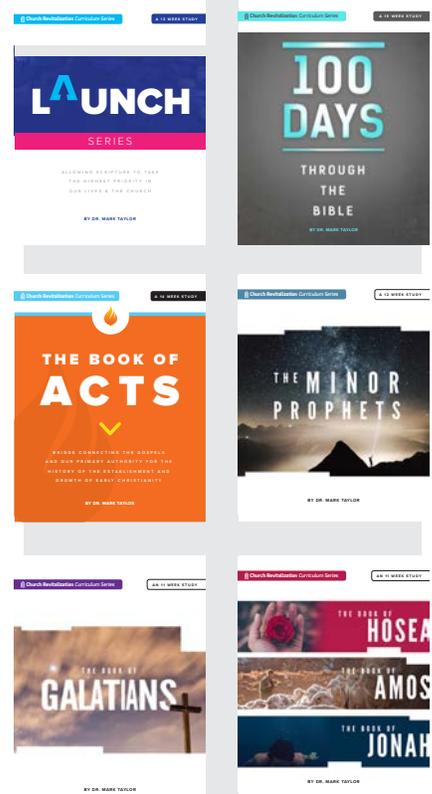
Step Six: Training Events

The SBTC offers two events per year for pastors to attend. The Revitalization Retreat (Spring) and the Revitalization Forum (Fall). These are strategic and intentional to assist the pastor in the revitalization process. The Forum is opportunity to develop specific strategies and processes for the next year of the church. Attendance at these events will tremendously assist in the needed turnaround of the church.

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*The SBTC uses a sermon-based small group process. We have a launch series focused on spiritual renewal, which then moves you into a study of the Bible in 100 Days, and then text-driven, Bible book series. Sunday school/Small group material is available which covers the entire Bible. Sermon recommendations are connected with the curriculum (Text and title, not manuscripts, we do not believe in preaching someone else's sermon).



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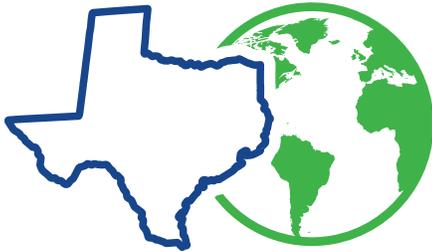
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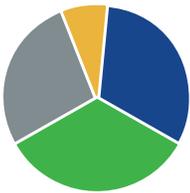


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