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CHURCH REVITALIZATION AND EVANGELISTIC
EMPHASIS: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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CHURCH REVITALIZATION AND EVANGELISTIC
EMPHASIS: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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For God and family

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| LIST OF TABLES | vi |
| PREFACE | vii |
| Chapter | |
| 1. INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Introduction to the Research Problem | 3 |
| Significance of the Study | 4 |
| Research Purpose | 5 |
| Delimitations of the Study | 5 |
| Research Questions | 6 |
| Research Assumptions | 6 |
| Procedural Overview | 7 |
| Research Design | 8 |
| Terminology | 10 |
| Conclusion | 11 |
| 2. PRECEDENT LITERATURE REVIEW | 12 |
| Mission of the Church | 14 |
| Evangelism | 18 |
| Changing Organizational Culture | 28 |
| Church Revitalization | 31 |
| Conclusion | 42 |

| Chapter | Page |
|---|------|
| 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY | 43 |
| Research Purpose | 43 |
| Research Questions | 43 |
| Research Design Overview | 44 |
| Research Population | 45 |
| Sample and Delimitations | 45 |
| Limitations of Generalization Research Findings | 46 |
| Research Instrumentation | 47 |
| Research Procedures | 47 |
| 4. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS | 49 |
| Compilation Protocol | 49 |
| Findings | 55 |
| Research Questions | 73 |
| Evaluation of the Research Design | 76 |
| Conclusion | 79 |
| 5. CONCLUSIONS | 80 |
| Research Implications | 80 |
| Research Applications | 83 |
| Additional Insights | 89 |
| Directives for Declining Churches | 91 |
| Further Research | 94 |
| Conclusion | 95 |
| Appendix | |
| 1. EXPERT PANEL REQUEST | 97 |
| 2. SURVEY REQUEST | 99 |
| 3. CHURCH REVITALIZATION INFLUENCE SURVEY | 101 |
| 4. TRANSCRIPTS | 112 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 232 |

LIST OF TABLES

| Table | Page |
|--|------|
| 1. Pastor age, tenure in local church and cumulative experience | 53 |
| 2. Phase 3 church participation profile | 55 |
| 3. Phase 2 ministry emphasis rate of importance | 56 |
| 4. Changes in church's evangelism ministry contributing to revitalization (question 13) | 56 |
| 5. Survey responses to level of agreement concerning the church's evangelism ministry during the revitalization process (question 14) | 58 |
| 6. Frequency of evangelism training (question 15) | 59 |
| 7. Themes noted among interviewed pastors | 60 |

PREFACE

At the conclusion of this research I am filled with hope, mostly founded in a quiet confidence that the Lord Jesus Christ is building His church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it (Matt 16:18). The need for church revitalization is severe and deserves to gather all the attention it can get. However, those whom God is currently using to grow His church are energetic, wise in the Word, and dependent on the Holy Spirit. I am sure that they will multiply their passion for the Great Commission in others and in the communities they serve.

A study of this magnitude is never accomplished in isolation, so I wish to say how grateful I am for so many who have helped along the way. To Dr. Michael Wilder, my doctoral supervisor, thank you for challenging me to take the passion you saw in me as a pastor practitioner and display it on the page as an academic scholar. You have a pastor's heart, and the Lord is using you in the context of church revitalization, but you are also a gifted scholar. Our conversations will continue to help me forge ahead to whatever the Lord calls me to in the future both in the church and in the context of academia. I am grateful also to Dr. Shane Parker. Your encouragements during the dissertation process were helpful and sharpening. To the 2016 Cohort, I am forever grateful for your fellowship and encouragement during the life of our program. Our time together in Louisville inside and outside the classroom never failed to aid me in pressing on academically and in ministry. I look forward to witnessing all the Lord does in and through us for his glory in the church and in the world. To the saints at FBC Roswell, thank you for your support in this season of doctoral work. So many prayed, wrote notes of encouragement, listened to ideas, and most of all lived out what it means to be a church that makes a priority of evangelism.

A special thanks goes to the love and support received from Burton and Nancy Hill; in so many ways you both have proved to be the “yokefellows” Paul speaks of when he addresses the Philippian church.

To my family, I cannot imagine this endeavor without your love and encouragement. Gracie, Bekah, and Zadok, you all are truly the apple of the eyes of your mother and me. Our hope and constant prayer are that God will use you all mightily in the kingdom of Christ as you fulfill a ministry and message of reconciliation offered through Jesus (2 Cor 5:17-21). To my amazing bride, Krista Faye, thank you for everything. Your partnership in life and ministry not only glorifies God, but also fills me with an overwhelming sense of unworthiness. I love you and could never say enough “thank yous.” You truly are my completer, and I am indebted to God that he knew “it is not good for man to be alone”(Gen 2:18) and gifted me with a wife like you! Every day is an adventure, and I look forward to running the race marked out for us as we fix our eyes of Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:1-2).

Finally, thank you to God my Father for my salvation and redemption in Christ. I am who I am because of who I am in Jesus. Thank you for my identity as adopted son, ambassador, husband, dad, and pastor. May I boast only in the cross of Jesus Christ today and every day for the rest of my life (Gal 6:14).

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Roswell, New Mexico

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The numbers are alarming. North American Mission Board President Kevin Ezell reports concerning Southern Baptist Churches between the years of 2007-2012: 43 percent of churches were plateaued and 30 percent were in decline.¹ This crisis crosses geographic and denominational lines as well. Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary states, “Between 80 to 90 percent of all evangelical churches in the United States are not growing, and a significant percentage are in outright decline.”²

¹ Kevin Ezell, “Breathing New Life into Dying Churches,” in *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, ed. Albert R. Mohler (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2015), 13. LifeWay Research defines church decline and plateau differently than the research design described later in this chapter. LifeWay Research or Annual Church Profile (ACP) data mentioned later in this chapter states “growing churches” as 10 percent or more increase in total membership over a five year period; “declining churches” as 10 percent or more decline in total membership over a five-year period; and “plateaued churches” as the churches in the margins between growing and declining (this includes churches with less than 10 percent decline over a five-year period ranging all the way to churches with less than 10 percent growth in a five-year period). Scott McConnell, Executive Director for LifeWay Research, email to author, February 11, 2018. See also graphic in Ronnie Floyd, “Fewer SBC Churches Growing, More SBC Churches Declining,” November 3, 2014, accessed February 13, 2017, <http://www.ronniefloyd.com/blog/8105/southern-baptist-convention/fewer-sbc-churches-growing-more-sbc-churches-declining/>.

² R. Albert Mohler, “Christ Will Build and Will Rebuild His Church: The Need for ‘Generation Replant,’” in Mohler, *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, 8. Rainer argues these numbers are exaggerated in Thom Rainer, “Dispelling the 80 Percent Myth of Declining Churches,” June 28, 2017, accessed August 30, 2017, <http://thomrainer.com/2017/06/dispelling-80-percent-myth-declining-churches/>. His data suggests roughly 65 percent of churches are declining or in a state of plateau, which is still troubling, but not nearly as bad as nine out of ten churches. The parameters of his research were the random selection of 1,000 churches in America, which provided available data through the years ranging from 2013-2016. In an interview on a moderated forum hosted by churchanswers.com, Rainer clarifies that a distinct feature of his study is the shift from measuring membership to worship attendance. Rainer noted that the majority of growth experienced by the growing churches could be attributed to transfer growth. Rainer observed that only 6.5 percent to 7 percent of churches were “evangelistically” effective, defined as having an attendance/baptism ratio of 50 percent of the average churches in the study. Based on the ambiguity of some of the specific metrics of this study, some questions exist regarding interpretation of the study in light of the prevailing body of literature. While a request was made to review the study, the information has not been made available at this time.

Darrin Patrick also observes that at the turn of the millennium only four states in the US saw a numeric growth in the percentage of population attending an established church.³ Joseph Hudson is precisely correct when he acknowledges, “The sober reality is that growing churches in America are the exception and not the rule.”⁴

A 2016 Barna Research study reveals less than one third of the American population attends church at least once a month.⁵ Add to this the concern of the growing number of young people in America with no faith foundation or religious affiliation known as the “nones.”⁶ A 2012 article titled “‘Nones’ on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation” published by Pew Research illuminates the trend of an entire generation who is quickly becoming agnostic. The article begins by stating, “One-fifth of the U.S. public—and a third of adults under thirty—are religiously unaffiliated today, the highest percentages ever in Pew Research Center polling.”⁷ Further findings on the “nones” reveal this group to be the second largest religious affiliation in North America.⁸ Indeed, these numbers are troubling.

Much work needs to be done not only in the area of planting new churches, but also with an increased effort to revitalize existing churches currently in decline. The church

³ Mark DeVine, Darrin Patrick, and Ed Stetzer, *Replant: How a Dying Church Can Grow Again* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2014), 32.

⁴ Joseph Stephen Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Churches: A Mixed Methods Study” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 1.

⁵ Barna Group, “The State of the Church 2016,” September 15, 2016, accessed December 27, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/state-church-2016/>. Their population size for this study was over 5,000 people who were surveyed between January and April of 2016.

⁶ Randall Reed, “A Book for None? Teaching Biblical Studies to Millennial Nones,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 19, no. 2 (April 2016): 154-74.

⁷ Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project, “‘Nones’ on the Rise,” October 9, 2012, accessed December 27, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>.

⁸ Conrad Hackett and Timmy Huynh, “What Is Each Country’s Second-Largest Religious Group?,” *Pew Research Center*, June 22, 2015, accessed December 21, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/22/what-is-each-countrys-second-largest-religious-group/>.

at large has a responsibility to reverse these trends and refuse to watch the evangelical church in America lose ground while demonstrating more and more severe symptoms of mortality.

Introduction to the Research Problem

With the number of churches forced to shut their doors, denominations have increased efforts to see new churches planted; however, the protestant world must ask if this effort is enough. The North American Mission Board (NAMB), the sending agency for Southern Baptist Churches, is setting optimistic goals in the area of church planting and recording great works of the Lord.⁹ That said, the numbers are not adding up. Simple arithmetic displays the gaping chasm that exists between the dying church problem and church planting efforts. Mohler cites a report from Assemblies of God Churches which says that “4,000 congregations close their doors in the United States every year, while only 1,000 evangelical churches are planted” and concludes, “We are falling further behind.”¹⁰

In *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can, Too*, Ed Stetzer offers hope for the dying church problem by identifying the top three factors for revitalization:¹¹ prayer, evangelism, and preaching.¹² His definition of a *comeback church* is simply stated, “Churches that experience significant growth through conversion as measured by increasing attendance and decreasing membership to baptism

⁹ Kevin Ezell, NAMB president states, “We want to increase the church birthrate by helping Southern Baptist start 15,000 new churches over a 10 year period.” Ezell, “Breathing New Life into Dying Churches,” 13.

¹⁰ Mohler, “Christ Will Build and Will Rebuild His Church,” 7-8.

¹¹ As stated in the section below, “Phase 1 and 2: Quantitative,” for the purposes of this research design, revitalization was defined by those churches who have declined 10 percent or greater in their average worship attendance over a five-year period and have subsequently seen a 10 percent annual growth in at least two years in a five-year period.

¹² Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can, Too* (Nashville: B & H, 2007), 200.

ratio.”¹³ Even still, churches that experience revitalization are the exception rather than the norm. Jesus makes it clear in the gospels that He is building His church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Matt 16:18). Yet, the reality is the church in America is losing ground. Now more than ever is the time to ask the hard questions, seek God’s face, and press into the command to fulfill the Great Commission. What is it going to take to reverse the problem of church death and decline?

While Rainer’s research in “Dispelling the 80 Percent Myth of Declining Churches” offers some encouragement, ultimately, he still concludes only 35 percent of churches are growing.¹⁴ One must ask how these growing churches are equipping their people to fulfill the Great Commission, engage the harvest, and see a change in the level of church members who are passionate to see the kingdom of Christ advanced? These themes are the motivations for the following research design.

Significance of the Study

As stated, church revitalization is certainly a topic of interest among evangelical church leaders.¹⁵ Some of the most pertinent information is already ten years old,¹⁶ yet little research has been done specifically connecting the priority of evangelism and discipleship among churches being revitalized.¹⁷ The primary mission of every local church, and even more critical for churches in need of revitalization, should be proclaiming

¹³ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, xxi.

¹⁴ Rainer, “Dispelling the 80 Percent Myth of Declining Churches.”

¹⁵ See Tom Cheyney, *The Seven Pillars of Church Revitalization & Renewal* (San Bernardino, CA: Renovate Publishing, 2016); Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B & H, 2016); and Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying & Divided Churches* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016).

¹⁶ For instance, Stetzer and Dodson’s *Comeback Churches* in 2007.

¹⁷ One rare example of research on the subject of church revitalization comes from C. Kirk Hadaway, “From Stability to Growth: A Study of Factors Related to the Statistical Revitalization of Southern Baptist Congregations,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30, no. 2 (June 1991): 181.

the good news of the gospel to a lost and dying world around them (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8ff).¹⁸ Acknowledging that there is a great deal of new information from this past decade and the fact that there is scant research with the specific focus on evangelistic emphasis for church revitalization were the leading motivators for this study. Providing more current and specific data to the research base were priority goals for the research.

Research Purpose

The intent of this three-phase, sequential mixed-methods study was to identify successful church revitalizations and determine what significance a focus on the Great Commission and/or the mission of the church had on those successes. The initial quantitative aspect was conducted in two phases, starting with an inquiry of churches that qualify for the study and ending by having qualifying churches surveyed. These measurements determined which churches have rebounded from their decline while making obedience of the Great Commission for their members a priority during that transition. Data gathered from this phase determined which participants were selected for a third qualitative phase. In the qualitative phase, interviews were conducted to identify best practices among pastors who have led their churches through the revitalization. More specifically drawing the connection between these pastors and what practices, in their view, led their churches to have a clear understanding and obedience to the Great Commission. Discerning these “best practices” not only has application for dying and plateaued churches, but also for growing churches to maintain church health.

Delimitations of the Study

The delimitations of the study were as follows. All churches researched in this study were Southern Baptist Congregations and needed to complete and return the Annual

¹⁸ For further discussion on this topic, see Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* (Nashville: B & H, 2013).

Church Profile (ACP) to LifeWay. Furthermore, this study was limited to investigating churches who had experienced a period of decline in the last ten years and thereafter seen revitalization as determined in the research design and methodology.¹⁹ As a final stipulation, this research identified and narrowed in on the churches experiencing revitalization who identified evangelism and obedience to the Great Commission as a priority of their efforts to revitalize. If a church failed to meet the above criteria it was not chosen for the qualitative interview phase.

Research Questions

The above described research design focused on four main research questions for this study; three were quantitative and one was a qualitative question.

Quantitative Questions

1. What percentage of Southern Baptist Churches are currently declining?
2. Of those churches that have experienced decline, what percentage have experienced revitalization?
3. Of those churches that experienced revitalization, what percentage emphasized evangelism and their membership participating in fulfilling the Great Commission?

Qualitative Questions

1. Among churches that experienced revitalization with a priority of evangelism and obedience to the Great Commission, what did their pastors and leadership do to make that a priority?

Research Assumptions

This research design acknowledges the following assumptions: the Holy Bible is authoritative and true, and true church revitalization is impossible outside of the power of God. When it comes to the mission of the church or the gospel truths that must be

¹⁹ Gleaning from Stetzer and Rainer's previous experience, some of these criteria include identifying a church as plateaued or declined when they fail to grow by 10 percent in average worship attendance over a five-year period with a rebound of a 10 percent increase each year in at least two out of five years. Also, a 20:1 worship attendance to baptism ratio as recorded by the baptism numbers reported in the ACP.

proclaimed in evangelistic efforts, this project heavily relied on the commands found in the Bible. In regard to strategies and best practice of church revitalization detailed in chapter 5, no lasting spiritual growth is possible outside of the supernatural power of God. William Henard does well to remind church leaders that “church revitalization occurs because of the of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, not just because of our efforts.”²⁰

Procedural Overview

The procedural overview for this mixed-methods study and research design are described next.

Population and Selection Criteria

The population for this research study was Southern Baptist churches who experienced decline and subsequent turnaround in the last ten years. This information not only provided the most current data, but increased the probability that the pastor leading the revitalization is currently serving at the church, which showed turnaround. Using the ACPs, churches were identified and then underwent further scrutiny to determine if they would make up the research sample in the second phase.

Research Sample

The research sample was derived from the churches who met the population criteria as given in the research method. Given the qualifications of the churches to meet the selection criteria, the sample was far from random. The sampling technique used was non-probability sampling. Through a system of screening, the churches selected for the qualitative portion of this study were assumed to be rich sources of information.

²⁰ William Henard, *Can These Bones Live: A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 16.

Delimitations of the Sample

The delimitations of the sample were determined through a series of grids that were applied to the data (see research methodology). To discover churches who were candidates for the qualitative portion of the research, certain markers for making evangelism and the Great Commission a priority for church revitalization were discovered through surveying the churches that meet the population criteria.²¹

Limitations of Generalization Research Findings

The population and sample was derived from Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) churches in America. While there may be limitations in direct application of these findings depending on the cultural context of a given church, the conclusions and findings have general principles and may be transferrable for all churches. After synthesizing the data and determining best practice for revitalization, there is wisdom for pastors and church leaders in numerous and diverse contexts. This group certainly includes all SBC churches experiencing decline and revitalization, but is also transferable across many denominations of churches desiring church health.

Research Design

Given the nature of the mixed-methods approach, the design of this research consisted of the three following phases:

Phases 1 and 2: Quantitative

Phase 1 of this study was quantitative. Data was collected through the LifeWay ACPs to discover which churches had seen decline in the last ten years and had since rebounded toward revitalization. Having already done some similar research, Stetzer's

²¹ For more on the markers for churches making evangelism and the Great Commission a priority in their revitalization efforts, see chap. 3 on methodology.

marker for decline, which he outlines in *Comeback Churches*,²² was immensely helpful for our research team.²³ He identifies a church in decline when it fails to grow a minimum of 10 percent of its average worship attendance over a three to five-year period.²⁴ After identifying churches who have experienced this specific decline, the next step was to identify churches who had seen a turnaround toward revitalization. Stetzer is helpful here as well—he wanted to identify a 10 percent annual increase in worship attendance. In our research we looked for that 10 percent increase in worship attendance to be consistent over a two out of three-year period as a marker for revitalization. In addition to this marker, Thom Rainer provides a helpful resource for tracking conversion growth and the health of a church in his book *BreakOut Churches*.²⁵ In his research design he identified churches experiencing revitalization by having a minimum worship attendance to conversion ratio as 20:1 annually, which can be identified through baptism numbers turned in by the ACP. Thus, three factors determined churches that have experienced revitalization:

1. A church has declined by 10 percent or greater in their average worship attendance over a five-year period.
2. A church who has reversed that trend of decline by showing a consistent increase of average worship attendance by 10 percent annually at a minimum for two out of three years.
3. A church that is maintaining a minimum of average worship attendance to conversion and baptism ratio of 20:1 on an annual basis.

In phase 2, churches who meet the criteria as discovered from data collected through the LifeWay ACP were then selected for a survey to be distributed through

²² See Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*.

²³ The research protocol for phase 1 and phase 2 was conducted as part of a research consisting of six doctoral students under the supervision of Michael Wilder. While different team members carried out different responsibilities, the product of the research is a joint effort.

²⁴ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, xii.

²⁵ Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

SurveyMonkey. The key focus of this survey was to determine what priority the current pastoral leadership considered an emphasis on evangelism and the Great Commission had in the revitalization of their church. Those that scored the highest on this survey were selected for the qualitative portion of the research.

Phase 3: Qualitative

Churches and pastors who met the selection criteria were pursued for the qualitative portion of this research. The proposed research design was created with the intent of interviewing a minimum of twelve churches whose revitalization status appeared to be greatly influenced by a priority on evangelism and the Great Commission. Areas of focus in this interview included the following questions:

1. What measures were taken to develop a culture of evangelism among the church membership?
2. Were there specific strategies and methods identified and used for training church members and tools for leading the church to obey the Great Commission?
3. How did you and others lead the church in developing a system of celebrating victories when it came to having evangelism as a priority?
4. What roadblocks were there, if any, when the congregation was experiencing change to see a priority on evangelism and the Great Commission?
5. What are some of your greatest stories of success you would like to praise God for in this season of revitalization of the church you are leading?

The answers to these interviews were collected and synthesized in order to draw conclusions about the importance and priority of evangelism and the Great Commission among churches experiencing revitalization.

Terminology

As the topic of church revitalization is being written and spoken about in broad terms, an intentional definition of terms should prove helpful for the remainder of the research. The following terms are used throughout this thesis.

Church decline or plateau. An individual church is in decline or plateau when it fails to grow a minimum of 10 percent of its average worship attendance over a three- to five-year period.²⁶

Evangelism. Verbal proclamation (see Rom 10:17 “so faith comes from hearing”) and invitation to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ procuring the forgiveness of sin, righteousness of God, and gift of grace for all who repent and believe.²⁷

Revitalization. Joseph Hudson explains, “Revitalization is an intentional change of culture and praxis by members of a church community, after a period of plateau or decline, that leads to greater church health and numerical growth.”²⁸

Conclusion

The dying and declining church problem in America will not be solved on its own. As stated in the outset of this chapter, the majority of churches are in a state of decline or plateau. Add to this the fact that growing churches are the exception rather than the rule, then the natural conclusion is that something needs to change. There is certainly a need for a movement of God, passionate persevering pastors and church leaders, and a willingness of church members to awaken to the Great Commission by increasing personal evangelism efforts.

While this chapter was devoted to introducing the research problem, the following chapter reviews precedent literature in the fields of church revitalization, mission of the church, organizational change, and evangelism and discipleship strategy. It also demonstrates the current void in research specifically connecting church revitalization and evangelistic emphasis. In addition, it notes the lack of current data on church revitalization success in the last ten years.

²⁶ See Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, xxi.

²⁷ J. I. Packer, *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1991), 91.

²⁸ Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization.”

CHAPTER 2

PRECEDENT LITERATURE REVIEW

The book of Acts begins by stating, “I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach” (v. 1:1), thus implying that the rest of the book is about all Jesus continued to do through his church. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus tells Peter that on his confession, “Jesus is the Son of God,” and through Peter and the rest of the apostles he will build his church.¹ For almost twenty centuries, the Lord has been accomplishing this task through, using obedient followers of Christ to fish for men and build his church.

While the church has been given a clear mission in the Great Commission, too often churches fail to obey, which in turn creates the need for church revitalization. Thom Rainer observes, “As I looked at the deaths of fourteen churches, I saw a common pattern. Obedience to the Great Commission faded; it usually faded gradually.”² Rainer writes, “Some churches begin with great heart and great effort toward the Great Commission. But the methods used become the focus rather than the Great Commission itself. As a

¹ The interpretation of Matt 16:18 has been debated through the ages. Recent examples include Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1 (Nashville: Holman, 1992); and David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 404. Both Turner and Blomberg disagree with the above interpretation as they translate “on this rock” to be Peter. For example, Blomberg states,

It is often alleged, however, that the “rock” must be Christ or Peter’s confession of Christ, especially since the days of Luther and the Protestant Reformation. These alternatives understandably react against traditional Roman Catholic equation of Peter with the first pope and against an elaborate ecclesiology built on this verse. But a legitimate interpretation of vv. 18b-19, as below, predicates nothing of this, so there should be no theological objections to taking Peter as “the rock.” (Blomberg, *Matthew*, 252)

Ultimately, I side with Chrys C. Caragounis, *Peter and the Rock* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), 89; and David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2013), 173. Caragounis and Garland both affirm the interpretation given above.

² Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 42.

consequence the Great Commission becomes the Great Omission.”³ Is there a connection to the need for church revitalization and this apparent fading of the desire and ability for churches to fulfill the Great Commission?

Regarding evangelism and the mission of the church, Mark Dever says, “Christians should tell everyone the good news. And we should all evangelize, we should do so with honesty, urgency, and joy, living a life that backs up our message—and doing it all for the glory of God.”⁴ The impetus of Dever’s book becomes clearer in the appendix, as he transparently includes a letter that outlines these thoughts in their original form as a letter to his former congregation.⁵ Dever explains the problem with unhealthy churches: they are full of people who have had some sincere experience with the Lord in their lives but never experienced fruitful change since then. Sadly, this is often true with “Christians” who refuse to share their faith and thus fulfill the mission of God for the church.

George Barna offers statistical evidence to support the previous claims. When asked about the single most important thing self-proclaimed Christians wanted to accomplish in life, only one-fifth stated something to do with spiritual growth, living in God’s will, evangelizing others, or raising kids to be Christians.⁶ If Christ-followers do not desire to fulfill the Great Commission, then what have Christians been left here to do? Another sad reality is the tragically low number of Christians who would identify their spiritual gift to be evangelism. In *Futurecast*, George Barna writes,

One cannot help but wonder if the reduction in interpersonal evangelism is at least partially attributable to the fact that only one percent of Christian adults (self-described or born again) claim the gift of evangelism. Though the Bible never suggests that one must possess this gift in order to share the gospel, the tiny

³ Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 39.

⁴ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 148.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 269.

⁶ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2001), 42.

proportion of believers who self-identify with the gift reflects the stalled growth of the Christian church in America.⁷

In another study conducted among 450 self-proclaimed “born again” adults, a mere 20 percent selected a priority in evangelizing others.⁸ It is astonishing to consider the failure of the church to fulfill the Great Commission. In an attempt to reverse this trend, Mark Clifton writes,

The heartbeat of what it means to replant a church is the process of ensuring a continued legacy for the thousands of near-death churches throughout North America by leading them to reengage with the missions and ministry that laid the foundation of the church.⁹

He further supports this point when states, “The only metric that matters can’t be measured entirely from within your church walls. Jesus gives us this metric in the Great Commission. Our job is to make disciples who make disciples.”¹⁰

Overcoming the failure to fulfill the Great Commission is at the heart of this particular research on church revitalization. To this end, we will continue to observe the following themes in the rest of this precedent literature chapter: the mission of the church, the importance of evangelism, and its connection to church revitalization.

Mission of the Church

After his crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples and left them with marching orders. Since that day, the church has had a specific and crucial job to fulfill. Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert speak to this urgency and mission: “It is our unique mission and plain priority that this unpopular, impractical gospel message gets told, that neighbors and nations may know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,

⁷ George Barna, *Futurecast: What Today’s Trends Mean for Tomorrow’s World* (Austin, TX: Barna, 2011), 171.

⁸ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 39.

⁹ Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 112.

and that by believing, they may have life in his name.”¹¹ In church revitalization, leading churches back to this central mission must inform all pastors and leaders say and do.

That said, leading a church to have the same definition and understanding of what is being addressed when one says the word *mission* can be difficult. DeYoung and Gilbert argue that the term is used too broadly.¹² In *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel*, Andreas Köstenberger makes a similar observation:

The word “mission,” similar to the term “discipleship,” is commonplace in the contemporary church. Young people may go on a short-term mission or prospective missionaries join a mission agency. In theological writings, too, the expression “mission” is ubiquitous.¹³

A clear definition of the term *mission* is provided by DeYoung and Gilbert:

The mission of the church is to go into the world and make disciples by declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit and gathering disciples into churches, that they might worship the Lord and obey his commands now and into eternity to the glory of God the Father.¹⁴

Of course, the best resource for defining *mission* would be to survey the Great Commission passages in the Bible (Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:14-16;¹⁵ Luke 24:44-49; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8).

¹¹ Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 249.

¹² *Ibid.*, 18.

¹³ Andreas J. Kostenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 1.

¹⁴ DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 18.

¹⁵ Many scholars agree that the ending of Mark is not included in the original manuscripts and should not be considered with equal weight as the rest of the canon. Stein writes, “The longer endings of Mark are acknowledged by almost all scholars to be later additions to Mark’s Gospel.” Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 727. Akin agrees: “Verses 9-20 are not found in the oldest and most reliable manuscripts.” Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, ed. David Platt and Tony Merida (Nashville: Holman, 2014), 362.

The Great Commission text in Matthew 28:18-20 is most often quoted and is handled in more detail later in this chapter.¹⁶ John's account in John 20:21-23 is the shortest and simplest as Jesus states, "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you."¹⁷ Luke's gospel, in Luke 24:44-49,¹⁸ offers a message of hope and speaks of the forgiveness of sins as the central message of Jesus' command to proclaim the gospel.¹⁹ In Acts 1:8,²⁰ Jesus teaches his disciples that the "restoration of the kingdom involves worldwide mission."²¹ While all these accounts are different and could stand alone, there are similarities, which need to be observed.

Consistent themes between these passages exist, which should be noted as they pertain to the mission of the church. One of these concerns the geographic and ethnic magnitude of the call to make disciples of all nations. Darrell Bock writes, "This is a

¹⁶ Matt 28:18-20 says,

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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 that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

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

¹⁷John 20:21-23 says, "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.' And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.'"

¹⁸Luke 24:44-49 says,

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

¹⁹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 626.

²⁰ Acts 1:8 says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

²¹ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, New American Commentary, vol. 30 (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1992), 84.

universal message, offered to anyone from any nation.”²² In addition, both the Luke and Acts accounts of the Great Commission share the “witnesses” theme. David Garland rightly argues, “The disciples move from being eyewitnesses to becoming ministers of the word. As witnesses, they no longer assume the passive role of observers but actively champion the gospel with their testimony.”²³ This point will see later application for churches seeking to change the culture of the organization and encourage the membership to share an evangelistic fervor.

In these texts, the reader also perceives that the power to fulfill the Great Commission does not come from the witnesses but from God himself in the person of the Holy Spirit. In Luke and Acts, the emphasis on the Holy Spirit is clear. Also, in John, although the disciples had not yet experienced Pentecost, the symbolic meaning of the soon to be given Spirit is seen as Jesus breaths on his disciples.²⁴ Of course, this observation further supports Henard’s comments mentioned in chapter 1: “Church revitalization occurs because of the of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, not just because of our efforts.”²⁵

A grasp on the biblical texts calling believers to Christ’s mission is vital, but not the only component in church revitalization. Leading a church to not only understand the mission, but also faithfully live it out comes as a result of allowing the gospel of Christ to have a foundational effect in one’s life. In *Center Church*, Tim Keller contends that one must experience a personal revival of sorts before ever expecting a church or citywide

²² Bock, *Luke*, 626.

²³ David E. Garland, *Luke*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 968.

²⁴ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 573. See also D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (repr., Leicester, England: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990). In opposition to the “symbolic” reading, see James Hamilton, Jr., *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 159.

²⁵ William Henard, *Can These Bones Live: A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 16.

revival. He writes, “Gospel renewal is a life-changing recovery of the gospel. Personal gospel renewal means the gospel doctrines of sin and grace are actually experienced, not just known intellectually.”²⁶ Beyond the necessity of individual leaders experiencing personal revival is the need for the commitment of laypeople in the congregation to speak the good news of the gospel.

Evangelism

Effective evangelism requires faithful discipleship and effective discipleship includes passionate evangelism.²⁷ While the Great Commission puts evangelism and discipleship as two sides of the same coin,²⁸ this research zeros in on the conversation of evangelism.²⁹

In *Tell the Truth*, Will Metzger provides gems of wisdom when it comes to practical evangelism, but also maintains a solid theological underpinning for the task of fulfilling the Great Commission. At the outset of his work, Metzger writes, “[My] goal is to help you recover the theological content of the gospel because only as your view of

²⁶ Timothy Keller, *Center Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 51. Keller offers a theological textbook for gospel-centered ministry. He explains his “theological vision” with the phrase *center church*, by stating that the gospel must stay in the center, and further offers practical applications about churches being the center of the city. In chap. 21, titled “Equipping People for Missional Living,” Keller defines the goal of churches in developing “every-member gospel ministry” and creatively lists what that might look like for various church members in all walks of life. *Ibid.*, 279. The kind of missional living he is proposing happens in the context of engaging neighbors, colleagues, coworkers, and friends.

²⁷ Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016). See Dever’s arguments concerning living in view of eternity to include “helping others follow Jesus; doing deliberate good; praying for gospel influence, and proclaiming God’s words.” *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁸ A cursory survey of the Great Commission in Matt 28:18-20 connects the command to make disciples by baptizing, assuming they have received the gospel, and teaching these new believers to obey everything Christ has commanded. Therefore, evangelism and discipleship are two sides of the same coin. The verbs in this passage tell the story: “make disciples” is the imperative verb, while “go,” “baptize,” and “teach” are participles of “make disciples. See Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 1080.

²⁹ LeRoy Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978). Eims is a helpful resource for those just getting started in discipleship relationships. See also Robert Emerson Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Westwood, NJ: F. H. Revell, 1964).

God's active grace in salvation is changed can you find the confidence, joy, and gratitude to undergird a new evangelistic lifestyle"³⁰ Regarding sharing the gospel, one needs to remember the importance of offering an invitation to repent and believe. In *Evangelism & Sovereignty of God*, J. I. Packer says, "The message begins with information and ends with an invitation."³¹ When the evangelist shares the hope found in a relationship with Jesus Christ yet leaves out the proper response of repentance and faith, he has not shared the full gospel.

Rico Tice and Carl Laferton offer another strategic resource on evangelism for the church in *Honest Evangelism*. He is diligent to discuss principles rather than verbatim outlines to make gospel conversations flexible for the context each Christ follower finds himself in as he is sharing the gospel. Tice's three themes of gospel content include the identity of Christ, the mission of Christ (the cross at Calvary), and the call for response (repent and believe). Another helpful aspect of this work is his ability to identify a major stumbling block for most believers when it comes to evangelism. He discovered the following of non-evangelizing Christians: "In their hearts, they were serving something good that they have made into their god—their idol. And that's what was stopping them from evangelizing."³² He concludes that the idol of believers who are unwilling to share their faith is comfort: "It's because actually what we most want is a comfortable life, or a good reputation with friends and colleagues, or a nice settled existence with friends and family and so on."³³ As Tice draws his book to a close, one of the last pieces of advice he

³⁰ Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth: The Whole Gospel Wholly by Grace Communicated Truthfully & Lovingly*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013), 15.

³¹ J. I. Packer, *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1991), 91.

³² Rico Tice and Carl Laferton, *Honest Evangelism* (London: Good Book, 2015), 43.

³³ *Ibid.*, 44.

offers Christians when it comes to evangelism is to “just be you” and to remember “we are all wired to serve God in our unique way.”³⁴

One of the newest and most widely used tools for evangelism in SBC churches and the North American Mission Board is the “3 Circles Gospel Conversation Guide.”³⁵ In *Turning Everyday Conversations into Gospel Conversations*, the authors direct pastors and church leaders in a “how to” session on training individuals and churches with the 3 Circles tool. In humility, they state, “3 Circles is simply a tool. We love and are committed to Christ, not tools. We always have to remember that this is God’s work, and He’s doing it. He is the one reconciling the world to Himself, and He just uses us as His mouthpieces.”³⁶ In this resource, they also give clear biblical wisdom concerning the need for abundant seed sowing of the gospel message: “The gospel advances when people sow regularly and generously, not erratically and sparingly. This is why leaders of multiplying movements train new believers to go and immediately begin sharing the gospel.”³⁷ Sowing the gospel message is central to the mission of the church, but understanding how people are called to respond according to Scripture is just as important.

Repentance and Belief at Conversion

In Mark 1:15, Jesus makes his mission clear: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” As the Savior broke into

³⁴ Tice, Laferton, and Carson, *Honest Evangelism*, 75.

³⁵ Over the last three decades, it seems that the SBC has promoted a new evangelism tool once every ten years. In the 1990s it was *Continuous Witness Training* (see Thom S. Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996]). At the turn of the century F.A.I.T.H. training dominated SBC churches (see Chip Alford, “More than 600 Churches Committed to Attend FAITH Training Clinics,” *Baptist Press*, July 17, 1998, accessed March 10, 2017, <http://www.bpnews.net/2387/more-than-600-churches-committed-to-attend-faith-training-clinics>). The evangelism tool that will go down as the dominant evangelism tool for the present decade in the SBC is 3-Circles.

³⁶ Jimmy Scroggins, Steve Wright, and Leslee Bennett, *Turning Everyday Conversations into Gospel Conversations* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 85.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

human history to fulfill promises made long ago by his life, death, and resurrection he ensured that “all the promises of God found their yes in him” (2 Cor 1:20). Jesus’ message of repentance and belief in the gospel was not intended to be unique to him, but the central message of all those who would follow him as well. Daniel Akin writes in *Exalting Jesus in Mark*: “Those who are confronted with the kingdom of God must repent, that is, ‘change their minds leading to a change in behavior.’ It is both a rational and willful act. It involves a turn from sin and a turn to a Savior.”³⁸ James Mays, who wrote *Jesus Came Preaching*, agrees: “The substance of the gospel is the presence of the Kingdom, which is the reality that calls for repentance and belief in the gospel.”³⁹

Repentance and belief are requirements for genuine Christ followers to experience the kingdom.⁴⁰ Understanding what this repentance looks like in the life of an individual confronted with the truths of the gospel can be extremely helpful. Kenneth Keathley writes, “There is a type of sorrow that merely laments the unhappiness of the situation that one’s deeds have caught up with him, but a sorrow that truly repents is a genuine remorse for the sins committed.”⁴¹ He later adds, “Repentance requires a submission to God’s revealed truth and a commitment to radical honesty about oneself.”⁴² Having a grasp on repentance and belief as a vital component of gospel growth is a priority, but what if only a small percentage of church members are sharing the gospel?

³⁸ Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 19.

³⁹ James Luther Mays, “Jesus Came Preaching: A Study and Sermon on Mark 1:14-15,” *Interpretation* 26, no. 1 (January 1972): 32.

⁴⁰ Stein, *Mark*, 74.

⁴¹ Kenneth Keathley, *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, rev. ed. (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 576.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Church-Wide Evangelistic Fervor

Everyone in the church has a part to play in seeing the kingdom of Christ move forward. Many churches seats are filled with Christians who have been tempted to believe the lie from Satan that evangelism and discipleship are only a task for the select few who have been given special gifts and passions.⁴³ In *The Sending Church*, Pat Hood offers resolution to people who think this way: “If we think some are ‘called’ to missions and others aren’t, then we’ll be content to pay for others to do missions for us. But when we realize we’re ‘called’ to missions, everything changes.”⁴⁴

In *Gaining by Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches that Send*, J. D. Greear gives firsthand experience of what it took for his church to get a passion for the Great Commission and understand the importance of being sent out. He challenges all pastors to evaluate their ministries when he states, “If the people in our churches are not ‘going’ we are not doing our jobs.”⁴⁵ Greear gives copious accounts telling story after story of how his church sent some of his closest friends in ministry into the mission field in an effort to be a healthy church. Regarding the mission of the church, Greear says, “The Great Commission is not a calling for some; it is a mandate for all. . . . When the church begins to operate with the assumption that *everyone is called*, our approach to mobilization will shift dramatically.”⁴⁶

Robert Coleman, who wrote *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, reminds that this kind of multiplication is Jesus’ strategy for the church:

⁴³ In total transparency, some members of the church I lead still feel this way, but I love them and will continue to pray for the Holy Spirit to bring them conviction and growth so they can be a part of what God is doing in advancing His kingdom for his glory and our joy.

⁴⁴ Pat Hood, *The Sending Church: The Church Must Leave the Building* (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 181.

⁴⁵ J. D Greear, *Gaining by Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches That Send* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 20.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

His whole evangelistic strategy—indeed, the fulfillment of his very purpose in coming into the world, dying on the cross, and rising from the grave—depended on the faithfulness of his chosen disciples to this task. It did not matter how small the group was to start with so long as they reproduce and taught their disciples to reproduce.⁴⁷

Thus, it is not only the Christian leader’s responsibility to maintain a ministry of proclamation of calling people to repent and believe in the gospel, but truly, it is the responsibility of every genuine Christ follower.

Evangelism to the “Ends of the Earth”

An aspect of leading a church to have evangelistic fervor is directly associated with a passion and plan for taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.⁴⁸ In *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution*, Smith and Kai come together to share their decades of missionary experience and give glory to God for all the churches they have seen started. In regard to evangelism, Smith writes, “We have a responsibility to share the gospel in a way that is not needlessly difficult to grasp—it must be understandable in their worldview.”⁴⁹ The good news of redemption through the promised Messiah existed long before the New Testament Church. Andreas Köstenberger and Peter O’Brien synthesize God’s overarching redemptive mission from both biblical testaments in their seminal book on the subject, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*. They state their goal for the audience is to help give “a greater appreciation of God’s saving plan that moves from creation to new creation.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 99.

⁴⁸ The “ends of the earth” language here is an abbreviation of the Great Commission text found in Acts 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

⁴⁹ Steve Smith and Ying Kai, *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution: The Story Behind the World’s Fastest Growing Church Planting Movement and How It Can Happen in Your Community!* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2011), 217.

⁵⁰ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Leicester, England: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2001), 50.

In *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible*, Mark Dever clearly states one of the primary purposes of the church is “the evangelization of the world.”⁵¹ Later in the same chapter, he discusses this happening in a local context because of the natural relationships church members have in the community they gather and then scatter back out into on a weekly basis. However, the mission of the church does not stop there. Dever explains, “Witnessing the glory of God proclaimed around the globe in the hearts of all his people should be an end and purpose for every local church.”⁵²

John Piper also delivers a power-packed text on global missions driven by a passion to see God glorified to the ends of the earth. He states, “One overwhelming aspect of this hope is its expectation that the truth of God would reach to all people groups of the world and that these groups would come and worship the true God.”⁵³ Another helpful exhortation is his focus on every local church doing their part to take the “all nations” aspect of the Great Commission seriously. Piper says, “Every denomination and church [should] have some vital group that is recruiting, equipping, sending, and supporting Paul-type missionaries to more and more unreached peoples.”⁵⁴ Church revitalization efforts need to exhibit a passion and priority for both sharing the gospel with neighbors and friends and also to the ends of the earth! Having established pertinent discussion on evangelistic emphasis in churches and the need for evangelistic fervor in church revitalization, it is also necessary to address the landscape of evangelism currently in churches. To this end, a brief survey of relevant empirical studies on the evangelism in churches is found next.

⁵¹ Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 69.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 76.

⁵³ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 170.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 196.

Empirical Study in Evangelism

When it comes to churches and their evangelistic efforts, the numbers in many Southern Baptist Churches are alarming. In 2016, *Baptist Press* released the findings from the Annual Church Profile (ACP): “Reported membership declined more than 200,000, down 1.32% to 15.3 million members. Average weekly worship attendance declined by 1.72% [roughly ninety-six thousand nationwide] to 5.6 million worshippers.”⁵⁵ One might ask how these numbers are effected by evangelism or a lack of evangelism in SBC churches. To quantify that relationship, many look to baptism numbers, assuming that often times baptism would rightly be a reflection of a new conversion to Christ. Again, the ACP numbers are not encouraging: “Reported baptisms have fallen eight of the last 10 years . . . down 3.3% in 2015.”⁵⁶

Joel Southerland, executive director of evangelism with the North American Mission Board (NAMB) reports similar findings: “The median baptisms for a SBC church is three.”⁵⁷ In his research, NAMB identified the top evangelistic churches in every state and surveyed them in an attempt to find best practices among various-sized churches with evangelistic fervor.⁵⁸ After synthesizing the responses of roughly 500 churches who responded to the survey, Southerland makes the following observations concerning evangelism:

Evangelistic members share their faith. They don’t necessarily use a canned presentation but they talk to those around them about their faith. They have gospel conversations. Evangelistic churches train their members with gospel sharing tools and encourage them to incorporate their own story into the narrative.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Baptist Press, “ACP: More Churches Reported; Baptisms Decline,” June 7, 2016, accessed May 13, 2017, <http://www.bpnews.net/46989/acp-more-churches-reported-baptisms-decline>.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Joel Southerland, “What Are the Top Evangelistic Churches Doing That Mine Is Not?,” NAMB, December 10, 2015, accessed May 13, 2017, <https://www.namb.net/your-church-on-mission-blog/what-are-the-top-evangelistic-churches-doing-that-mine-is-not>.

⁵⁸ Ibid. After 1,100 churches, they found the baptisms far exceeded the national average in the following four regions: Southwest (114), Northeast (31), Midwest (37), West (52).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

While these results are helpful, I would have benefitted more if raw numbers of his study had been posted.

Baptist Press recently published one specific study that gives more detailed numbers on SBC churches. In conjunction with the Billy Graham Center of Wheaton College, LifeWay Research, and the Caskey Center for Church Excellence of New Orleans Baptist Theological Center, this study randomly sampled 1,500 pastors of small churches (250 or less). It states, “Researchers then compared the 20% of churches with the most retained converts (11.7 or more per 100 attendees) to the 50% with the fewest retained converts (5.56 or fewer per 100 attendees).”⁶⁰ Among churches that best retained converts, their findings suggest that 92 percent of pastors consistently hear reports of church members engaging in gospel conversations, and 51 percent of those pastors attend personal evangelism training every six months. In a 2012 study, LifeWay Research surveyed nearly 3,000 protestant churchgoers asking questions regarding personal evangelism.⁶¹ John Wilke states, “Despite a vast majority believing it is their duty to share their faith (80%) . . . 61% have not shared how to become a Christian with anyone in the past 6 months.”⁶² Indeed these numbers must change if churches are to experience revitalization.

Another research team from Australia does well to provide usable numbers for their country and ministry context.⁶³ In *Churches Who Share their Faith: A Case Study Survey of the Baptist Union of Victoria*, they compare national averages of evangelism

⁶⁰ Bob Smietana, “Study: With Evangelism, Small Things Matter,” *Baptist Press*, August 28, 2017, accessed February 7, 2018, <http://www.bpnews.net/49436/study--with-evangelism-small-things-matter>.

⁶¹ John Wilke, “Churchgoers Believe in Sharing Faith, Most Never Do,” LifeWay Research, 2012, accessed May 13, 2017, <https://www.lifeway.com/en/articles/research-survey-sharing-christ-2012>.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ To my surprise, very little academic work has been done in the area of empirical research and evangelism in America. Though ample searches were made through dissertation archives, little to no research was reflected in this area, thus the information coming from Australia reported above.

numbers to the Baptist Union of Victoria.⁶⁴ While not case-for-case reflective of the SBC in America, their findings are enlightening. For example, they cite that only 9 percent of the Baptist churches in Victoria over a recent two-year span of time offered evangelistic training for their members.⁶⁵ Another finding that gives quantifiable numbers to a desperate situation of churches not fulfilling their call in the Great Commission is the low number of people who feel comfortable looking for opportunities to share their faith in Christ. Their research revealed a mere 17 percent of churchgoers in Australia felt at ease sharing their faith and often look for opportunities. One wonders if these numbers would be similar among SBC churches in America. While this group is encouraged that this number grew from 14 percent in a ten-year span of time,⁶⁶ I would argue that the numbers are not growing quickly enough.

To remedy the problem of evangelism in churches dying on the vine, one writer argues that church budgets should reflect an emphasis on evangelism training. While he does not cite his research, John Throop, president of The Summit Group, argues, “How much money do churches have invested in mission and evangelism? Coming into most churches in 2006, even more conservative Protestant congregations, the typical budget figure for his work is simple: \$0.”⁶⁷ His number can be debated,⁶⁸ but

⁶⁴ Darren Cronshaw et al., “Churches Who Share Their Faith: A Case Study Survey of the Baptist Union of Victoria,” *Australian E-Journal of Theology* 22, no. 2 (August 2015): 95-119. Using the National Church Life Survey (NCLS), which covers over 20 Australian denominations and 300,000 church attenders, this research team was able to compare data from 216,063 Australian nationals who were surveyed in the NCLS to the 8,830 adult attenders among churches in the Baptist Union of Victoria.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁶⁷ John Throop, “Investing in Mission and Evangelism,” *The Clergy Journal* 82, no. 8 (July 2006): 23.

⁶⁸ Smietana, “Study: With Evangelism.” This study reports that 42 percent of the 1,500 pastors surveyed had missions and evangelism budgets were greater than or equal to 30 percent of their annual budget.

the point is still well made. Steve Gains, recently appointed president of the SBC, seems to be in agreement as he is quoted from his 2017 Southern Baptist Convention address: “I want to encourage you to be a soul-winner. I want to encourage you to be evangelistic, said Gains who plans to appoint a task force for more effective personal evangelism.”⁶⁹

Church leaders need to ensure that their people are equipped and encouraged to be speak the gospel. That said, what are the difficulties in changing a culture where an emphasis on evangelism has been dormant for years? Is there any wisdom to offer for those attempting to lead colossal change in the DNA of a church’s foundational culture? For answers to these questions, it is necessary to consider organizational change.

Changing Organizational Culture

Change is inevitable in most organizations.⁷⁰ This idiom is also true for the local church. Leading the change in any context requires motivation, determination, perseverance, focus, and flexibility. From the Christian perspective, Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, in *Leading Congregational Change*, offer the following wisdom: “If the leaders of the congregation are not spending significant, consistent time seeking God’s direction—through prayer, Bible study, meditation, solitude, and fasting—it will be impossible for meaningful and lasting transformation to occur.”⁷¹ Though this comment from the authors

⁶⁹ Adelle Banks, “Faced with Declining Numbers, Southern Baptists Focus on Evangelism,” *Religion News Service*, June 2017, accessed February 7, 2018, <http://religionnews.com/2017/06/13/faced-with-declineing-numbers-southern-baptists-focus-on-evangelism/#>.

⁷⁰ Reid S. Trulson, “Ten Observations about Organizational Re-Structuring,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (2008): 316-22. Trulson argues that “change is continuous and increasingly rapid,” especially in the West. *Ibid.*, 319.

⁷¹ Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 31. Similar to John Kotter’s eight steps in the change process offered in his book *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012). Herrington, Bonem, and Furr offer the following stages for change: (1) Making Personal Preparation, (2) Creating Urgency, (3) Establishing the Vision Community, (4) Discerning the Vision and Determining the Visionpath, (5) Communicating the Vision, (6) Empowering Change Leaders, (7) Implementing the Vision, (8) Reinforcing Momentum through Alignment. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 13.

may be assumed by most, it is vital for the pastor or church leader seeking to lead revitalization in their churches to heed their admonition.

While the above scholars within the church give wise counsel when it comes to organizational change, secular theorists must be observed here as well. Edgar Schein, author of *Organization Culture and Leadership*, argues that to change culture one must identify and influence the artifacts, values, and assumptions of an organization. Schein defines artifacts: “All the phenomena that you would see, hear, and feel when you encounter an unfamiliar culture.”⁷² In churches experiencing plateau or decline, many of which have been in existence for many years, there is certainly much to see, hear, and feel within the existing culture. In the context of church revitalization, a leader must understand existing values and assumptions that may have contributed to the church’s decline or plateau before they will ever be able to change them. Kevin Peck, whose case studies of church culture change, is helpful in modifying Schein’s definition of culture in an effort to define the ultimate goal of leading a church through organizational change. He writes the following definition of *church culture*:

A set of tacit assumptions (both biblical and unbiblical) shared by local congregations as it attempts to flourish according to God’s will, addressing both external interaction and internal cooperation, that is considered to be true, and therefore is taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, feel in relation to God’s design and purpose to the individual, the local church, and the world.⁷³

In the later stages of Schein’s process, a change agent is then able to impact what Schein calls the embedded mechanisms, “mechanisms that a leader has available to them to reinforce the adoption of their own beliefs, values, and assumptions as the group gradually evolves into an organization.”⁷⁴ In this stage, the vision casting for healthy church revitalization becomes a priority. The consistent theme of a “healthy, disciple

⁷² Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 23.

⁷³ Kevin Jamie Peck, “Examining a Church Culture of Multiplication: A Multiple Case Study” (D.Min. project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 1.

⁷⁴ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 235.

making church” cannot be over communicated in this stage of the church revitalization process. Patrick Lencioni, while not an organizational change expert, yet highly regarded for his writing on healthy teams, affirms the need for repetitious communication: “Many leaders fail to over communicate because they get bored saying the same things over and over again. But that does not matter. The point of leadership is not to keep the leader entertained, but to mobilize people around what is most important.”⁷⁵ In church revitalization, what could be more important than communicating again and again the clear priority for the gospel to continue to be proclaimed?

Leading change in the church is not for the faint of heart, but when one’s motive is the glory of God, it is a worthy ambition and fulfilling achievement. In *The First Hundred Days*, Daniels argues, “Leading the body of Christ in extending the mission of the kingdom of Christ in the world is the most significant work a person can take on.”⁷⁶ Warner Burke, another practitioner in changing organizational culture offers wisdom to leaders experiencing change as well. Although his audience is generally more secular in nature, pastors and church leaders seeking to revitalize have much to learn from him. Burke argues the necessity of incorporating stories in the process of culture change.⁷⁷ Salvation testimonies of new converts and simple, honest accounts of gospel conversations are a sure way to make evangelistic emphasis a part of the culture of any church organization. In *The Heart of Change: Real Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations*, John Kotter contends that the first step in his eight-step change process is creating urgency.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Patrick M. Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 143.

⁷⁶ T. Scott Daniels, *First 100 Days, The: A Pastor’s Guide* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2011), 17.

⁷⁷ W. Warner Burke, *Organization Change: Theory and Practice*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2017), 341.

⁷⁸ John P. Kotter and Dan S. Cohen, *The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 15.

What could be more urgent than seeing the Great Commission fulfilled? Jesus has already clearly communicated in the gospels that “the harvest is plentiful” (Luke 10:2), thus the church revitalization process and communicating the urgency of the gospel go hand-in-hand. Walking through the journey of organization culture change is an essential aspect of the church revitalization process. Many other scholars and practitioners have written on the larger subject of church revitalization and the grit, skillset, and wisdom needed for those engaging this adventure.

Church Revitalization

As the numbers of dying churches continue to rise, more and more will be written about the need for church revitalization. While numerous authors join the conversation with several and sometimes-contradictory strategies, it is helpful to remember that, as Brian Croft writes, “Only God and his power can truly revitalize a dying, divided church, and God’s design to accomplish this is found through his Spirit at work in his word.”⁷⁹ What surprises me the most is how often church revitalization is discussed with zero mention of the need for evangelism. In his chapter “What Makes a Church Reform Possible,” John Folmar gives lip-service to the fruit of church reform being an “evangelistic impact on surrounding neighborhoods,” but when giving his four pillared strategy for church reform, he only mentions preaching (here he has the corporate worship setting primarily in view), providence, partnership, and patience.⁸⁰ Another

⁷⁹ Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying & Divided Churches* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), 17. Though Croft’s title suggests that his approach to church revitalization is biblical, he surprisingly makes little emphasis concerning the mission of the church or the great commission. Croft lists the day-to-day tasks of a pastor to be preaching, praying, visiting the sick, caring for widows, discipling others, raising up leaders, encouraging the weak, conducting weddings, and funerals. *Ibid.*, 35. In surprising fashion, personal evangelism is not mentioned once in these day-to-day tasks. Similarly he lists essential qualities for those called to pastor a dying church (with no mention of evangelistic fervor): Visionary shepherd, High tolerance for pain, Respect and passion for the church’s legacy, Passion for multi-generational ministry, A resourceful generalist, Tactical Patience, Emotional Awareness, and Spousal perseverance. *Ibid.*, 34.

⁸⁰ John Folmar, “What Makes a Church Reform Possible,” in *Revitalize: Why We Must Reclaim Dying Churches and How* | *9Marks Journal*, ed. Jonathan Leeman (Washington, DC: CreateSpace

example of this lack of attention given to evangelism is found in a book entitled *Nuts & Bolts of Church Revitalization*. Authors Tom Cheyney and Terry Rials combine their decades of ministry experience to compile their wisdom on the subject. Albeit, it seems the aim of their book is largely about addressing and reinventing organizational culture.⁸¹ One must read half way through their book to even find a mention of evangelism, and then it is only a brief mention among a list of other qualifications that a church revitalization team member must possess (collaboration, dedication, evangelistic fervor, optimism, and faith). Concerning this evangelistic fervor, Cheyney and Rials write, “Individual members must believe in evangelism. If you have a group on the team that does not believe you must work to reach the lost for Christ Jesus, they will hurt every single effort to impact the culture you trying to reach around the world.”⁸² As has been displayed, the voices that join the conversation for revitalization are not always in agreement and some are more beneficial than others. That said, next are a few of the more beneficial voices.

In *Can These Bones Live: A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization*, Bill Henard offers much needed encouragement to the men attempting to lead church revitalization. Pointing to Revelation 3:20-21,⁸³ Henard challenges the church leader not

Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), 35.

⁸¹ Cheyney and Rials’ “Seven Pillars” include Refocusing, Revisionizing, Renewal, Reinvention, Restoration, Restart & Repotting, and Revitalization.

⁸² Tom Cheyney and Terry Rials, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Revitalization* (Orlando: Renovate Publishing, 2015), 85.

⁸³ Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, New American Commentary, vol. 39 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2012), 143. Patterson rightly notes that this passage “might qualify as the most misused verse in the New Testament” for the overzealous evangelistic preacher due to the fact that Jesus in the context is addressing the church at Laodicea and not an unbeliever. That said, he offers the following wisdom for churches in need of waking up:

A final word may be permissible. In every era the ultimate adjudication about the value of an individual church is not the question of the name of the church on the shingle at the entrance or the history of the church's liaisons and relationships or even an analysis of the history of a particular congregation. The question to be answered is always the relationship of Christ to the local church. Is

to give up or lose hope: “To lead a church through revitalization takes risk. It requires time, patience, and biblical eschatology. The rewards however, remain strong. Jesus promised that he would not give up on the church and neither should we.”⁸⁴ It seems here that Henard is emphasizing the *Christus Victor* reality of Jesus—who is the one who conquered and sat down at the right hand of the Father. An additional risk/reward theme arises as one considers that a church which is going to have a successful revitalization needs to have a pastor who is willing to stay for at least ten years. Croft states, “I had very wise mentors who taught me well. I came with two commitments that I learned from them. First, I must faithfully preach the word, sacrificially love the people, and not change anything for a while. Second, regardless of what happens stay ten years.”⁸⁵ Through this testimony and others, Croft encourages, similar to Mark Dever, that all church revitalizers need to be willing to preach and pray, love, and stay.

A recent work by Andrew Davis titled *Revitalize: Biblical Keyes to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* offers wisdom and insights for those pastors who find themselves in dying church situations. For the last two decades, Davis himself pastored a church that had been reformed by his definition. While his book provides many topics for revitalization, most pertinent to this research is a chapter he titles “Embrace the Two Journeys of Disciple Making.”⁸⁶ Davis gives the following list as key concepts for every pastor seeking to lead revitalization in their church, and more particularly, give their people a passion and priority for evangelism and making disciples:

- (1) *Root all evangelism in the glory of God.* Teach that God’s glory is supreme (1 Cor. 10:31)—more important than even the value of a human soul—but show

he on the inside embraced, loved, honored, enthroned, and followed? Or is he on the outside knocking and calling for entrance to the entity that bears his name? (Ibid., 144)

⁸⁴ Henard, *Can These Bones Live*, 218.

⁸⁵ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 103.

⁸⁶ Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 47-58.

that the greatest display of God's glory in the universe is the salvation of sinners through faith in Christ

- (2) *Teach Christ's mission to save the lost.* Speak often the verses in which Christ lays out his evangelistic mission: "The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10; see also Matt. 20:28; John 4:34; 6:39-40). Then connect them with our mission: "As the Father sent me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21). Let the word of God do its convicting work!
- (3) *Establish plainly the spiritual condition of the lost.* Demonstrate biblically, that apart from the saving grace of God in Christ, all people are lost, "Having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12).
- (4) *Show the gospel of Christ is the only answer.* The exclusivity of Christ is central to the saving message of the Bible: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name in heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).
- (5) *Connect with two great commandments to evangelism.* All of God's law is summed up in "love God, and love your neighbor" (see Matt. 22:37-39). Regularly teaching the law will both reveal the sinfulness of all humanity (for no one keeps this law) and give us suitable motive for evangelism. We must be compelled by the love of Christ and love for our neighbor (2 Cor. 5:14-15).
- (6) *Train people in the gospel message.* In a dying church, the people have almost certainly never been carefully trained in evangelism—either in the gospel message itself or in practical approaches to holding gospel conversations with people. Revitalizing leaders must do this careful work of training the people of the church to reach their mission fields.
- (7) *Give people a vision for practical ministry that leads to evangelism.* The church must follow Jesus in meeting present needs but always point to the central, spiritual needs, for "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?" (Matt. 16:26). Missional churches find ways to connect with the surrounding community in which ministry to the body and soul are well-harmonized and properly proportioned. These ministries become a fruitful matrix of relationships in which the gospel can easily be shared.
- (8) *Prepare church for visitors.* As the training is going on, it is likely that more and more people will want to come to visit your church on a Sunday morning. Be ready to show them hospitality. Be ready to draw them into the life of the church.
- (9) *Follow up with visitors.* If visitors willingly give contact information, it is their way of saying "Please reach out to me." Such permission is like gold, so follow up with them.
- (10) *Seek a "culture of evangelism" rather than programs.* Old patterns of program-based, "come and see" evangelism (tent revivals, events at church, etc.) are not as effective as "go and tell" ministries in which people use their existing contacts with the lost to share the gospel.
- (11) *Have people get specific about their own mission field.* To that end, members of the church need to embrace their own mission field: workplace, neighborhood, children's activities (sports teams, music lessons, etc.). They need to be trained to think about lost people in their lives by name, and begin praying for them and asking God how he wants them to reach out. They can use hospitality, inviting lost people to their homes. They can use mercy ministry, if the coworker or fellow student or neighbor has some medical emergency.

(12) *Cover all of this in prayer.* Regular and extraordinary prayer for evangelistic fruit should characterize the revitalization effort from the beginning and all the way through.⁸⁷

It is interesting to note that when the priorities mentioned at the outset of his book are compared to an earlier published edition of the same article appearing in the above mentioned 9Marks Journal, the emphasis on evangelism seems to be missing.⁸⁸ Many of the chapter headings in Davis' *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* are revealed to be almost verbatim as his "Lessons from the Reform" written in Leeman's edited work *Revitalize: Why We Must Reclaim Dying Churches and How*, such as "Rely on God Not Yourself," "Rely on God's Word," "Saturate the Church in Prayer," "Be Patient," etc.⁸⁹ While his reproof to pastors concerning the need for discipleship multiplication in church revitalization is certainly welcome now, one wonders why it was not a priority for him early on in the conversation of church reform. Regardless of the reason Davis would give for the missing emphasis on evangelism in his original attempt at writing on revitalization, I still agree with him when he writes, "A church that stops reforming is dead" in his first published work⁹⁰

Another useful resource on the subject of church revitalization is Tom Cheyney's *The Seven Pillars of Church Revitalization and Renewal*. In his book, Cheyney focuses on the seven churches in the book of Revelation in order to identify the following seven themes for church's revitalization and renewal: re-alignment, re-visioning, refocusing, renewing, restarting, reinvention, and restoration. Toward the end of the book, he begins discussing conclusions concerning how various denominations are doing

⁸⁷ Davis, *Revitalize*, 204-7.

⁸⁸ Andrew Davis, "The Reform of First Baptist Church Durham," in Leeman, *Revitalize*, 5.

⁸⁹ For a detailed list of the similar themes, see Davis, "The Reform of First Baptist Church Durham," in Leeman, *Revitalize*, compared to the list Davis offers in chap. 1 of his book, "Eyes of Blazing Fire: The Zeal of Christ to Revitalize His Church," in *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again*.

⁹⁰ Davis, "The Reform of First Baptist Church Durham," in Leeman, *Revitalize*, 5.

in the efforts to revitalize churches. Specific to SBC churches, he explains that the ACP states that 28 percent of SBC churches are in a state of decline, 43.9 percent of SBC churches are in a state of plateau, and only 28.1 percent of churches are growing.⁹¹ In summary he writes, “A key factor in congregational decline is the failure to introduce new members to disciple making and equip them in the disciple-making mission of the church.”⁹² Henard would agree with the above statement as he argues, “In order to revitalize, the church has to rediscover its passion for the Great Commission.”⁹³

Empirical Study in Church Revitalization

There have been a handful of great resources offering best practice for church revitalization through various studies and empirical research. Kirk Hadaway provides one such example in his article “From Stability to Growth: A Study of Factors Related to the Statistical Revitalization of Southern Baptist Congregations.” While his research is dated and no longer viable for SBC congregations and church leaders, his findings still offer encouragement to pastors and leaders.⁹⁴ In connecting revitalization and evangelistic

⁹¹ Cheyney, *The Seven Pillars of Church Revitalization & Renewal*. Cheyney uses the data gleaned from a 2012 report released from the Leavell Center for Evangelism and Church Health housed within the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Because Cheyney is quoting ACP data, I would conclude that Cheyney defines church decline and plateau as separate terms similar to LifeWay Research. LifeWay Research states “growing churches” as 10 percent or more increase in total membership over a five year period; “declining churches” as 10 percent or more decline in total membership over a five year period; and “plateaued churches” as the churches in the margins between growing and declining (this includes churches with less than 10 percent decline over a five year period ranging all the way to churches with less than 10 percent growth in a five year period). This information was given via Scott McConnell, Executive Director for LifeWay Research, email to author, February 11, 2018. For additional information, see graphic at Ronnie Floyd, “Fewer SBC Churches Growing, More SBC Churches Declining,” November 3, 2014, accessed December 20, 2017, <http://www.ronniefloyd.com/blog/8105/southern-baptist-convention/fewer-sbc-churches-growing-more-sbc-churches-declining/>.

⁹² Cheyney, *The Seven Pillars*, 98.

⁹³ Henard, *Can These Bones Live*, 205.

⁹⁴ Hadaway, “From Stability to Growth,” 181. Hadaway’s method included sifting data for the years 1983-1987 from the Uniform Church Letter (what is now known as the Annual Church Profile—ACP). His parameters sought to find churches that had an overall 5 percent decline in total membership over the five-year period of time. After identifying 76 plateaued churches, 65 of them met his criteria for being labeled a “breakout church.” He surveyed the remaining churches with 12 variables and outlined his

fervor, Hadaway states, “Goal setting and evangelism are the two most important actions a church can take to grow off a plateau.”⁹⁵

Other examples of studies that screen churches and define appropriate levels of decline and revitalization to be studied are provided in Thom Rainer’s *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap*. After quantitative research, Rainer and his team identified thirteen churches for the qualitative interview portion of their research. In the quantitative phase, he and his team essentially started with over 52,000 churches and narrowed them down to 13.⁹⁶ For example, his first evangelistic screen sought to identify the churches who recorded a minimum of 26 new converts to Christ in at least one of the five years on record in the data screening. This assumes that a church of any size could be a part of making new converts on an average of one person every two weeks. Surprisingly, this screening diminished his potential; sample size from over 52,000 churches to just 1,936 churches. Many best practice recommendations follow from the qualitative portion of his study. That said, what is most helpful for this present research is what he calls his first and second evangelistic screens. In an effort to narrow the field, his first screen only leaves churches who reached a new convert a minimum of 26 times annually. He concludes, “We felt that it was reasonable for any size church to reach at least one person every two weeks.”⁹⁷ His second screening involved a ratio of membership to conversion. In his

findings in detail: (1) Facilities and Setting, (2) Congregational Structure, (3) Congregational Character, (4) Planning and Goal Setting, (5) Pastor and Staff, (6) Evangelism and Outreach, (7) Sunday School, (8) Worship, (9) Other Church Programs, (10) Integration and Assimilation, (11) Morale and Desire for Growth, (12) Spiritual Emphasis and Renewal. Hadaway, “From Stability to Growth,” 181.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 191.

⁹⁶ Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 211. For an in depth look at the sample size and population criteria, see Rainer’s chapter, “Selection Process and Research Steps,” 211ff.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 213.

research design, only churches with a 20:1 ratio of new conversion to membership for one of the five years of growth would pass the screening.

Moving beyond the quantitative aspects of research to more qualitative case study examples, Clifton discusses many motivations of a pastor who would engage in replanting or revitalizing a dying church and lists nostalgia, pride, biblical, evangelistic, and compassion.⁹⁸ Yet, ultimately, he argues only the glory of God as a motivation will keep the pastor and the lay leaders over the long haul of the revitalization journey. Thus, the big idea of his book reads, “We replant [read also revitalize] churches to reclaim God’s glory in a tangible way in our communities.”⁹⁹ Also helpful are his six replanting imperatives: pray without ceasing, love the church’s existing members, exegete the community, simplify your strategy, focus on reaching young men, and make disciples who make disciples who make disciples. He clarifies this language of disciple making disciples when he writes, “You have succeeded if you are making disciples who make disciples who transform your community. Biblical discipleship never ends with the one being disciplined. You are always discipling so that person disciplines another, then another, then another.”¹⁰⁰ This principle is also true as evangelism is a vital part of discipleship. The gospel is shared in hopes that when the Lord brings repentance and faith that person will also share the gospel with others and on and on goes the multiplication of the kingdom!

Darren Cronshaw surveys several churches that have experienced revitalization in Australia in his article “Revitalization Consultancy Models: Australian Church Case Studies.”¹⁰¹ Particular application to this research are his findings regarding using 3DM

⁹⁸ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 19.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁰¹ Darren Cronshaw, “Revitalization Consultancy Models: Australian Church Case Studies,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 19, no. 2 (November 2015): 317-45. Cronshaw’s abstract gives a complete list of consultancy models offered:

Consultancy processes can help local churches that are plateaued or declining to revitalize. This article discusses six models of consultancies in Australian local churches or denominations: Alan Roxburgh’s

Resources¹⁰² in the case of Fitzroy Church of Christ.¹⁰³ That church applied the strategy of reaching UP with God, IN with one another, and OUT to the world. Mike Breen, one of the founders of 3DM, explains,

People want to create missional churches or missional programs or missional small groups. The problem is that we don't have a "missional" problem in the Western church. We have a discipleship problem. If you know how to disciple people well, you will always get mission.¹⁰⁴

Cronshaw summarizes the result for this specific church in Australia:

Fitzroy Church of Christ was inspired by 3DM to invite their people to reengage the biblical story. Ultimately, they have prioritized matrices beyond church involvement as they challenge and empower disciples in their church to live out mission in their everyday lives.¹⁰⁵

Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger's *Simple Church* gives a practical challenge to de-clutter church calendars and ministry programs. These conclusions were reached after surveying a large sample of churches that Geiger put in two different categories: vibrant and struggling. Most helpful for this research are their thoughts concerning communicating

Future Directions used by Churches of Christ, Paul Borden and Salvation Army's Growing Health Corps, Natural Church Development with Brisbane Anglicans, Ken Morgan's Pathways for Melbourne Anglicans, 3DM adapted by Fitzroy North Church of Christ, and Neil Cole's Church Transfusion at Geelong's Central Baptist Church. The essential elements in a revitalization consultancy are to resource spiritual depth, reconnect with Biblical and congregational stories, facilitate congregational conversations, provide leadership in change, and foster creative dreaming. (Cronshaw, "Revitalization Consultancy Models, 317)

¹⁰² 3DM is a mission and discipleship resource for the church and its leaders. More information can be found at their website, <https://3dmovements.com>. They state the vision of the ministry in the following way:

3D Movements is a global movement made up of leaders, church leaders and lay leaders from across the globe. God is moving in many tribes and in many different ways and we continue to work alongside these leaders to put discipleship and mission back in the hands of ordinary people. We work alongside and partner with many leaders and groups including Alan Hirsch, Hugh Halter, Caesar Kalinowski, Verge, Exponential, Wheaton College, Northern Seminary, IF, Virginia Baptist, Spence Network and many, many more. (Ibid.)

¹⁰³ Cronshaw, "Revitalization Consultancy Models," 333-37.

¹⁰⁴ Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 2nd ed. (Greenville, SC: 3DM Publishing, 2014), 5-6. This statement also connects to an earlier argument made in this chapter that evangelism and discipleship are two sides of the same coin.

¹⁰⁵ Cronshaw, "Revitalization Consultancy Models," 114.

clear, simple mission and vision. Specifically, the leadership at Cross Church, Arkansas, excelled in the way they communicated this mission to their people. Rainer writes, “The purpose and process are married at Cross Church. The two have become one. Their purpose (loving God, loving people, and serving the world) is a process.”¹⁰⁶

Finally, in *Comeback Churches*, Stetzer and Dodson compile statistical analysis from over three hundred churches that met their sampling requirements.¹⁰⁷ Their parameters for qualifying churches have been valuable in helping this research team refine our instrument for research of churches that have been in need and experienced revitalization.¹⁰⁸ Not only is his analysis helpful, but his findings are as well. His study concluded with the top three factors of “comeback churches” being prayer, evangelism, and preaching.¹⁰⁹ Concerning the priority of evangelism, Stetzer writes, “Comeback churches have a fresh and new passion for evangelism. It is important for all churches desiring to comeback to remember, ‘Follow me and I will make you fishers of people,’ was the challenge Jesus gave to Galilean fisherman.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God’s Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 38. *Simple Church* is heavily founded upon Eric Benjamin Geiger, “An Exploration of the Relationship Between a Process-Driven Design for Church Ministry and Church Growth” (Ed.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005).

¹⁰⁷ Stetzer and Dodson’s research design was as follows: churches qualifying for the study needed to have experienced five years of plateau or decline starting in 1995. Subsequently, that decline or plateau was followed by significant growth for at least two of the five years including both of the following parameters: a membership to baptism (conversion) ratio of 35:1 or lower each year, and at least a 10 percent increase in worship attendance each year.

¹⁰⁸ The research protocol for phase 1 and phase 2 was conducted as part of a research consisting of six doctoral students under the supervision of Michael Wilder. While different team members carried out different responsibilities, the product of the research was a joint effort.

¹⁰⁹ Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can, Too* (Nashville: B & H, 2007), 200.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 195.

Void in Research

Many of these mentioned authors make an emphasis in evangelism one of many aspects for concern in the revitalization process. The goal of this research was to argue that an evangelistic emphasis must be the primary aspect of the church revitalization. Additionally, it was this study's aim to identify and isolate those churches who have experienced revitalization while making an evangelistic emphasis the top priority. In the duration of this research, best practices were determined among churches that experienced decline or plateau, but now have life and health. After those churches were interviewed, testimony was compared to data collected to determine the influence of teaching and applying evangelistic fervor in a local church has on the actual numbers for revitalization. By doing this, the research team sought to provide empirical data that suggested the emphasis on evangelism greatly increases the success of a church walking through the revitalization process.

Contribution to the Literature Base

The precedent literature reveals that many voices have added their perspective to the subject of church revitalization. That said, it is odd to see the lack of relational connection between the success of church revitalization and an evangelistic emphasis. Ultimately, I would agree with DeYoung and Gilbert when they say, "In the end, the Great Commission must be the mission of the church."¹¹¹ It was the specific purpose of this research to draw a connection between church revitalization and an emphasis of evangelistic fervor. While there are certainly other areas of study and further research,¹¹² the goal of this study was to provide helpful resources for those who come behind to add to the discussion of church revitalization and the Great Commission.

¹¹¹ DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 242.

¹¹²See chap. 5.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed precedent literature in the fields of church revitalization, mission of the church, and evangelism and discipleship strategy. In addition, it demonstrated the void in research, specifically connecting church revitalization and evangelistic emphasis while noting the lack of current data on church revitalization success in the last ten years. In the following chapter, more attention is given to the method and research design for this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current status of the church in America has been noted in previous chapters. Dying and declining churches need to be revitalized now more than ever. Then again, the precedent literature connecting the relationship of church revitalization and evangelistic emphasis seems to be lacking. The design method proposed in this chapter is an attempt to remedy the issue.

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

Research Purpose

The intent of this sequential mixed-methods study was to identify successful church revitalizations and determine what significance a focus on the Great Commission and/or the mission of the church had on those successes. More specifically, drawing the connection between these pastors and what practices, in their view, led their churches to have a clear understanding and obedience to the Great Commission.

Research Questions

To determine the relationship between evangelistic priority and passion to the success of church revitalization, with this mixed methods study, this research design sought to answer the following question:

1. What percentage of Southern Baptist Churches are currently declining?
2. Of those churches that have experienced decline what percentage have experienced revitalization?
3. Of those churches that experienced revitalization, what percentage emphasized evangelism and their membership obeying and fulfilling the Great Commission?
4. Among churches that experienced revitalization with a priority of evangelism and obedience to the Great Commission, what did their pastors and leadership do to make that a priority?

Research Design Overview

The research design for this study was an explanatory sequential mixed methods design.¹ Phase 1 of the research consisted of a document request and review of selected ACP records,² submitted by SBC churches to Lifeway Research.³ Contact information for the qualifying churches was obtained from these records, and an email was sent to the senior/lead pastor of each qualifying church explaining the nature of the survey and soliciting his participation. A link was included for the quantitative study described as phase 2.

In phase 2, a quantitative survey instrument was created using SurveyMonkey.com, and sent to the churches in the sample. This instrument was designed by collaborative efforts of the doctoral research team each focusing on differing aspects of church revitalization. The results were compiled for analysis and scored using

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

² This research phase was a team effort as part of a doctoral research pod. Some of the language in this chapter is mirrored in their dissertation method chapters as well. Members of this team include Christopher Aiken, John Baker, and me.

³ Three factors determined churches that have experienced revitalization: (1) a church has declined 10 percent or greater in their average worship attendance over a five-year period; (2) a church who has reversed that trend of decline by showing a consistent increase of average worship attendance by 10 percent annually at a minimum for two out of five years; (3) a church that is maintaining a minimum of average worship attendance to conversion and baptism ratio of 20:1 on an annual basis.

a Likert-type scale.⁴ Twelve candidates for phase 3 interviews were identified based on scoring of the survey, in consultation with the research team and our supervisor.

In phase 3, members of the research team individually contacted participants via email to schedule telephone/video-conference. Interviews were conducted with the senior/lead pastors of 12 churches.⁵ After advising as to the purpose of the phase 3 interviews, necessary permissions were obtained to record the interview and used the gathered data in the final research project. The interviews were transcribed, general observations and key points during the interviews and provided a summary of the key points of each interview. The data was analyzed and common themes were identified concerning the importance and priority of evangelism and the Great Commission among churches experiencing revitalization.

Research Population

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

Sample and Delimitations

In order to participate in this study, participants met the following criteria: (1) serve as a senior/lead pastor at a church that experienced decline, followed by a period of revitalization, (2) the church reported a decline of 10 percent or greater in average worship

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

⁵ Areas of focus in this interview included the following questions: (1) What measures were taken to develop a culture of evangelism among the church membership? (2) Were there specific strategies and methods identified and used for training church members and tools for leading the church to obey the Great Commission? (3) How did you and others lead the church in developing a system of celebrating victories when it came to having evangelism as a priority? (4) What roadblocks were there, if any, when the congregation was experiencing change to see a priority on evangelism and the Great Commission? (5) What are some of your greatest stories of success you would like to praise God for in this season of revitalization of the church you are leading?

attendance over a five-year period followed by revitalization period as demonstrated by a primary worship attendance increase of at least 10 percent annually for two out of five years following the turnaround while decreasing the attendance to baptism ratio during the same reporting periods, and (3) the church maintained a minimum attendance to baptism ratio of 20:1.⁶

Limitations of Generalization Research Findings

The population and sample were derived from SBC churches in America, which comprise the largest protestant denomination in the United States. As such, the findings of this study of revitalized SBC churches will have significant transferability to other church contexts. Discerning these “best practices” not only have application for dying and plateaued churches, but also for growing churches to maintain church health. While there may be limitations in direct application of these findings depending on the cultural context of a given church, the conclusions and findings have general principles and may be transferrable for all churches. Once a firm grasp on the current data and best practice for revitalization was ascertained, wisdom for pastors and church leaders in numerous and diverse contexts was offered. These pastors and church leaders include all SBC churches experiencing decline and revitalization, but is also transferable to SBC churches desiring church health. Finally, this study provides general insights for churches of any denomination.

⁶ These criteria closely resemble those used in Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B & H, 2007), xiii. One notable exception is the use of attendance to baptism ratio rather than the membership to baptism ratio used by Stetzer and Dodson. Thom Rainer identified 20:1 attendance to baptism ratio as criteria for an evangelistically effective church. Thom Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches: Successful Churches Reveal What Works and What Doesn't* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 35. Since the purpose of this study was to identify revitalized churches and not merely churches experiencing numerical growth, the criteria recognized by Rainer were employed. According to the SBC, based on 47,272 cooperating churches in 2016, the average weekly attendance was 5,200,773 with annual baptisms of 280,773. This yields an attendance to baptism ratio of 18.52:1. Southern Baptist Convention, “Fast Facts about the Southern Baptist Convention,” October 9, 2017, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/BecomingSouthernBaptist/pdf/FastFacts2017.pdf>.

Research Instrumentation

Phase 2 of the explanatory sequential mixed methods study involved a quantitative survey instrument consisting of questions pertaining to building a culture of evangelism, confidence and regularity of church member gospel conversations, and frequency and type of evangelism training conducted in revitalized churches. The quantitative instrument was reviewed by an expert panel and field tested with a select group of pastors to identify any procedural issues, and approved by the Ethics Committee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) prior to implementation.

Phase 3 qualitative interview questions were determined following the completion of the quantitative instrument. The purpose of this methodological approach was so that the qualitative phase could clarify and explain information surfaced in the quantitative phase.⁷

Research Procedures

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

In phase 1, LifeWay Research was contacted to obtain the ACP information in order to determine the research population and collect contact information for senior pastors of qualifying churches. In phase 2, the research team emailed the research population a request to complete the quantitative instrument via surveymonkey.com. A ten-day window of availability was given to complete the survey. A follow-up email was sent after three days encouraging the pastors to complete the survey if they had not already done so. A second follow-up email was sent on day 7. Upon receipt of the instruments, responses were compiled and analyzed according to each research team members' area of emphasis.

⁷ Creswell and Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 71.

The phase 3 qualitative interview questions were finalized and the participants were contacted in order to schedule and conduct a minimum of twelve in-depth interviews.⁸ The interviews consisted of obtaining basic demographic and church information, followed by a series of open-ended, exploratory questions related to building a culture of evangelism, specific training tools, and systems of celebrating key wins. Prior to interview, permission was obtained to record the interviews, use the pastor's and church's information in the final research report.

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

⁸ The selection criteria for the phase 3 interview portion is as follows: (1) the pastor indicated that evangelism was important or highly important during the revitalization process, (2) the pastor showed at least some differentiation between areas of importance, (3) the pastor indicated that he agreed or strongly agreed to at least one of the three specific evangelism questions, and (4) the pastors represented a diversity of congregational sizes and ministry contexts.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this three-phase, sequential mixed-methods study was to identify successful church revitalizations and determine what significance a focus on the Great Commission and/or the mission of the church had on those successes. This chapter provides detailed descriptions of the research protocol, the demographics of the research participants, and the results of both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the research. The relative strengths and weaknesses of the research design are also addressed.

Compilation Protocol

The research design was an explanatory mixed-methods study that examined SBC churches in three phases.¹ Data collection began by contacting Lifeway Research to obtain Annual Church Profile (ACP) data on select SBC churches. All churches designated for the second phase met the following selection criteria: (1) the church had ACP data for 2006-2016, (2) the church experienced 10 percent or greater decline in worship attendance over the five-year period prior to the turnaround, and (3) the church experienced at least 10 percent annual growth in worship attendance for at least 2 of 5 years following the turnaround while maintaining a 20:1 worship attendance to baptism ratio in the same years.² There were 716 churches selected for phase 2. They were invited to participate in

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

² Thom Rainer identified 20:1 attendance to baptism ratio as criteria for an evangelistically effective church. Thom Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches: Successful Churches Reveal What Works and What Doesn't* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 35. Since the purpose of this study was to identify revitalized churches and not merely churches experiencing numerical growth, the criteria recognized by

a survey administered electronically consisting of 24 questions pertaining to church revitalization and eight demographic questions, including two questions pertaining to willingness to participate in phase 3 if selected (see appendix 3). Phase 3 participants were purposefully selected and invited to participate in an interview pertaining to evangelistic emphasis given during the revitalization process. Selection criteria for phase 3 interviews included the following: (1) the pastor indicated that evangelism was important or highly important during the revitalization process, (2) the pastor showed at least some differentiation between areas of importance,³ (3) the pastor indicated that he agreed or strongly agreed to at least one of the three specific evangelism questions,⁴ and (4) the pastors represented a diversity of congregational sizes and ministry contexts. Interviews with selected churches were conducted by telephone or video-conference via Face Time. These interviews were recorded and the interviews were transcribed (see appendix 4). Interviews were analyzed to identify principles and best practices among the revitalized churches and leaders.

Phase 1

In phase 1, a request was made to Lifeway Research to identify churches that existed in 2016, which was the most current year of data for ACP information at the time the request was made. In that year, 28,046 churches existed that had sufficient data to

Rainer were employed. According to the SBC, based on 47,272 cooperating churches in 2016, the average weekly attendance was 5,200,773 with annual baptisms of 280,773. This yields an attendance to baptism ratio of 18.52:1. Southern Baptist Convention, "Fast Facts about the Southern Baptist Convention," October 9, 2017, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/BecomingSouthernBaptist/pdf/FastFacts2017.pdf>.

³ Responses where the person surveyed evaluated all areas (evangelism, leadership, discipleship, prayer, etc.) as "highly important" were eliminated with preference being given to investigate churches in which differentiation was displayed in their rankings.

⁴ The three specific evangelism questions in the survey were as follows: (1) There was a demonstrable increase in personal evangelism among active members of the church; (2) The majority of active members could communicate the gospel in a personal evangelism encounter; (3) The active members of the church regularly engaged in gospel conversations for the purpose of personal evangelism.

calculate their five-year worship attendance trend during 2011-2016.⁵ Among these churches, 26 percent were growing churches, 26 percent were plateaued, and 49 percent were declining. All churches with incomplete data required for the study were then eliminated, and 3,364 churches remained. Narrowing of the sample churches was completed according to the following criteria: (1) worship attendance in 2011 had declined 10 percent or more compared to 2006 (5 years prior), and (2) worship attendance in 2016 had grown 10 percent or more over 2011 levels (5 years prior) yielding 1,266 churches. The field was then further narrowed by eliminating congregations that (1) had less than 10 percent annual growth for 2 of the last 5 years, or (2) had less than 2 of the last 5 years with a minimum worship attendance to baptism ratio of 20:1. We then narrowed further by requiring that the turnaround churches had to have both 2 years of 10 percent worship growth per year and 20:1 baptism ratio. These actions resulted in the identification of 716 churches, or **5.24** percent of the original churches which were declining.⁶ Isolating the churches in decline yet still revitalized gave the research the opportunity to observe the most extreme cases of church revitalization. Learning from those churches and pastors who witnessed God help them grow to heights coming from the greatest depths will certainly help churches which find themselves in more minor cases of decline or plateau as well.

Phase 2

The population of 716 churches was divided among the research team to identify or verify contact information. The pastors of the churches in the population were emailed

⁵ It should be further noted that according to the 2017 *Book of Reports of the 2017 Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville), 8, there were actually 46,793 churches reported as participating in the SBC. Thus, our research team was only considering just over half of the potential SBC churches across the country.

⁶ Of the 28,046 churches with reported ACP data, both the “growing” churches (25.60 percent) and the “plateaued” (25.71 percent) were removed from this calculation and no longer part of the population in need of revitalization. The above 5.24 percent was calculated by dividing 716 churches by 13,656, which were in decline in the year 2016.

an invitation to participate in a survey on church revitalization, along with a link to the survey instrument (see appendix 3). Each participant in the first seven days of the survey that agreed to participate in phase 2 if selected was offered an incentive. Following the initial seven-day period, members of the research team divided those churches that had not responded and contacted them to enlist participation. Some follow-up calls revealed that several churches did not have access to email; therefore, hard copies of the survey instrument were provided to facilitate participation. After several weeks, responses slowed so the research team made an additional and more aggressive effort to contact potential participants within the sample that had not returned the survey. The efforts resulted in responses from 129 churches as of September 13, 2018.⁷ The survey instrument consisted of eight demographic related questions and 24 questions related to aspects of revitalization, including discipleship, evangelism, leadership, missions, prayer, and the primary worship gathering. The questions consisted of multiple-choice, rating according to a Likert-type scale, prioritization of items, and open-ended responses. Questions were provided to an expert panel of pastors and denominational leaders with expertise in church revitalization for review and consultation before distributing the survey instrument.⁸ Their comments were helpful in making final revisions to the survey instrument before it was distributed to the research sample via SurveyMonkey.

Phase 3

Interview candidates were purposefully selected from survey respondents that indicated a willingness to participate in a follow-up interview in question 6. Additional

⁷ The data analyzed in this phase is pulled in process and is part of an ongoing study; however, it is expected that while other members of the research team are continuing to seek further participation in the study, the results of the final analysis will be consistent with the analysis reported in this chapter.

⁸ The expert panel consisted of pastors and scholars who have experienced and written on the subject of church revitalization. The panel included Brian Croft (*Biblical Church Revitalization*, 2016), Andrew Davis (*Revitalize*, 2017), Phillip Nation (*Transformational Discipleship*, 2012), and Joseph Stephen Hudson (“A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Churches,” 2017).

selection criteria for phase 3 interviews included the following: (1) the pastor indicated that evangelism was important or highly important during the revitalization process, (2) the pastor showed at least some differentiation between areas of importance,⁹ (3) the pastor indicated that he agreed or strongly agreed to at least one of the three specific evangelism questions,¹⁰ and (4) the pastors represented a diversity of congregational sizes and ministry contexts. After confirming with the research team that selected churches were not overlapping, interviews were conducted by telephone or video-conference via Face Time. Interviews were analyzed to identify principles and best practice among the revitalized churches and leaders. Pastors were identified based upon the selection criteria and 12 in-depth interviews were completed.

The interviewees represented an average of 20 years of ministry experience and 9 years tenure in the revitalized church. The interviewees ranged in age from 35 to 67 years old (see table 1).

Table 1: Pastor age, tenure in local church and cumulative experience

| | Minimum | Maximum | Range | Mean | Median |
|------------------------------|---------|---------|-------|------|--------|
| Pastor's Age | 35 | 67 | 32 | 48 | 46 |
| Tenure in the Church | 2 | 34 | 32 | 9 | 6 |
| Years of Ministry Experience | 6 | 34 | 28 | 20 | 21 |

Before the interview portion of the research began, a pilot test was run with another pastor in my local Baptist Association to ensure that all recording mechanisms and protocol processes were tested. Referring to pilot testing, Lesley Andres writes, “Pilot

⁹ Responses where the person surveyed evaluated all areas (evangelism, leadership, discipleship, prayer, etc.) as “highly important” were eliminated with preference given to investigate churches in which differentiation was displayed in their rankings.

¹⁰ The three specific evangelism questions in the survey were as follows: (1) There was a demonstrable increase in personal evangelism among active members of the church; (2) The majority of active members could communicate the gospel in a personal evangelism encounter; (3) The active members of the church regularly engaged in gospel conversations for the purpose of personal evangelism.

testing at this level will help to ensure that the content of the [interview] is accurate and that important topics and items have been included.”¹¹ During the interview, overwhelming gratitude was expressed to each interviewee for the gift of their time and permission to record their responses. The following ethics statement was read to every interviewee:

Agreement to Participate: The research in which you are about to participate is designed to determine the critical elements of your church’s recent revitalization. This research is being conducted by research team of six students pursuing doctoral degrees at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for purposes of understanding and encouraging these elements among other churches. In this research, you will be asked to describe your church’s experiences. During the interview portion of the research, notes will be kept for your specific church revitalization, which may appear in the publication of the research. If you desire any of the information given to remain confidential, please inform the interviewer. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. **By your completion of this interview, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.**

To maintain consistency across all twelve interviews, the following five primary questions were asked of every interviewee before probing questions guided the rest of the interview:

1. What measures were taken to develop a culture of evangelism among the church membership?
2. Were there specific strategies and methods identified and used for training church members and tools for leading the church to obey the Great Commission?
3. How did you and others lead the church in developing a system of celebrating victories when it came to having evangelism as a priority?
4. What roadblocks were there, if any, when the congregation was experiencing change to see a priority on evangelism and the Great Commission?
5. What are some of your greatest stories of success you would like to praise God for in this season of revitalization of the church you are leading?

The pastors selected for phase 3 represented churches of diverse sizes and ministry contexts located across varied regions of the United States (see table 2).¹²

Interview times were scheduled in various ways via email and telephone. Interviews were conducted via FaceTime. Each interview was recorded and transcribed.

¹¹ Lesley Andres, *Designing and Doing Survey Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 27.

¹² Regions were defined by the US Government census regional divisions. United States Census Bureau, “Geography: Divisions,” accessed September 19, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/geo/reference/webatlas/divisions.html>.

Table 2. Phase 3 church participation profile

| Average Reported Worship Attendance (2016 ACP-reported) | Region | State | Church Ministry Context | Single Campus or Multisite (S/M) |
|---|-----------------|-------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 28 | East N. Central | OH | Rural | S |
| 30 | East N. Central | IN | Rural | S |
| 55 | Mountain | NM | Rural | S |
| 69 | Pacific | WA | Rural | S |
| 75 | East S. Central | MS | Rural | S |
| 98 | West S. Central | LA | Rural | S |
| 135 | South Atlantic | GA | Rural | S |
| 150 | South Atlantic | NC | Rural | S |
| 165 | Mountain | UT | Urban | S |
| 527 | Pacific | CA | Suburban | S |
| 717 | Mountain | AZ | Suburban | M |
| 1500 | South Atlantic | FL | Suburban | M |

Findings

Following the data analysis with the aid of LifeWay Research, the findings of the study are presented in two phases.

Phase 1

Phase 1 consisted of quantitative data collected through use of the survey instrument. While the instrument covered six areas of emphasis of church revitalization—discipleship, evangelism, leadership, missions, prayer, and primary worship gathering—the analysis of these findings focuses on an emphasis on evangelism. Question 8 asked the respondents to rate each ministry emphasis as to the importance it played in the revitalization process (see table 3).

While it was surprising to me that the number of respondents who indicated evangelism as “important” or “highly important” was ranked toward the bottom of the six themes, 82.50 percent is still a high response and less than 10 percent off the leading theme of “Primary Worship Gathering.” As noted in the research protocol, these responses played an integral part in the selection criteria for the qualitative portion of the research.

Table 3. Phase 2 ministry emphasis rate of importance

| | Highly Un-important | Un-important | Slightly Un-important | Slightly Important | Important (1) | Highly Important (HI) | Total HI and I responses |
|---------------------------|---------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Primary Worship Gathering | 1.65% | 0.83% | 1.65% | 4.13% | 36.36% | 55.37% | 91.73% |
| Prayer | 3.33% | 0% | 0.83% | 6.67% | 23.33% | 65.83% | 89.16% |
| Leadership | 4.17% | 0% | 0.83% | 8.33% | 29.17% | 57.5% | 86.67% |
| Discipleship | 4.13% | 0.83% | 2.48% | 9.92% | 33.88% | 48.76% | 82.64% |
| Evangelism | 5% | 0.83% | 1.67% | 10% | 40.83% | 41.67% | 82.50% |
| Missions | 2.48% | 4.96% | 4.96% | 16.53% | 36.36% | 34.71% | 71.07% |

Further quantitative data was gathered concerning the connection of church revitalization with evangelistic fervor. Question 13 on the survey instrument read as follows: “Briefly describe the primary changes to the church’s evangelism ministry which, you perceive, have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.” Of the 105 pastors who responded to the question, 10 pastors confessed that no effort was made.¹³ In a more encouraging trend, 92 percent of pastors who responded to question 13 reported intentional efforts to increase the participation in the evangelism ministry (see table 4).

Table 4. Changes in church’s evangelism ministry contributing to revitalization (question 13)

| Contributors | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------|-----------|------------|
| Training | 50 | 40.00% |
| Outreach | 48 | 38.40% |
| Relational Evangelism | 17 | 13.60% |
| No Effort | 10 | 8.00% |
| Total Responses | 125 | 100.00% |

¹³ It should be noted here that the survey instrument did not require all questions to be answered. Twenty-four participants did not respond to question 13, resulting in 10 responses. Some pastors gave multiple answers and this accounts for the 20 additional responses in the frequency column in table 4.

The three answers given were training, outreach, and relational evangelism.¹⁴

In regard to training—which made up 40 percent of responses—one pastor wrote,

We focused on the message of the Gospel: what it is and what it does. We also went through some evangelism training so as to equip the people with tools for sharing their faith. Then, we try to put our evangelism into practice in the places where we are present in the community.

Outreach made up a slightly smaller percentage of the responses compared to trainings but still high at 38.40 percent. Another pastor surveyed gave the following example prioritizing outreach in discussing the primary changes to their evangelism ministry:

The church three years ago had no evangelism ministry. They were inward focused and had no desire to spread the Gospel. We started having outreach events and during those events we would have a team walking around and sharing Jesus. We started door knocking and walking around the community evangelizing. Several sermons were focused on the Great Commission and putting that into practice.

Concerning relational evangelism one pastor simply stated, “More personal evangelism through developing relationships.” The responses present a strong connection between making changes to a church’s evangelism ministry and a positive impact to the revitalization process.

In question 14 respondents were asked about the church’s evangelism ministry during the revitalization process: (14a) There was a demonstrable increase in personal evangelism among active members of the church; (14b) The majority of active members could communicate the gospel in a personal evangelism encounter; (14c) The active members of the church regularly engaged in gospel conversations for the purpose of personal evangelism. In total, the pastors surveyed answered positively at 52.33 percent for a demonstrable increase in evangelism, 42.6 percent that their members could clearly communicate the gospel, and 27.1 percent that their members regularly engage in gospel conversations (see table 5).

¹⁴ While additional comments were made these answers generalized into the three categories listed all cases.

Table 5. Survey responses to level of agreement concerning the church’s evangelism ministry during the revitalization process (question 14)

| Personal Evangelism Among Active Members | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------|-----------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree (A) | Strongly Agree (SA) | Total (A & SA) Agreement |
| 14a. Increase demonstrated | 0.93% | 10.28% | 7.48% | 28.97% | 39.25% | 13.08% | 52.33% |
| 14b. Could communicate the gospel | 0.93% | 8.33% | 9.26% | 38.89% | 37.04% | 5.56% | 42.60% |
| 14c. Regularly engaged in gospel conversations | 1.87% | 12.15% | 14.95% | 43.93% | 23.36% | 3.74% | 27.10% |

I understand that the term “slightly” can be read many ways, yet when any positive response is included an even more optimistic reading of the numbers presents the following: 81.30 percent for a demonstrable increase in evangelism, 81.49 percent that their members could clearly communicate the gospel, and 71.03 percent that their members regularly engage in gospel conversations. These findings present an encouraging connection between churches experiencing revitalization and pastors leading to increased evangelistic fervor.

Question 15 dealt with the type and frequency of evangelism training currently offered in the churches surveyed. The type of training was asked in an open-ended response format, thus providing a litany of answers. While ‘3-Circles,’ ‘Sharing Jesus without Fear’ and ‘No Place Left’ were the only repeated responses, several others were mentioned, including Evangecube, Evangelism Explosion, The Difference Maker, and The Answer Track.¹⁵ These evangelism trainings often involve a mix of classroom time, role-play practice, and either door-to-door or sharing the gospel one-on-one in a public space.

¹⁵ Repeated responses for type of training tools were as follows: 3-Circles = 6; Sharing Jesus Without Fear = 3; No Place Left = 2.

Although 27 participants did not respond to this question, pastors who did overwhelmingly affirmed their church’s priority to train members for gospel conversations. Almost half of the pastors reported scheduling more than four evangelism trainings a year (46.08 percent) and a total of 84.31 percent planned a minimum of one evangelism training a year (see table 6). It should be further noted that these answers represent the 102 survey responses even among pastors who did not otherwise indicate high scores with evangelistic fervor among their church during the revitalization process.

Table 6. Frequency of evangelism training (question 15)

| Times a Year | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------|-----------|------------|
| More than 4 | 47 | 46.08% |
| 1-2 | 30 | 29.41% |
| None | 16 | 15.69% |
| 3-4 | 9 | 8.82% |
| Total Responses | 102 | 100.00% |

Much can be learned from the quantitative data reported through the survey instrument, but even more detail was provided in the qualitative phase of the study.

Phase 2

The interview portion of this research resulted in several consistent themes related to pastors leading their churches in evangelistic fervor. A coding process was used to “generate a description of categories or themes for analysis.”¹⁶ By coding these themes based off percentages of frequency in the interviews, best practices could be derived from the raw information presented in each interview. Fifteen repeated topics and themes identified among pastors are outlined below (see table 7).

¹⁶ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009), 189.

Table 7. Themes noted among interviewed pastors

| Recurring Themes | Frequency of Response |
|---|-----------------------|
| Used church member testimonies to celebrate key wins | 12/12 |
| Planned evangelism training | 12/12 |
| Preached emphasis on gospel conversations | 10/12 |
| Communicated clear mission and vision of the church | 9/12 |
| Prioritized setting the example for evangelism | 7/12 |
| Maintained slow culture shift & awareness of on-going revitalization progress | 7/12 |
| Motivated by Biblical truths | 7/12 |
| Focused upon prayer | 7/12 |
| Emphasized relational evangelism | 6/12 |
| Displayed an awareness of the Holy Spirit | 6/12 |
| Instituted intentional membership | 5/12 |
| Scheduled off-campus outreach events | 4/12 |
| Connected evangelism with discipleship | 3/12 |
| Changed worship style | 3/12 |
| Shaped a sending culture | 2/12 |

Used church member testimonies to celebrate key wins. One hundred percent of pastors interviewed showed emphasis in using church member testimonies to celebrate key wins. Admittedly, the third primary interview question alluded to a “system of celebrating victories.” That said, one pastor brought up the subject without being prompted by the third primary question. Pastor Jackie Allen of Cross Church, Arizona, stated,

We had a guy talk to us about the importance of stories to create culture and so we have a rotation of trying to be very intentional with stories on Sunday. So every Sunday we’re telling an invite story, a Bible group story, a give story or a serve story. On a rotation and we sprinkle more invite stories into the rotation more than any other stories. So we’ll probably do two invite stories a month. And then two other ones. And it’s like a video of somebody telling, ‘Hey, this past week I told my friend about Jesus,’ or have a video of a baptism and the story behind that and how this person came to Cross Church. And I think those are probably as powerful to create the culture of evangelism in our church.¹⁷

Later he added, “One of our leadership axioms is that we get what we celebrate.”

Additionally, several pastors mentioned the use of testimony during baptism services,¹⁸

¹⁷ Jackie Allen, FaceTime interview with author, September 2018.

¹⁸ Jim Jackson stated that they planned monthly baptisms and the current month they were

including beach baptisms as a major win.¹⁹ Charles Petty of Second Baptist Church, Ogden, Utah, spoke to the significance of their annual Great Commission Service where they share pictures, videos, and testimonies all in celebration of how God is helping the church live on mission. Another unique form of celebrating key wins comes from Joshua Geopfrich of Warsaw Baptist Church in Warsaw, Indiana. Geopfrich discussed using the offering time during the church services in the following way:

So a big celebration, for example, is just last week, Saturday night. One of our families, one of the dads just led his youngest son to the Lord. So we've made a huge deal of that during our "Take 5" time on Sunday. Mainly because that's something in a celebration thing, we talk about getting prayer requests from people and he had specifically asked the entire church to pray for his son's salvation and he responded. So we had time to praise, which we don't generally get. And so we make that a priority. We are renaming our Sunday service too, similar to what other churches do with Weekend Celebration.²⁰

Goepfrich's "Take 5" moment is one of many ways these pastors intentionally use member testimonies to celebrate successes in building a culture of evangelism. Cory Thomas of Flat Creek Baptist Church in Blakely, Georgia, further made this point as he stated,

If I feel like someone . . . if God is moving in their life and I feel like the church needs to know about it, I'm going to ask them, say, "hey, would you be willing to share this with the church?" Because I believe that that's how we grow and I believe that's how God gets glory and credit, but that's how we grow. People must see, they can hear me preach all day long, a simple message on salvation, but if they see lives changed in what God's doing in people's lives, that moves more people than all the preachers put together in the world preaching messages.²¹

Using member testimony was not the only key theme that these revitalization pastors discussed at a 100 percent rate. Evangelism Training also received the same frequency of mention during the interviews.

scheduled to baptize 22 people in one service alone. Jim Jackson, FaceTime interview with author, September 2018.

¹⁹ Jeff Robinson, FaceTime interview with author, September 2018.

²⁰ Joshua Goepfrich, FaceTime interview with author, September 2018.

²¹ Cory Thomas, FaceTime interview with author, September 2018.

Planned evangelism training. While the above-mentioned theme displayed itself as a result of the primary question about developing a system of celebrating key wins, the discussion concerning evangelism training surfaced during the initial survey instrument in the evangelism specific questions. One hundred percent of pastors interviewed showed emphasis on frequent trainings for gospel conversations among their church members and attenders. These training times varied in where they were placed throughout the week and also frequency on the annual church calendar. While some would think that Sundays and Wednesdays are the most natural weekly times in a church to train the membership to share their faith, one pastor discussed Friday nights being their outreach night with yet another choosing the third Tuesday of the month. That said, all twelve pastors consistently had a plan to train their church to share their faith in Jesus Christ. Jeff Robinson of Grace Fellowship A Church for All Nations in West Palm Beach, Florida, incorporates evangelism training as part of their church’s membership interest class. Beau Lamb of FBC Santa Rosa, New Mexico, stated,

As we grow relationships then that’s what propels us to be able to go beyond just being a friend, but then to actually be obedient in sharing the good news with them. So we’d have some practice times and this is with our group as a whole was willing to learn how to share, whether it be 3-Circles or Answer Track or Roman Road or Share Jesus Without Fear.²²

Although pastors mentioned several tools,²³ many agreed with the sentiment that while the method may change, the message stays the same. In response to this phrase, Charles Petty shared, “The message is always the same because the news is Christ’s death, burial, resurrection. Well, the message is the same, but the messenger could certainly change.”²⁴ A strategic plan for evangelism training was a priority for all churches interviewed, while

²² Beau Lamb, FaceTime interview with author, September 2018.

²³ As noted, 3-Circles (6 occurrences), Sharing Jesus without Fear (3 occurrences) and No Place Left (2 occurrences) were the only repeated responses, yet several others included Evangecube, Evangelism Explosion, The Difference Maker, and The Answer Track

²⁴ Charles Petty, FaceTime interview with author, September 2018.

an additional theme discovered was the preaching emphasis on the importance of gospel conversations.

Preached emphasis on gospel conversations. In the shepherding ministry of leading a local church, the pulpit is a central place of teaching and vision-casting among the congregation. Ten out of the 12 pastors interviewed mentioned this in connection with encouraging their church to have gospel conversations. Paul Eckley of Sonshine Baptist Fellowship in Bremerton, Washington, affirmed, “Well, number one, lift up Jesus. Preach about him and his ministry and the mission of the church as a whole.”²⁵ He later added,

The church isn’t just something that somebody thought they would begin or start or it was a great idea, and that kind of a thing, but the church, the bride of Christ, the individual that’s a believer of Christ baptized and all, that person is just as important in the church as the next person. So I try to preach or teach the fact that every member of the church is vitally important in carrying out the plan of God during this period in which we live.²⁶

Brad Delaughter of Satsuma Baptist, Livingston, Louisiana, agreed: “Personal evangelism is in almost every sermon I preach. Every single sermon I do the shotgun approach of we’re called to go share the gospel.”²⁷ Phil Westenbarger of Glouster Southern Baptist Church, Glouster, Ohio, makes similar references to the importance of his preaching:

The only other thing I would say is in the beginning and here and there, I will end my preaching constantly pushing that idea of we’ve got to be the people that take this out—it’s our mission that we’ve been given. Um, it’s good. . . . I gear, a lot of preaching toward that.²⁸

Not only has the pulpit ministry proven to be a priority in the church revitalization process, but pastors also shared the importance of communicating the mission and vision of the church clearly.

²⁵ Paul Eckley, FaceTime interview with author, September 2018.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Brad Delaughter, FaceTime interview with author, September 2018.

²⁸ Phil Westenbarger, FaceTime interview with author, September 2018.

Communicated clear mission and vision of the church. Another theme discovered in the interview phase was an intentionality to clearly communicate mission and vision to the church. Again, without being prompted, 75 percent of the pastors mentioned the need of addressing and casting vision. Petty stated,

The key thing is with emphasis on basically three part mission statement. It says that we are here for a purpose and our purpose is to reach people for Christ and mature them in Christ and mobilize them through Christ. And I think everything else kind of is made from that perspective.²⁹

Thomas addressed the need to consistently repeat and emphasize the church's mission:

It's a continual repetitive cycle of I'm trying to indelve that in people's minds and in their spirit that the Great Commission is not just for pastors. We've got to be involved and if the church is ever going to fulfill its mission, then it's got to have the whole, every member working corporately.³⁰

Allen agreed: "You have to constantly defend the vision. And then you have to preach the vision like you're preaching to a parade. Because there's a whole new group of people coming that hasn't heard it yet."³¹ In addition, Goepfrich alone mentioned mission and vision on three separate occasions throughout the interview to communicate the emphasis he has made to clearly communicate to his church. Jesus left marching orders in Matthew 28 and Acts 1 and pastors leading revitalization must do the same by heralding the centrality of mission and vision in their churches. While there was a repeated theme of pastors clearly communication the mission to those whom they lead, interviews also revealed the key aspect of pastors setting the example for personal evangelism.

Prioritized setting the example for evangelism. Quoting 2 Timothy 4:5, one pastor reminds church leaders that they are all called to "do the work of an evangelist." Add to this Peter's challenge to the shepherds in 1 Peter 5:1ff where he identifies himself

²⁹ Petty, interview.

³⁰ Thomas, interview.

³¹ Allen, interview.

as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's suffering.³² From this passage one could argue that if a pastor is not being a faithful witness of Christ, he is failing to be a faithful pastor. Seven of the 12 pastors interviewed referred to themselves as setting the example for evangelism as key in their revitalization process as a church. Jaie Warlick of Leonards Fork Baptist Church, Lincolnton, North Carolina, was one of the pastors who mentioned the importance of leading his people by example when it comes to encouraging personal evangelism within his church:

The pastor has to live it . . . we have a past culture, especially in the Southern Baptist churches, of there being a disconnect between the pastor and his people, between the pastor and what he preaches. Not that he's not a godly man, but, you know, what he's willing to do and what he's living like on a daily basis."³³

Scott Flynt of Fellowship Baptist Church in Taylorsville, Mississippi, made a similar statement: "If you're going to talk it you better live it. Yeah, absolutely, I think it's paramount that they see me doing evangelism."³⁴ Jim Jackson of The Orchard Christian Fellowship, Temecula, California, argued, "So, number one, I think the number one thing is people have to hear it be important to me first." He then added,

What I don't want to do is sit in my office all day and read these books and exegete a passage and I feel like I've done evangelism myself. Because the thing that really stokes evangelism. . . . Here's the problem is pastors really don't cool off, I don't think, in their love for the Lord because they feel like they're serving the Lord by giving the people the best of themselves when they preach. Which is I'm going to honor the Lord by giving them excellent food to eat. Which is correct. That is their goal. But at the end of the day, you know, Paul tells Timothy, do the work of an evangelist. Jesus was an evangelist and heaven knows Paul was an evangelist. Two thirds of the books in your New Testament hit him going, laying down the foundation for those churches.³⁵

³² First Peter 5:1-4 says,

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

³³ Jaie Warlick, FaceTime interview with author, September 2018.

³⁴ Scott Flynt, FaceTime interview with author, September 2018.

³⁵ Jackson, interview.

Delaughter summarized the above thoughts well when he said, “So what we did for our leadership for my weekends and my staff, I [tell] every one of them it’s our job is to share the gospel. If we don’t do it, they’re not going to do it.”³⁶ When pastors want to change the culture of evangelism among church membership, they must be willing to lead from the front.

Maintained slow culture shift and awareness of on-going revitalization progress. Again, 7 of the 12 pastors interviewed at some point made mention of the necessity of slow culture shift and awareness of the ongoing revitalization process. Warlick mentioned his gratitude for mentors who encouraged him to “slowly tread the waters of change.”³⁷ Delaughter added, “And so everything we’re doing is new and towards that and it’s just slowly but surely adding those types of things to build a culture of we’re going to be out of these walls. It’s not just about here [but outside the walls of the church].”³⁸ Flynt agreed when he said, “I think we need to address that is not going to be well received by a lot of people, you know, because we are an old church, 148 years old. We were talking about that Sunday and . . . there’s a way to get through . . . moving slowly and diligently with it but not giving up.”³⁹ Along the same lines of this slow change process is a humility to recognize that the revitalization process is not yet complete. Thomas explained, “We have seen, well, it’s kind of been an up and down revitalization over the last say three years probably. We’ve really seen it and I don’t know that it’s complete.”⁴⁰ Add to this the fact that none of the twelve pastors interviewed alluded to the thought that they suspected their revitalization process to be done.

³⁶ Delaughter, interview.

³⁷ Warlick, interview.

³⁸ Delaughter, interview.

³⁹ Flynt, interview.

⁴⁰ Thomas, interview.

Motivated by biblical truths. Seven of the 12 pastors interviewed exhibited a readiness to quote Scripture when discussing a culture shift toward evangelism in their churches. Naturally, many quoted Matthew 28 when discussing evangelism. Westenbarger gave the following example:

The Great Commission, obviously, I kind of have turned that into our mission statement: to go, teach and serve. Kind of derived that right from the great commission saying, hey, everything that we need to do needs to filter through this mission statement of go, teach and serve. It comes straight from the Great Commission. I think, the passage on the two great commandments to love God and love others, implicit in telling the message of the cross. That's how we've come to love God. And that's how we come to love others is by sharing that.⁴¹

That said, other passages were important to these pastors as well. While discussing his preaching focus, Eckley quoted John 12:32 concerning his desire to preach Christ in all things: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

Discussing the need for Christ followers to consider their Christian identity, Petty quoted from Romans 8 when he said,

I think it just continues maturation to study the Word to the point where they realize that we are more than conquerors through Christ Jesus. It doesn't matter that I was living on skid road or this or that. I am who I am because God created who I am by His grace and his mercy.⁴²

One would think it is normal for Christian leaders to quote the Bible; however, these examples were an encouragement to me in observing so many pastors ready to use Scripture as they spoke about God's work in the revitalization process in their churches.

Focused upon prayer. When addressing the need for people in their church to have a passion to fulfill the Great Commission, 7 out of 12 pastors mentioned prayer as an integral part of that aim. Goepfrich gave a great example:

Let me share this because this is vital to everything. . . . We spend anywhere from five to 20 minutes individually and corporately on Sunday morning worship in

⁴¹ Westenbarger, interview.

⁴² Petty, interview.

prayer time. We moved from a people who said we prayed to becoming the people of prayer and my goal is that we become a house of prayer.”⁴³

Addressing the necessity of prayer for specific gospel conversations, Lamb said, “It also improves your prayer life as you move forward with it because you’re not praying for someone who is lost, but you’re praying for someone who is going to have the opportunity.”⁴⁴ Lastly, Warlick summarized what several others mentioned when he explained that they devote their church’s entire Wednesday night service to prayer. As pastors seek to experience revitalization in their churches, prayer is a tool that must be utilized.

Emphasized relational evangelism. When it comes to the actual nuts and bolts of the gospel conversations, half of the pastors offered credence to the importance of their church members engaging in relational evangelism. Goepfrich spoke about these things as he stated,

When I came in with my enthusiasm, with my testimony, and letting them know what true evangelism looked like, going out and sharing the gospel with people and letting them know that it’s not necessarily walking up to somebody saying, hey, you need to come to my church.”⁴⁵

Allen clarified this idea when he added,

That’s the elevator speech, right? We do that in the crafting of the story. We train them to do that during that time. But I think you also should hear that we totally reject any canned, like rehearsed, memorized salesmanship of the Gospel. We think it’s got to be relationally driven to be effective. And so we just, I’ve been through all of those, man, over the years. I’m old enough to have gone through EE and CWT and I guess they all were a good tool for their season. We just don’t feel like that season is now. And so we’re going to gear towards relationship evangelism and what’s more relational than your story?⁴⁶

⁴³ Goepfrich, interview.

⁴⁴ Lamb, interview.

⁴⁵ Warlick, interview.

⁴⁶ Allen, interview.

Goepfrich also agreed: “You constantly have to be pursuing people.”⁴⁷ These findings affirm what Andy Davis found to be true in the church revitalization process: “Missional churches find ways to connect with the surrounding community in which ministry to the body and soul are well-harmonized and properly proportioned. These ministries become a fruitful matrix of relationships in which the gospel can easily be shared.”⁴⁸

Displayed an awareness of the Holy Spirit. A breath of fresh air to me was the consistent theme of the Holy Spirit’s role in not only causing church members to engage in gospel conversations, but also to work in the hearts of those hearing the gospel. Fifty percent of pastors interviewed mentioned this connection without being prompted. Eckley said,

In my preaching, I try to focus on Christ, not so much social issues, that type of thing. Just good old gospel preaching from the Bible, the word of God, and that everybody can, by the power of the Holy Spirit, speak what God has done for them. So when they are talking and engaged in conversation, wherever they might go, the Holy Spirit will lead them into a place of saying, share the gospel. . . . I’ve had to let them know that’s how I believe that the Lord works in evangelism...constantly remind them that God, the Spirit is going to be moving them to share their faith and be listening for that.”⁴⁹

Flynt also exhibited a similar focus on the Holy Spirit: “It’s not rocket science, you know, it’s really basic, really simple to being very positive about what each Christian has the ability to do that God has given them the strength and the power through the Holy Spirit to go out into the community.”⁵⁰ Thomas affirmed similar findings in his revitalization context:

God has really blessed me. I really believe that God has transitioned our church from just an old traditional country, Southern Baptist church into a true spirit of community and believers coming together and are welcoming of other people and

⁴⁷ Goepfrich, interview.

⁴⁸ Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 207.

⁴⁹ Eckley, interview.

⁵⁰ Flynt, interview.

want to manifest the Spirit in our church. Not be run by the pastor, not be run by the deacons, but a total manifestation of the Holy Spirit leading, guiding, and directing our church.⁵¹

This must be what William Henard meant when he said, “Church revitalization occurs because of the of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, not just because of our efforts.”⁵²

Pastors who desire to see a movement of God in and among the people of their church will display an awareness of the Holy Spirit.

Instituted intentional membership. Although there were not specific interview questions regarding this subject, 5 of the 12 pastors interviewed mentioned their intentional membership associated with their revitalization process. Westenbarger said,

We’ve established a process for church membership. We try to lead those people through profession, to baptism and right into church membership. . . . I really make a big deal about church membership and really make a big deal about it when somebody joins the church.⁵³

Jim Jackson commented on the use of their church’s membership class to be a training time for evangelism. He also asks every member candidate to share the gospel with one of the church’s pastors as part of their membership process. With a different emphasis, Flynt discussed the importance of matching membership roles with the genuine active membership. He stated,

Now we’ve got 200 members. I’ve got a list we’re going through to see if on that list of members who is still in the community who is still around and who’s not. Some may have moved off. If there somewhere else we’re going to ask them, to send a letter to them, and go through that process of sort of cleaning up our church roles so we know who is and who’s not in the area. The church has never done that before.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Thomas, interview.

⁵² William Henard, *Can These Bones Live: A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 16.

⁵³ Westenbarger, interview.

⁵⁴ Flynt, interview.

The concern for Flynt was having the ability to know exactly who he was shepherding in the process of ultimately attempting to change the church culture to have an emphasis on evangelism.

Scheduled off-campus outreach events. Many of the pastors interviewed made mention of the desire to lead their church in the effort to get outside the walls of the church building. Four of the 12 pastors discussed the priority of scheduling off-campus outreach events as part of their revitalization process. Thomas gave an example:

Suddenly the whole church went and we had a service at the nearby lake. We try to focus on everything being outreach from our fall festival that's coming up to our Easter egg hunt. We have an annual fish fry that we, it kind of just started out as what is the word I want use here? Just kind of started out as an idea of having a fish fry and maybe putting a speaker on the program. And it just kind of manifested. We've been doing it for eight years now.⁵⁵

Warlick also spoke about an event that had taken off in their community: "We had our annual mud dodgeball event. We started that five years ago. Now we've grown to over 400 plus people who come and it is all paid for. We feed them. I bring in a special speaker every year."⁵⁶ If a church wants to reach people in the community it needs to change the mindset of assuming the community will come to the building by training the people to go out and make disciples.

Connected evangelism with discipleship. At times, evangelism and discipleship have a polarizing effect among pastors whereby one will be promoted and prioritized as more important than the other. Twenty five percent of the pastors interviewed would differ with that statement as they communicated the connection between evangelism and discipleship. Warlick explained,

We've got discipleship classes that we've started, life group classes and things like that. Then on the heels of what has taken place in our community with our people, evangelizing and going out and share the gospel, inviting people to these classes so

⁵⁵ Thomas, interview.

⁵⁶ Warlick, interview.

they can not only hear the gospel but also walk through the Gospel and hopefully get saved obviously and those things.⁵⁷

As people hear the gospel, they are plugged into discipleship classes. Lamb sees this process happening in his church as well. He stated, “It doesn’t stop simply with us and evangelism. It goes through the relationship building and then the investment and then bringing that discipleship background.”⁵⁸ Thomas proposed similar priorities as he said, “Evangelism to me has a two-fold purpose. It is to call those in that are lost and hope the Spirit speaks to them and saves them. But also for those that are within the church to continually disciple them and grow them in the Lord.”⁵⁹ Understanding that good discipleship will include a push for evangelism and that good evangelism will increase the need for discipleship helped the pastors as they walked through church revitalization in their contexts.

Changed worship style. Another theme I did not expect to find among pastors making evangelism an emphasis for church revitalization was the implementation of a different worship style in their Sunday services. Again, 3 of the 12 pastors changed their worship music during their revitalization process. Delaughter from Louisiana said,

We just recently changed the worship services to be a blended service. And people got upset about. . . . So for a solid year prior to this, I’ve been sprinkling in contemporary music once a month during the specials. So when we started, it wasn’t like such a shocker to the older generation. And the reason what we did it is you have people jump on the wagon, as soon as that happens. . . . If singing this type of music, if simply just opening the church to this type of music will help get your grandson and granddaughter in church would you be willing to do it?⁶⁰

In response to the question about giving an example of changed hearts within the church, another pastor stated the importance of their music ministry as a major area of change.

⁵⁷ Warlick, interview.

⁵⁸ Lamb, interview.

⁵⁹ Thomas, interview.

⁶⁰ Delaughter, interview.

Thomas said, “Our worship . . . moving from a staunch traditional worship service to a contemporary blended worship service with a full band.”⁶¹ While changing the culture of evangelism and making a priority of the Great Commission, these pastors experienced changes in other areas as well.

Shaped a sending culture. In the last repeated theme experienced among revitalization pastors, 2 out of 12 mentioned shaping a sending culture. Lamb from New Mexico said,

So many that have come, we’ve prayed for it seems like forever, come to know the Lord. Most of them have moved on and God’s using them somewhere else. Where our church is, even though we’re going through revitalization, we are more of a staging ground for lack of a better word, for sending others out to go and share the good news.⁶²

Eckley made similar observations about his church in Washington:

We’re not a big congregation. I feel like our church, for instance, has been a church that has brought and attracted people through the Lord’s Word and then they go from where we are. They were either transferred or they move along to other areas in the country and in the world and they always report back saying how much they’ve appreciated their time at Sonshine Baptist Fellowship and they are experiencing some of the power of the Lord in their ministry, whether it’s in a new church, whether it’s back at home preaching or sharing the gospel with their family. I guess the excitement is to hear that what we’re doing goes with the people to wherever God sends them next.⁶³

Research Questions

At the outset of this research design, specific research questions were established to guide the process. Now that the findings have been summarized, a brief description of each question and its answer is given next.

⁶¹ Thomas, interview.

⁶² Lamb, interview.

⁶³ Eckley, interview.

Research Question 1

Research question 1: What percentage of Southern Baptist Churches are currently declining?

As stated in the research protocol, in 2016, 28,046 SBC churches existing had sufficient data to calculate their five-year worship attendance trend. Among these, 26 percent were growing churches, 26 percent were plateaued, and 49 percent were declining.

Research Question 2

Research question 2: Of those churches that have experienced decline what percentage have experienced revitalization?

As stated, 716 met the selection criteria for church revitalization as defined by this research design. Narrowing of the sample churches was completed according to the following criteria: (1) worship attendance in 2011 had declined 10 percent or more compared to 2006 (5 years prior) and (2) worship attendance in 2016 had grown 10 percent or more over 2011 levels (5 years prior). The field was then further narrowed by eliminating congregations that (1) had less than 10 percent annual growth for 2 of the last five years or (2) had less than 2 of the last 5 years with a minimum worship attendance to baptism ratio of 20:1. We then narrowed further by requiring that the turnaround churches had to have both 2 years of 10 percent worship growth per year and 20:1 baptism ratio. Our actions resulted in the identification of 716 churches who were experiencing revitalization, 5.24 percent of the original churches which were previously in decline.⁶⁴

Research Question 3

Research question 3: Of those churches that experienced revitalization, what

⁶⁴ Of the 28,046 churches with reported ACP data, both the “growing” churches (25.60 percent) and the “plateaued” (25.71 percent) were removed from this calculation and no longer part of the population in need of revitalization. The above 5.24 percent was calculated by dividing 716 churches by 13,656, which were in decline in the year 2016.

percentage emphasized evangelism and their membership obeying and fulfilling the Great Commission?

These results are summarized in table 3. According to the results of the quantitative phase, the number of respondents who indicated evangelism was “important” or “highly important” was ranked toward the bottom of the six themes at 82.5 percent.

Research Question 4

Research question 4: Among churches that experienced revitalization with a priority of evangelism and obedience to the Great Commission, what did their pastors and leadership do to make that a priority?

After analyzing data from the qualitative interviews, the following fifteen themes arose to inform research question 4:

1. Used church member testimonies to celebrate key wins
2. Planned evangelism training
3. Preached emphasis on gospel conversations
4. Communicated clear mission and vision of the church
5. Prioritized setting the example for evangelism
6. Maintained slow culture shift with awareness of on-going revitalization progress
7. Motivated by Biblical truths
8. Focused upon prayer
9. Emphasized relational evangelism
10. Displayed an awareness of the Holy Spirit
11. Instituted intentional membership
12. Scheduled off-campus outreach events
13. Connected evangelism with discipleship
14. Changed worship style
15. Shaped a sending culture

Evaluation of the Research Design

This study followed the sequential mixed-methods research design with each phase building upon the former. After the quantitative data was scrutinized according to the revitalization metrics, 716 Southern Baptist Convention churches were identified as being revitalized. The strength of this population choice is two-fold. The denomination has a voluntary reporting mechanism through the ACP. Given the access to data and the reporting mechanisms already organized through Lifeway Research, SBC churches were selected to gain insights of church revitalization that may be transferable to other denominations as well. In addition, the SBC is the largest evangelical denomination in the United States, consisting of over 46,000 churches and a membership of 15 million.⁶⁵ If SBC churches were experiencing revitalization due to certain priorities and practices, there may be applications for other evangelical churches around the country as well. I am incredibly grateful for LifeWay Research for its aid in providing raw ACP data to the research team. As phase 1 concluded, 716 churches were identified as having experienced church revitalization in the last ten years. In phase 2, the research team was able to procure 129 survey responses. Phase 3 included interviews with 12 pastors whose churches met the selection criteria for revitalizing churches with an evangelistic emphasis.

Challenges

According to Creswell and Clark, a potential challenge in explanatory sequential mixed-methods is the amount of time it takes to implement the two phases.⁶⁶ This certainly proved true for our research team. Often times multi-phase studies require more effort and sequencing of timing and steps. Due to some of the small sizes of churches that met the inclusion criteria for church revitalization, often pastors and other church staff were

⁶⁵ According to the 2017 *Book of Reports of the 2017 Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville), 8, there were 46,793 churches reported as participating in the SBC comprised of 15,294,764 total members.

⁶⁶ John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2010), 85

difficult to contact. This could be for several reasons, including faulty emails or phone numbers on the ACP data, low levels of support staff to help offset administrative challenges within individual churches, pastors who have bi-vocational responsibilities, and the busy nature of ministry leaders who are constantly dealing with the challenges of local church ministry. Once the survey instrument was distributed, ensuring pastors completed the survey was difficult as well. The low response rate of 129 completed surveys among the population of 716 churches was certainly not what the research team optimistically planned for at the outset of this research. These factors resulted in a less than desirable confidence interval of 7.82 percent.⁶⁷

For those conducting further research, there were three specific concerns in the survey instrument that if corrected in the future would provide greater clarity and detail for scholars and practitioners seeking to make an impact on church revitalization.

Recommendations for sharpening word choice and language in the survey are as follows:

Question 14 read, “Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning the church's evangelism ministry during the revitalization process.” The term “during” can be unclear as there are phases in the revitalization process. While some pastors may have felt they were at the beginning of the process and planned future changes in their evangelism ministries, others may be toward the end of that process. A church with ideal evangelistic fervor may have answered lower scale because “during” the revitalization many members did not display a zeal for the Great Commission, but God has sense grown the majority of people to change. More clarity would have been given by stating the question as “current evangelism ministry” with the understanding that those churches receiving surveys had already been identified as experiencing revitalization.

The word choice in question 14c was equally problematic. It read, “The active members of the church regularly engaged in gospel conversations for the purpose of

⁶⁷ At the outset of this research, our research team would have preferred that the survey instrument to measure a statistical confidence interval of 5 percent.

personal evangelism.” The survey instrument failed to put parameters on the term “regularly.” This could have been interpreted on a broad range as once a day, once a week, once a month. A remedy for this ambiguity would have been to clearly define regular as once a week or once a month. This would have provided more detailed answers and the ability to dig deeper into applications about evangelism training.

Finally, question 15 delivered wonderful data concerning frequency of evangelism training, but was lacking in offering consistent answers with the type of training. If the goal of the question was to acquire information of both frequency and type, then perhaps restating it as two separate responses would prove more fruitful. In addition, the “type” aspect of the question was open-ended. Providing drop down options could have cleaned up the survey instrument. In this way pastors would have given more detail about the type of evangelism training occurring in their churches as they experienced revitalization.

Strengths

While a lower than desired participation rate during phase 2 was certainly a challenge, a strength was the wealth of knowledge gained by a diverse group of pastors interviewed in the qualitative phase, especially when considering the intentional three-phase process required to identify churches experiencing revitalization. The criteria designed to select these pastors and churches not only served to verify the quantitative data, but also aided by ensuring that those interviewed best fit the profile of a church revitalizer giving emphasis to evangelistic fervor as a contributing factor. This group of men were not only in different church contexts (i.e., rural, urban, suburban, multi-site and single campus), but were also geographically spread throughout the country. They were located from the far reaches of the northwest corner in the state of Washington to the southeast beaches of Florida. Some churches were less than 50 and some greater than 1,500 in weekly average worship attendance, yet they were all growing and experiencing

revitalization. It is astounding to consider the themes and similarities experienced among such a vastly diverse group of pastors and churches.

Conclusion

This study collected quantitative data from 716 churches, which met the inclusion criteria for church revitalization. In phase 2, 129 pastors participated by completing the survey instrument. Finally, 12 pastors were interviewed in the qualitative phase providing data, which shaped best practices for churches and pastors seeking to revitalize their local church context.

These findings represent the first comprehensive look at SBC churches experiencing revitalization in the last decade. Applications of this study will influence pastors and leaders desiring to see God revitalize their church, especially in connection to an evangelistic emphasis. Additional insights, implications, and applications of the research, and recommendations for further research are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this three-phase, sequential mixed-methods study was to understand the connection between church revitalization and an emphasis of evangelistic fervor. After identifying 716 churches that were experiencing revitalization, our research team acquired 129 survey responses from pastors who are seeing God grow their churches. During the twelve in-depth interviews, themes and topics of best practice were identified as contributing factors to church revitalization.

Acknowledging that there is a great deal of new information since the last major efforts were made over a decade ago to gather data of church revitalization on a large scale¹ and the fact that there is scant research with the specific focus on evangelistic emphasis for church revitalization were the leading motivators for this study. Providing more current and specific data to the research base were priority goals. What follows in this chapter are implications, applications, and additional insights from the research along with some suggestions for further areas of study.

Research Implications

The number of declining and plateaued churches is certainly alarming. At the outset of this research, Thom Rainer was cited as having more optimistic numbers stating 35 percent of churches to be growing.² However, according to the findings of this present

¹ See Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned around and Yours Can, Too* (Nashville: B & H, 2007); and Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

² Thom Rainer, “Dispelling the 80 Percent Myth of Declining Churches,” June 28, 2017, accessed August 30, 2017, <http://thomrainer.com/2017/06/dispelling-80-percent-myth-declining-churches/>.

research design, Rainer's optimism was unsubstantiated. NAMB president, Kevin Ezell reported in 2012 that over a five year span a mere 27 percent of churches were growing.³ This present study discovered that in the time passing between then and 2016, the decline and plateau issue has worsened by a percentage.⁴ To exacerbate the issue of churches dying, we also noted that only 5.24 percent of the churches walking through decline were revitalizing.⁵ What must be done then to ensure that a church be included in the small percentage of churches that are revitalizing? Certainly, William Henard's comments must be kept in mind when answering this question, as he says, "Church revitalization occurs because of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, not just because of our efforts."⁶ That said this research presents evangelistic fervor to be a vital component for churches experiencing church revitalization. Ed Stetzer then, had it right as he identified prayer, evangelism, and preaching as the top three factors for revitalization back in 2007.⁷ Though, it is not enough to simply observe and acknowledge a relationship between church health and evangelistic members. Pastors must lead their congregations to make obedience to the Great Commission a priority as they lead by example, train their members, and preach the mission. Dying churches are in desperate need for a movement of God,

³ Kevin Ezell, "Breathing New Life into Dying Churches," in *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, ed. Albert R. Mohler (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2015), 13.

⁴ In phase 1, a request was made to Lifeway Research to identify churches that existed in 2016, which was the most current year of data for ACP information at the time the request was made. In that year, 28,046 churches existed that had sufficient data to calculate their five-year worship attendance trend. Among these, 25.60 percent were growing churches, 25.71 percent were plateaued, and 48.69 percent were declining.

⁵ Of the 28,046 churches with reported ACP data, both the "growing" churches (25.60 percent) and the "plateaued" (25.71 percent) were removed from this calculation and no longer part of the population in need of revitalization. The above 5.24 percent was calculated by dividing 716 churches by 13,656, which were in decline in the year 2016.

⁶ William Henard, *Can These Bones Live? A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 16.

⁷ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 200. As noted below, both the themes of prayer and preaching were notable applications among pastors who were emphasizing evangelistic passion as a priority in the church revitalizations they were leading.

passionate persevering pastors, and a willingness of church members to awaken to the Great Commission by increased personal evangelism efforts.

At the conclusion of this study, I am hopeful. Through the quantitative data gathered, we learned that in churches experiencing revitalization, 92 percent have made positive changes in their evangelism ministries. By emphasizing evangelism training, outreach events, and promoting relational evangelism, these churches are seeing the Great Commission fulfilled right in front of their eyes in significant ways as they make disciples, baptize, and teach people to obey all that Christ has commanded. This trend cannot be overstated. If only 5.24 percent of churches within the SBC are experiencing revitalization and the vast majority are making changes to promote evangelistic fervor within their churches (92 percent), then the denomination as a whole must wake up to the fact that if they do not make a positive change to their evangelism ministries, they will only continue to decline and plateau.

As noted in chapter 4, of 129 pastors surveyed, 82.5 percent ranked evangelism as “important” or “highly important” in their church revitalization process. The implication here is that churches experiencing revitalization are intentionally emphasizing evangelism and giving priority to fulfilling the Great Commission. Furthermore, pastors surveyed overwhelmingly affirmed their church’s priority to train members for gospel conversations. Almost half of the pastors reported scheduling more than four evangelism trainings a year (46.08 percent) and a total of 84.31 percent planned a minimum of one evangelism training a year. Pastors looking for growth opportunities within churches needing revitalization should be encouraged by the example set by those surveyed. Providing simple evangelism training to the members of these declining churches and teaching them to share the good news of the gospel will certainly go a long way in making revitalization in their congregation a reality.

Research Applications

The three phases of this sequential mixed-methods study of SBC churches began with 46,793 cooperating churches. It was narrowed to 28,046 churches whom had reported ACP data, then narrowed to 716 churches experiencing revitalization, reduced to 129 pastors who participated by completing a survey resulting in twelve pastors who went through the qualitative interview portion. The winnowing effect of this research design provided a unique group of expert practitioners who discussed evangelistic fervor in connection to church revitalizations they were leading. Although this group was diverse in age, church size, and geographic location, several themes became consistent among the interviews.⁸ The top ten themes are discussed below with their apparent connections to the precedent literature offered in chapter 2.⁹

Used Church Member Testimonies to Celebrate Key Wins

Several pastors discussed their use of testimony and story as a way of shifting the church so that the congregation would understand the need for evangelism to be the greatest priority. These ideas reinforce what was presented in the precedent literature. In *Organizational Change: Theory and Practice*, Burke argues the necessity of incorporating stories in the process of culture change.¹⁰ Salvation testimonies of new converts and simple, honest accounts of gospel conversations are a sure way to make evangelistic emphasis a part of the culture of any church organization. Giving the congregation

⁸ A more detailed discussion of these topics and themes along with copious examples and excerpts from the interviews can be found in chap. 4.

⁹ Helpfully, Stetzer and Dodson also provided a top ten list for “most common transformations in comeback” churches, including Prayer, Children’s Ministry, Evangelism, Youth Ministry, Leadership, Missions, Assimilation, Worship, Small Groups, and Organization Structure. Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 193.

¹⁰ W. Warner Burke, *Organization Change: Theory and Practice*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2017), 341.

opportunities to hear about key wins in gospel conversation was a great way for pastors to emphasize the culture shift needed in most churches to fulfill the Great Commission.

Planned Evangelism Training

All of the pastors interviewed had intentional strategies for evangelism training. Hosting frequent and intentional evangelism trainings will surely reverse the trend observed by George Barna in *Futurecast*:

One cannot help but wonder if the reduction in interpersonal evangelism is at least partially attributable to the fact that only one percent of Christian adults (self-described or born again) claim the gift of evangelism. Though the Bible never suggests that one must possess this gift in order to share the gospel, the tiny proportion of believers who self-identify with the gift reflects the stalled growth of the Christian church in America.¹¹

Additionally, training can go a long way in helping the church understand and apply Mark Dever's comments concerning the universal mission of all Christians: "Christians should tell everyone the good news. And we should all evangelize, we should do so with honesty, urgency, and joy, living a life that backs up our message—and doing it all for the glory of God."¹² John Wilke presented disturbing statistics in 2012 when he surveyed 3,000 churchgoers on the subject of evangelism. He writes, "Despite a vast majority believing it is their duty to share their faith (80%) . . . 61% have not shared how to become a Christian with anyone in the past 6 months."¹³ The only way this is going to change in churches that are dying at a staggering rate is if pastors train and motivate their people to share the gospel.

¹¹ George Barna, *Futurecast: What Today's Trends Mean for Tomorrow's World* (Austin, TX: Barna, 2011), 171.

¹² Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 148.

¹³ John Wilke, "Churchgoers Believe in Sharing Faith, Most Never Do," LifeWay Research, 2012, accessed May 13, 2017, <https://www.lifeway.com/en/articles/research-survey-sharing-christ-2012>.

Preached Emphasis on Gospel Conversations

Stetzer and Dodson, in their book *Comeback Churches*, mention the priority of preaching. Their study concluded with the top three factors of “comeback churches” being prayer, evangelism, and preaching.¹⁴ John Folmer agrees as he states his four pillars of church reform: preaching, providence, partnership, and patience.¹⁵ Ten out of twelve pastors interviewed mentioned the use of their pulpit as a primary means to encourage their people to fulfill the Great Commission. Those engaged in church revitalization cannot ignore the vast potential the pulpit has in shifting the culture of the church toward making evangelism a priority.

Communicated Clear Mission and Vision of the Church

Seventy-five percent of the pastors interviewed mentioned the importance of the centrality of the Great Commission to the mission and vision of their churches. As previously noted in chapter 4, one pastor’s comments about casting vision were as follows: “You have to constantly defend the vision. And then you have to preach the vision like you’re preaching to a parade. Because there’s a whole new group of people coming that hasn’t heard it yet.”¹⁶ This application confirms what Lencioni says *The Advantage*: “Many leaders fail to over communicate because they get bored saying the same things over and over again. But that does not matter. The point of leadership is not to keep the leader entertained, but to mobilize people around what is most important.”¹⁷ The mission

¹⁴ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 200.

¹⁵ John Folmar, “What Makes a Church Reform Possible,” in *Revitalize: Why We Must Reclaim Dying Churches and How* | *9Marks Journal*, ed. Jonathan Leeman (Washington, DC: CreateSpace, 2016), 35.

¹⁶ Jackie Allen, Facetime interview with author, September 2018.

¹⁷ Patrick M. Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 143.

of the church to make disciples is repeated time and again throughout the Bible: pastors in revitalization contexts will do well by never tiring of communicating these truths.

Prioritized Setting the Example for Evangelism

Many pastors described a sense of understanding their role to lead by example in exuding a passion for evangelism and the Great Commission. Beau Lamb of New Mexico gave one such example:

It has given us the opportunity to really lead by example. So as we share the good news, it is instilling in them that our church members would have the same heart for following Jesus as we do. We don't ask our church to do anything that my wife and I and the kids aren't doing already. I feel that leadership by example is the strongest point.¹⁸

As difficulty, frustration, and burn-out are prevalent in pastoral ministry, perhaps Tim Keller's admonishment for the need of personal renewal is an appropriate reminder "Gospel renewal is a life-changing recovery of the gospel."¹⁹ As pastors continue to experience their own sanctification, this recovery of the gospel not only reminds them of the sweet mercies of Jesus in their own lives, but also motivates them to communicate these truths to others. Thus, pastors continue to make a priority of setting the example of evangelism for their members while at the same time experiencing the joy of obedience that comes with participation in the Great Commission task.

Maintained Slow Culture Shift and Awareness of On-Going Revitalization Progress

Many pastors in the interview portion of this study noted the necessity for patience during the slow shifting church culture toward evangelism. One pastor specifically mentioned his goal to stay long enough to see this change. Brad Delaughter stated,

¹⁸ Beau Lamb, Facetime interview with author, September 2018.

¹⁹ Timothy Keller, *Center Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 51.

I've learned it takes time from everything I've read, and experience now. We have to increase pastoral tenure. If we want revitalization to happen. . . . It cannot. It will not happen in three years, which is average stay now. You ain't been there long enough. You ain't buried enough people in three years to get clout.²⁰

Brian Croft, author of *Biblical Church Revitalization*, agrees with Delaughter's comments when he writes,

I had very wise mentors who taught me well. I came with two commitments that I learned from them. First, I must faithfully preach the word, sacrificially love the people, and not change anything for a while. Second, regardless of what happens stay ten years.²¹

If pastors are not willing to make this commitment at the front end of a church revitalization then they should refrain from ever initiating the process.

Motivated by Biblical Truths

While not specifically recorded as a competency required for church revitalization in the precedent literature, plenty of examples can be found in Scripture that support the calling of a pastor to have a knowledgeable grasp of Scripture. Paul's exhortations to Timothy alone stand as sufficient examples of these things. He not only writes that elders/overseers must "be able to teach," but also Timothy and pastors who would follow in his steps must "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (1 Tim 3:2; 2 Tim 4:2). If a man is expecting any success in church revitalization he certainly must be ready to quote Scripture as not only his authority, but motivation for all he does and teaches.

Focused upon Prayer

Of the pastors interviewed, 7 out of 12 mentioned prayer unprompted as a critical tool in their church revitalization process. Again, the precedent literature affirms these findings. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, in *Leading Congregational Change*, offer a

²⁰ Brad Delaughter, Facetime interview with author, September 2018.

²¹ Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying & Divided Churches* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), 103.

reminder: “If the leaders of the congregation are not spending significant, consistent time seeking God’s direction—through prayer, Bible study, meditation, solitude, and fasting—it will be impossible for meaningful and lasting transformation to occur.”²² Henard also speaks to church revitalization ultimately being a work of God.²³ If pastors desiring to see revitalization are not praying, one could argue that they should not expect God to move in mighty ways.

Emphasized Relational Evangelism

An emphasis on relational evangelism, which appeared both in the quantitative and qualitative portions of this study, was strangely missing in the precedent literature of church revitalization.²⁴ Perhaps this gives even greater credence for application to all who are seeking to lead in revitalization context. Even though this theme is largely absent from previous scholarship on the subject, expert practitioners are finding it to be helpful and thus it is delivered here as best practice among revitalizers.

Displayed an Awareness of the Holy Spirit

If the presence of God is required for successful church revitalization to occur,²⁵ then an awareness of the Holy Spirit is paramount. Half of the pastors interviewed made this observation, as Brian Croft agrees when he writes, “Only God and His power can truly revitalize a dying, divided church, and God’s design to accomplish this is found

²² Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 31.

²³ Henard, *Can These Bones Live*, 16.

²⁴ Evangelism resources surveyed included J. I. Packer, *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1991); Jimmy Scroggins, Steve Wright, and Leslee Bennett, *Turning Everyday Conversations into Gospel Conversations* (Nashville: B & H, 2016); Rico Tice, Carl Laferton, and D. A. Carson, *Honest Evangelism* (London: Good Book, 2015); and Robert Emerson Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Westwood, NJ: F. H. Revell, 1964).

²⁵ Henard writes, “Church revitalization occurs because of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, not just because of our efforts.” Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 16.

through his Spirit at work in His word.”²⁶ If pastors are seeking to experience church revitalization they must not only depend on the power of God, but the presence of the Holy Spirit as well.

Additional Insights

Reported above are the top ten themes and topics among practitioners of revitalization in connection to the scholarship presented in the precedent literature and the quantitative data gathered through the survey instrument. Beyond the consistent themes that formed best practices among revitalizers, a few less mentioned comments, but notable nonetheless, came from the interviews as well, including a “sending” church culture, the need for creating urgency, and the connection between discipleship and evangelism.

Sending Church Culture

One pastor who has led his church for the last twenty years spoke to the transitional nature of his community and how Sonshine Baptist Fellowship uses that as an opportunity to train people up and send them out. Eckley said,

We're not a big congregation. I feel like our church, for instance, has been a church that has brought and has attracted people through the Lord's Word and then they go from where we are. They were either transferred or they move along to other areas in the country and in the world and they always report back saying how much they've appreciated their time at Sonshine Baptist Fellowship and they are experiencing some of the power of the Lord in their ministry, whether it's in a new church, whether it's back at home preaching or sharing the gospel with their family. I guess the excitement is to hear that what we're doing goes with the people to wherever God sends them next.²⁷

This sense of celebrating the sending rather than mourning the loss of leaders or friends is a good reminder of Greear’s comments in *Gaining by Losing*: “If the people in our churches are not ‘going’ we are not doing our jobs.”²⁸ Greear gives copious accounts of

²⁶ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 17.

²⁷ Paul Eckley, Facetime interview with author, September 2018.

²⁸ J. D Greear, *Gaining by Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches That Send* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 20.

how his church sent some of his closest friends in ministry into the mission field in an effort to be a healthy church. Pastors teaching their people to celebrate a sending culture has the potential to normalize that as the expectation for all Christians.

Creating Urgency

In *The Heart of Change: Real Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations*, John Kotter contends that the first step in his eight-step change process is creating urgency.²⁹ Herrington, Bonem, and Furr agree with Kotter as they identify “creating urgency as the second step in their eight-step process only after “making personal preparation.”³⁰ In their view, the pastor walking through this personal preparation leads to helping create urgency within the church, they offer the following wisdom: “If the leaders of the congregation are not spending significant, consistent time seeking God’s direction—through prayer, Bible study, meditation, solitude, and fasting—it will be impossible for meaningful and lasting transformation to occur.”³¹ Regarding the need for his church members to not only believe but distribute the good news of the gospel, Petty says,

The [need] of them being aware of what our mission is and especially as we look at the things that are taking place in our world certainly indicates that we are living in the last days. Which means what are we going to do for Christ, we need to do it now. We can't wait to do it.³²

What should be more urgent than the promised soon return of Christ as a motivation for

²⁹ John P. Kotter and Dan S. Cohen, *The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 15.

³⁰ Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 13. Similar to John Kotter’s eight steps in the change process offered in *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012). Herrington, Bonem, and Furr offer the following stages for change: (1) Making Personal Preparation, (2) Creating Urgency, (3) Establishing the Vision Community, (4) Discerning the Vision and Determining the Visionpath, (5) Communicating the Vision, (6) Empowering Change Leaders, (7) Implementing the Vision, (8) Reinforcing Momentum through Alignment. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 13.

³¹ Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 31.

³² Charles Petty, Facetime interview with author, September 2018.

church members to get busy doing kingdom work?

Connection between Discipleship and Evangelism

Effective evangelism requires faithful discipleship, and effective discipleship includes passionate evangelism.³³ Cory Thomas agrees with Dever's comments as he states, "And see evangelism to me is a two-fold purpose. It is to call those in that are lost and hope the spirit speaks to them and saves them. But also for those who are within the church to continually disciple them and grow them in the Lord."³⁴ Sometimes Christians talk about discipleship and evangelism as if they are opposing one another, but for the church revitalizer above, and Dever, that could not be further from the truth.

Observing these connections to the lesser discussed themes from the interviews and the precedent literature helps offer additional insights to pastors who are in the midst of a church revitalization context. While many implications and applications could be derived from this research, it certainly has not answered all the potential questions for pastors in need of experiencing church revitalization. Some areas of potential further study are offered next. Additionally noted are three directives for declining churches.

Directives for Declining Churches

There are no expedient means to ensure church revitalization; the directives in this section are not intended to be those kinds of solutions. However, this research does provide practical means for transforming an unhealthy church culture by creating a priority and emphasis on evangelism. As scholars have noted, a church that is going to revitalize must have the Father's blessing covering it and the Holy Spirit leading it.³⁵ This is

³³ Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016). See Dever's arguments concerning living in view of eternity to include "helping others follow Jesus; doing deliberate good; praying for gospel influence, and proclaiming God's words." *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁴ Cory Thomas, Facetime interview with author, September 2018.

³⁵ See Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 17; and Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 16.

precisely why it is paramount that a pastor covers his revitalization efforts in prayer. The pastor must not only pray, he also must seek to train, celebrate, and stay.

Train

The greatest finding in this study is the fact that an overwhelming majority (84.31 percent) of surveyed churches within the SBC experiencing revitalization are training members to have gospel conversations. This one simple change in ministry programming and priority has the potential to significantly increase the probability of revitalization. Resources on this subject are virtually endless, yet so many pastors and churches fail to use them. One does not need to look further than the research presented above to gain a cursory understanding of methods, tools, types, and trainings available to the pastor who is ready to implement evangelism training in his declining church. Recently I participated in a pastor round-table discussion whereby all fifteen pastors in the room admitted to not having led or participated in a single evangelism training in their church over the previous twelve months. Simply stated, a pastor who is unwilling to train his people in evangelism is a pastor who is complicit in the decline and death of the church he is leading. A professional athlete would never expect success on the field if he rarely invested time in the gym training. While the athlete has profitable contracts and championship races on the line, Christians have something far greater—the kingdom of Christ, the mission of the Father, and the longing to hear the words, “well done, my good and faithful servant” at the end of their lives (see Matt 25:21, 23; Like 19:17). Training the congregation to engage in gospel conversations is essential for church revitalization, but it does not stop there. A pastor also needs to develop a system of celebrating and sharing these stories as they happen within their church.

Celebrate

The raw power of a good story to motivate is often forgotten. In the church, Christians are motivated by the Scripture, but also greatly encouraged when they hear

someone other than the pastor share about a gospel conversation. Creating unique ways for church members to share stories of evangelism is a low cost, high reward strategy for preparing a church for revitalization. Imagine for just a moment a seventy-year-old deacon who has not shared the gospel for several decades. When that man hears his pastor say that he should be sharing the gospel, there is a temptation to allow that admonishment to wash right over him. But when his best friend of almost half a century gets in front of their church family to speak about the joy and exhilaration of evangelism, that challenge to obey the Great Commission cannot be ignored. The cost is too high for churches to maintain the status quo of filling pews with lukewarm Christians who have no passion for the advancement of the gospel. Churches must gather then scatter into a lost and dying world that desperately needs to hear the good news about Christ. When the church gathers and has an opportunity to experience and celebrate a fellow member's newfound passion for sharing the gospel, it has the great possibility of being the catalyst that other members need to actively obey the Great Commission as well. Pastors eager to serve in churches experiencing revitalization will need to train, celebrate, and, lastly, be ready to stay.

Stay

Looking back at the twelve churches surveyed in the qualitative portion of this study, the average ministry tenure of these pastors leading churches experiencing revitalization was nine years. As noted, Croft encourages pastors to stay a minimum of ten years.³⁶ Church revitalization is not for the faint of heart. If a pastor is not motivated to persevere through the most strenuous circumstances because they are motivated by the glory of God and desire to see the kingdom of Christ advanced, then they should not take the helm of a church which is already sinking. It is somewhat normal for a child to make a commitment and double back on his decision, but the church seeking revitalization needs a man or group of men who are mighty oaks finding their strength in the Lord and are

³⁶ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 103.

willing to stand by their word when they take on a challenge. Those who make a front-end commitment to stay at a ministry post for a longer than average tenure have a greater chance of seeing God move mightily in their churches.

Further Research

There are several areas for further study derived from this research: (1) the relationship between multi-site model and church revitalization, (2) average time of pastoral tenure before a church experiences revitalization, and (3) connection of cross-cultural influences in church revitalization.

Relationship between Multi-Site Model and Church Revitalization

Reflecting upon the demographic make-up of the twelve churches interviewed, one notices that the two largest churches utilized a multi-site strategy. While it was not the focus of this research, this observation notes a connection between larger churches experiencing revitalization and the multi-site model. Those interested in further study on this subject may seek to determine what percentage of multi-site churches are experiencing revitalization. Are these churches growing in connection to a new move to this model? In addition, researchers may ask about the timing of transition to multi-site. Was this move motivated by a desire to revitalize? Also, what is the pastor's perception of the multi-site model he is leading and its effect on church revitalization? Many questions are left unanswered as they relate to church revitalization and the multi-site model. Researching these questions and presenting findings would provide valuable information to pastors who are praying through making a transition to a multi-site ministry philosophy.

Average Time of Pastoral Tenure before a Church Experiences Revitalization

Whether it is Croft telling pastors they need to stay a minimum of ten years in a church revitalization or Mark Dever's quip "preach and pray, love, and stay" willingness to persevere through the process has been noted. The average time of pastor tenure among

those interviewed was nine years. One wonders what they would have said if asked the number of months or years it took for them to see a culture shift toward Great Commission obedience and church revitalization. A beneficial study would include all 716 churches with the aim of attaining the average time of pastor tenure required for church revitalization. Would this research find the average length of pastor tenure within these churches to be higher or lower than nine years? What percentage of those pastors entered their current ministry context with the specific aim of heeding Croft's advice to stay a minimum of ten years? Would they perceive that their willingness to make a long-term investment aided them in their leadership of a church in need of revitalization? A study of this magnitude could present a vital resource for pastors entering ministry contexts in need of revitalization.

Connection of Cross-Cultural Influences in Church Revitalization

One unexpected surprise in the interview portion of this research was the comments of a pastor in in the extremely diverse area of West Palm Beach, Florida. He observed the benefit of cross-cultural influences as a means of spreading the gospel. Robinson stated,

To go back to the cultural factor, people like you and me [middle class Anglo Americans] are usually the ones that you have the hardest time motivating to share their faith. But in a lot of our [cross-cultural] backgrounds, it's just natural to do it. It comes with the territory . . . our Spanish [and Haitian] speaking churches are way more connected than the English speaking church. . . . So it's just a different cultural dynamic. That is what it is. But if you get the people genuinely converted as tight as that is, it just, it just spreads.³⁷

Although this study did not seek to identify a connection between cross-cultural growth in our country and gospel growth in church revitalization, more work could be done to study the relationship between these two themes. This is especially true in an age of immigration and the growing diversity of America. As the nations are coming to the US, what will the church be willing to do to get the gospel to them?

³⁷ Jeff Robinson, Facetime interview with author, September 2018.

Conclusion

Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, states, “Between 80 to 90 percent of all evangelical churches in the United States are not growing, and a significant percentage are in outright decline.”³⁸ A 2016 Barna Research study reveals less than one-third of the American population attends church at least once a month.³⁹ Research continues to show that the decline and death of churches has only gotten worse in the last decade.⁴⁰ Now more than ever is the time to ask the hard questions, seek God’s face, and press into the command to fulfill the Great Commission. Not only is this a biblical recourse to the church decline and plateau phenomena, but the research presented above also affirms the urgency of the church to place the mission at the heart of everything they do. Jesus left the marching orders of Matthew 28 and Acts 1 and pastors leading revitalization must do the same by heralding the centrality of mission and vision in their churches.

This research design was intended to observe and communicate the influence evangelistic emphasis has on church revitalization. Considering both the quantitative data and the analysis of qualitative interviews, best practices from proven practitioners have been presented. Churches and their pastors who emphasize evangelistic fervor and participation in the Great Commission with their people in various ways are growing. Now is certainly not the time to become complacent or stagnate in the command to make disciples. Rather, the church must remember the words of Christ, “Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you’” (John 20:21).

³⁸ Albert Mohler, “Christ Will Build and Will Rebuild His Church: The Need for ‘Generation Replant,’” in Mohler, *A Guide to Church Revitalization*, 8.

³⁹ Barna Group, “The State of the Church 2016,” September 15, 2016, accessed December 27, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/state-church-2016/>. Their population size for this study was over 5,000 people who were surveyed between January and April of 2016.

⁴⁰ Ezell, “Breathing New Life into Dying Churches,” 13. NAMB president Kevin Ezell reported in 2012 that over a five-year span a mere 27 percent of churches were growing. This present study discovered that in the time passing between then and 2016 the decline and plateau issue has worsened by almost a full 2 percent.

APPENDIX 1
EXPERT PANEL REQUEST

Greetings [Recipient Name],

My name is Aaron Colyer and I am a doctoral student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. I am part of a research team seeking to identify successful church revitalizations and determine what significance a focus or priority of the following areas played the greatest role: evangelism, discipleship, leadership development, and worship ministry.

I am requesting your participation in sculpting our initial survey instrument as a panel of experts who have distinguished themselves as practitioners or thought leaders on the subject of church revitalization. Attached you will see a copy of the survey tool in its draft form. Below is the inclusion criteria for SBC churches in the research population who will receive this survey:

1. The church has ACP data for 2006-2016.
2. Less than 10% growth in worship attendance over the five year period prior to the turnaround.
3. Then experienced growth in worship attendance of 10% or more for 2 out of 5 years following the turnaround while achieving a 20:1 worship attendance to baptism ratio in the same years.

Roughly 700 SBC churches that provided ACP data fit the criteria above. After reviewing the survey, please respond with any edits or comments you would give to sharpen our research tool. Please keep in mind that the intent of this brief survey is to identify churches whereby the leadership intentionally employed strategies related to the above priorities. After the survey phase, individual researchers for each topic will conduct in depth follow up interviews of selected churches/pastor. In your view, will these questions effectively identify these priorities; if no, what changes would you propose?

If you have any further questions we are more than happy to provide much greater detail about the nature of the study if you are indeed interested. Our efforts to discover and

synthesize best practice of successful church revitalizations will no doubt be a benefit to current pastors and Christ's greater kingdom in years to come. Thank you for your valuable contribution for this important research in church revitalization.

Blessings,

Aaron T. Colyer (Church Revitalization Research Team)

APPENDIX 2
SURVEY REQUEST

Dear Church Leader,

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

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

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

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

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

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

As an incentive, if you complete the survey in the next seven days and indicate a willingness to participate in a 20-30 minute personal interview if requested, you will be entered into a drawing for a **\$250 Amazon Gift Card**.

Would you please take a moment, even now, to help all of our SBC churches learn from you? Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

On behalf of our team, thank you for your leadership and for your prayerful consideration of this request.

For the sake of His Name,

Aaron T. Colyer

APPENDIX 3

CHURCH REVITALIZATION INFLUENCE SURVEY

Church Revitalization Influence Survey (Panel)

Demographic Information

1. Your **current** role with your church:

- Pastor/Elder
- Deacon
- Staff
- Volunteer

2. Your role **prior** to the revitalization process:

- Pastor/Elder
- Deacon
- Staff
- Volunteer
- Not at the church

3. Your role **during** the revitalization process:

- Pastor/Elder
- Deacon
- Staff
- Volunteer
- Not at the church

4. Are you willing to participate in a follow up interview regarding the revitalization process at your church?

- Yes
- No

Interview Participation Contact Information

5. Contact information:

Name

Church Name

Church Address

Address 2

City/Town

State/Province

ZIP/Postal Code

Email Address

Phone Number

The Revitalization Process in General

6. Rate each ministry emphasis as to the importance it played in the revitalization process.

| | Highly Unimportant | Unimportant | Slightly Unimportant | Slightly Important | Important | Highly Important |
|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Discipleship | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Evangelism | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Leadership | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Missions | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Prayer | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Worship | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Other (please specify)

7. Reflecting on the change initiatives you have pursued in your church revitalization context, identify the area in which you have faced the **greatest** amount of **member resistance**.

8. Reflecting on the change initiatives you have pursued in your church revitalization context, identify the area in which you have faced the **greatest** amount of **member acceptance**.

Discipleship

9. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **discipleship ministry** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.

10. Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning the church's discipleship ministry **during the revitalization process.**

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| The church had a clearly defined discipleship process. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The majority of active members were able to explain the discipleship process. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

11. Which programmatic elements existed in the church's discipleship approach **during the revitalization process?** (Select all that apply.)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Age-graded Ministry (i.e. children, youth, college, adult) | <input type="checkbox"/> Men's Ministry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Men's and/or Women's Bible Studies | <input type="checkbox"/> Women's Ministry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intergenerational Mentoring | <input type="checkbox"/> One-on-one Type Discipleship Groups |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Home-based Small Groups | <input type="checkbox"/> Traditional Sunday School Model |

12. Regarding the Christian formation process, select the perspective which most closely represents the majority of the active church members **at the beginning of the revitalization process.**

- A More Individualistic Mindset** (Members expect to select and shape most of their own discipleship process, with an emphasis on personal needs and intentional personal growth.)
- A More Collective Mindset** (Members expect spiritual leadership to guide them in their discipleship process with an emphasis on common needs and intentional relational and community growth.)

Evangelism

13. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **evangelism ministry** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.

14. Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning the church's evangelism ministry **during the revitalization process**.

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| There was a demonstrable increase in personal evangelism among active members of the church. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The majority of active members could communicate the gospel in a personal evangelism encounter. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The active members of the church regularly engaged in gospel conversations for the purpose of personal evangelism. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

15. Briefly describe the type and frequency of evangelism training **currently** offered in your church.

Missions

16. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **missions ministry** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.

17. Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning the church's **missions ministry prior to the revitalization process**.

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| The church had a vibrant missions ministry focused on financially supporting short-term and/or long-term missionaries. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The church had a vibrant missions ministry focused on sending short-term and/or long-term missionaries from its own membership. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

18. Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning the church's **current missions ministry**.

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| The church has a vibrant missions ministry focused on financially supporting short-term and/or long-term missionaries. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The church has a vibrant missions ministry focused on sending short-term and/or long-term missionaries from its own membership. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Leadership

19. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **leadership structures** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.

20. Indicate how important each of the following leadership practices have been in the revitalization process in your ministry context.

| | Highly Unimportant | Unimportant | Slightly Unimportant | Slightly Important | Important | Highly Important |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Building Momentum | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Conceptual Thinking | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Contextual Awareness and Planning | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Developing Others | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Getting Members Engaged | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Gospel Orientation | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Individual and Corporate Repentance | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Information Seeking | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Initiative | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Interpersonal Understanding | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Missional Focus | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Organizational Awareness | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Relationship Building | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Teamwork and Cooperation | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Transparency | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Willingness to Confront/Church Discipline | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

21. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **leadership development processes** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.

22. Select your level of agreement with the following statements concerning leadership development processes.

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Prior to the revitalization process, a culture of effective leadership development existed within the church. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Leadership development played a significant role in the revitalization process. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Prayer

23. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **prayer ministry** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.

24. Rate the the following statement.

| | Highly Unimportant | Unimportant | Slightly Unimportant | Slightly Important | Important | Highly Important |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| The church leadership's dependence upon prayer as a vital means for realizing revitalization in your ministry context. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

25. Briefly describe your frequency and pattern of personal prayer **during the revitalization process**.

26. In what ways were the topic of and act of prayer prioritized in corporate worship **during the revitalization process**?

Worship

27. Briefly describe the primary changes to the church's **worship ministry** which you perceive have contributed significantly to the revitalization process.

28. Please indicate what the most **difficult** element was to change in the worship ministry during the revitalization process and state the reason it was difficult.

29. Please indicate what the most **rewarding** element of change was in the worship ministry during the revitalization process and state the reason it was rewarding.

General Comments

30. What advice would you offer to a pastor seeking to lead a revitalization process?

APPENDIX 4

TRANSCRIPTS

Jeff Robinson

- Aaron Colyer: Perfect, so on with Jeff Robinson here from Grace Fellowship, a Church for All Nations in West Palm Beach, Florida. Pastor Jeff you had said earlier, but I want to make sure we've got it for the record. You're okay with this conversation being audio recorded.
- Jeff Robinson: Yes.
- Aaron Colyer: Okay, perfect. Well, let me tell you first and foremost, thank you very, very much for your willingness to sit down. We've sent our revitalization survey to over 500 churches and that's only the church's that fit the plateau and then turn around, right? of ten percent growth in baptizing people. For every 20 people in your average worship attendance, you're baptizing at least one person. So praise God for what's happening there at Grace Fellowship. I want to let you know the reason I'm talking to you is your high rankings for evangelism. So you had marked that, one of the greatest, receptivity of change in church revitalization process of your membership receiving and understanding, accepting the priority is evangelism out of our six topics.
- Aaron Colyer: And I love hearing that because that is, that's my area of study. That connection between evangelistic fervor among the church membership and church revitalization. So wanted to tell you a little bit about why I'm contacting you out of our six man team. Then before I start asking you questions, see if you have any questions about our research. Do you have any questions from the front or were you pretty square . . .
- Jeff Robinson: You guys are working with the SBC?
- Aaron Colyer: SBTS - Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and really the clout that the seminary pulls gave us cooperation with Lifeway research. So any Southern Baptist Church that had been filling in their annual report and turning in that information, that's where we measured churches for revitalization and it's nuts to consider more than 300, about 500. But, we didn't have good contact information. So it was in the high three hundreds of churches that met those requirements, those metrics for revitalization. And we have 46,000 Southern Baptist churches. So a very exciting that I get to talk to you. But even more so, I'm wanting to see exactly what God's been doing there in Florida to connect evangelism and the revitalization process. So let me start by reading this ethics statement because I think you're going to be doing a lot of talking. I'm going to be doing a lot listening. But I want to make sure for academic purposes I read this and

I've got your consent to transcript our conversation and use some of it for my thesis that I'll be writing.

Aaron Colyer: **Agreement to Participate:** The research in which you are about to participate is designed to determine the critical elements of your church's recent revitalization. This research is being conducted by a six-man research team pursuing doctoral degrees at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for purposes of understanding and encouraging these elements among other churches. In this research, you will be asked to describe your church's experiences. During the interview portion of the research, notes will be kept for your specific church revitalization, which may appear in the publication of the research. If you desire any of the information given to remain confidential, please inform the interviewer. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this Interview, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Aaron Colyer: Are you good to go with those things? Pastor Jeff?

Jeff Robinson: Yes sir.

Aaron Colyer: All right. Well then I would say we're going to structure this time. I really want to keep it to half an hour. I want to guard your time. I realize that you're at the end of a Thursday there on the east coast. So we should have you offline by 5:00, which would be good. Let you know that I've got these five primary questions I'm asking every interviewer. So I'll ask those. If I need to probe and get specific examples I may slow it down. But if we're coming to the end of that half hour and I haven't reached all my questions, I may speed up. So that's kind of our outline for the conversation. Let me start just by asking this. Give me some general aspects of what's been happening in your church, the revitalization process. Were you there for the decline or plateau and then pick back up or did you come in as it was declined? How long have you been there? And then towards the end of that answer, shape what's happened over the last several years to develop this culture of evangelism where people are accepting this idea that every Christian has to be proclaiming the good news of Christ. And we'll get started there.

Jeff Robinson: Yeah. So I've been here about two years and let's see four months. I came in after we were without a senior leader for three years. And during that time, we had pretty much everything that could happen in a church that you don't want to happen in a church happen. And so we were just hemorrhaging people during that time. The church really lost direction. And so we came in at a time where people were, oh, I would say honestly in a state of desperation. And so, we just came in and just said, let's get back to the gospel. I mean, it's not super, you know, technical stuff, but the ones who had stuck it out, said the Lord still has a plan. And what is that plan? Let's go to Matthew 28.

Jeff Robinson: Yep. Just bring people back to what we're there for and it helps to here in Palm Beach County. I mean, you're aware of the research, the most never church region in the US. So that really gives you a lot of preaching power. You know, the traction with people. So yeah.

Aaron Colyer: Tell me about the average worship attendance. So you've been there going on three years. It had been hemorrhaging, but according to our research it's turned around and it's coming back up.

Jeff Robinson: Yep.

Aaron Colyer: What does that look like a numbers wise?

Jeff Robinson: Yeah. So the numbers that were taken before I came on were a little different. That's more of a longer conversation. Yeah. If you want to have that, I don't want to waste our time with that. So it's kind of really hard to find out exactly what it was. It (*inaudible*), but we know what it was when I came. Now as far as our English service, probably two of them were around 1300 with all of our campuses and we have three Haitian campuses and two Spanish in addition to our English.

Aaron Colyer: Church for all nations.

Jeff Robinson: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. We're around 2000 or so.

Aaron Colyer: Okay. So you the English speaking service, but when you got there it wasn't 1300.

Jeff Robinson: No, no, we were. I'd have to go back and look specifically if you want, I can, I can email that to you.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.

Jeff Robinson: I want to give you what I'm talking numbers. I'm going to actually give you a real number

Aaron Colyer: And one of the reasons why I asked that on the front is we actually had some weird, some weird thing happened in the annual report and the lifeway research where it shows you guys at 57,000. And I thought well that's got to be a typo. That's got to be a typo.

Aaron Colyer: So yeah, we have those numbers for these churches that we've surveyed, but I wanted to clarify a piece of that. That's not the biggest part of the research. Honestly get to the point where in three years you've seen a measurable difference in people understanding I've got to be sharing the gospel. So what happened to change that culture?

Jeff Robinson: Yeah, so I think people were just ready after three years. I mean it was primed. We gave options to invite your friends, here's how you share the gospel and just go do it. Like, let's go. So it is more of, I told them to give me 45 minutes to preach every service. So just tried to honestly, just hammer it time and time again. Talk about the area, talk about the needs and just call people back to the gospel. I mean that was pretty much the first year.

Aaron Colyer: I love it. Back to the basics, man. Yeah, we don't need smoke and lights, we just, we just need to be obeying the Lord. Yeah. Maybe you do smoke and lights, so I hope that's not the case when I just said that, but I

think that the sentiment is still there, you know. So in your survey you talk about 3 Circles and that leads us to my next question. What specific strategies, methods, tools were being used in this process of making the Great Commission a priority? So 3 Circles is one of them. Are there others? And how do y'all do training? How often do y'all do training?

Jeff Robinson: We don't, we don't do it enough. We will go over it in our membership class actually. We'll go over that. But for us, because the south Florida culture is so busy. There's so many things to do. We've tried to leverage certain events. So we make beach baptism a big deal. That in and of itself generates easy conversations. Everybody loves the beach. The religious people here, probably the majority would be of Roman Catholic heritage. And so baptism is not necessarily a bad thing. So we could piggyback off that and create a lot of social media pushes and then one on one conversations.

Aaron Colyer: Good. So, then exclusively 3 Circles as the tool, or are there other tools?

Jeff Robinson: Since I've been here? That's really where we've landed.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. Well you're right there in the backyard of where Jimmy Scroggins wrote the 3 Circles. So I don't know . . .

Jeff Robinson: We were just hanging out today. So, I just think it works for our area.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, absolutely. Well, we are similar. We got onto 3 Circles, actually not because NAMB was pushing it, it was before. I don't know if you've seen any of the 4 Fields stuff: enter a field; sow the seeds of the gospel; reap the harvest; discipleship and then leadership reproduction. It's like this mission strategy. They picked up 3 Circles like four or five years ago and started pushing it as a tool and are still pushing it as a gospel tool. And so, yeah, we were able to do that here and have seen some really good success in giving people an opportunity to know that it's about the conversation it is not just about the tool. But if you need to revert back to some foundational elements of the gospel, it's a very easy, reproducible tool.

Jeff Robinson: I would say for us that was important is, and I'm a huge fan of Carey Nieuwhof, but some guys that are my age will take some of his statements such as, we shouldn't worry about those who we're going to lose. We just focus on those who we are going to reach. You know, those types of thoughts were basically to steamroll people. I think for us it's been helpful to see how many allies can we gain. How many people who may not even be walking with Jesus, but they believe the tenants of Christianity, what's a win in there for them. Whether it's changing the culture.. Whether it is, you know, this next generation, they're all messed up they need to be changed. So trying to look for as many inroads for as many people in the church, even if they're not yet right with Christ. But they have a Christian memory that what you're not creating battles within the campaign.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. That reminds me of that idea of Jesus sent out the 72 and look for a person of peace or a household of peace, right? They're not anti-gospel or are unwilling to listen, but they're certainly not Christian, right?

They're not a disciple. We want to locate those people and do some discipleship process and hope and pray for the fruit of the gospel to bear repentance and faith. Right?

Jeff Robinson:

Yeah.

Aaron Colyer:

That's good, man. Let me ask you, you mentioned beach baptism, which is a big celebration. One of the things I'm finding with this trend of people who are seeing the church revitalize, is the ability to celebrate wins and celebrate victories. And so, what are some systems in place there at Grace Fellowship where you guys are able to celebrate wins for the gospel?

Jeff Robinson:

It's where the pastor, this is what we're finding. And my team tells me all the time and I've pushed back against it, but now I believe it. As to where, when the pastor preaches those announcements, that's when you get the most traction. So for example, these baptisms, we'll have our video team do an actual video. Show that in church right before the sermon. So we show it after the bumper video and then the sermon roles right after that. And everything that happens in a positive way, we push. We use that as a launch pad like I use that and I weave it in my sermon. So I'll use like record high enrollment in Awana or one of our Haitian pastors, baptized 10 people the other week. I'll make that an illustration. So in other words, like, you know, I mean like, like pastors, do you try to preach the vision and preach the sermon?

Jeff Robinson:

So constantly, constantly creating that through the sermon. That's what we found here. That's the best way to do it because of our multi ethnic makeup and the high regard for a senior pastor. What you and I as with our background as white guys in America, to be totally frank, right? There's more of, an egalitarian view and the pastor, it's like, hey man, my name's Jeff. For many of our people, they come from, from cultures and traditions to where they feel uncomfortable even calling me Pastor Jeff. Pastor, there's that title. Does that make sense?

Aaron Colyer:

Oh absolutely. In Roswell we are 50 percent Hispanic. I mean 50/50 (*inaudible*) Hispanic. And so, you know, I was going to say young lady, but she's in her sixties. That has to call me brother, brother, brother, brother, brother, brother. Not Brother Aaron. Now Pastor Aaron, I'm brother, right? Because that's her culture. And she's also the only other woman aside from my wife and daughters who's allowed to kiss me, right? Because she, she kisses her pastor, so she'll bring me a big hug. She'll kiss me on my cheek. I'm like, and I asked my wife, I said, do I need to stop that because if she feels uncomfortable I'll do it. And she was like, no, she's just, she loves you. And she's loving on her pastor and she's a big hug and a kiss on the cheek. and that's beautiful, man. I think there's something really amazing about that, you know? So I, I'm not in West Palm Beach in that kind of diversity, but I will say you talk about having these other congregations, we are so excited. I think for the first time in the history of our church to be looking at a full time ministry position of someone who's not white guy.

Jeff Robinson:

Did you say you guys were in Roswell?

Aaron Colyer: Roswell, New Mexico. Yeah.

Jeff Robinson: Do you where Fort Sumner is?

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, yeah.

Jeff Robinson: Do you know John Russo?

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, I know Russo. Yeah, he just left Fort Sumner. He just went to Arizona.

Jeff Robinson: I've preached at First Baptist, Fort Sumner. I'm friends with him from college and seminary.

Aaron Colyer: In fact, our wives who were having dinner maybe six months ago when she was just pouring out her heart saying this is just dark times in Fort Sumner. People aren't getting it. People pushing back and then having an opportunity to fresh start in Arizona is probably a really good thing for him right now. So praise God. Yeah. Small world, Bro. So specifically videos, y'all do the beach baptism. Do you use videos as celebration for other things as well?

Jeff Robinson: We do, absolutely. Everything that we can do, man, we're finding that that is just huge in the service. And then also with social media. We're finding that the money we spend on Facebook advertising is probably the best money we spend.

Aaron Colyer: Wow. So in those videos is it always leadership pastors or are you using church members to tell their stories.

Jeff Robinson: We've done some of that. We've got a lot that are in queue right now. So that is still to be determined. But that's what we're pushing for this fall to start sharing stories of grace because of our church name. And I think, I think we're going to see incredible stuff from that.

Jeff Robinson: Like we have a Chinese student who was baptized in a bathtub in China. I mean stuff like that.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. I mean that's, that's something that I'm seeing as a trend is there's a difference between, okay, Pastor Jeff is expected to be sharing the gospel when he goes to the mall, to a restaurant, to his kid's baseball game. But when someone who's not sharing the gospel for 20 years gets woken up to Great Commission obedience and their best friend sees them sharing a story, they realized I can't just say, Pastor Jeff is that guy. I'm this guy. I have to see that there's a connection between he and I and if he's doing it, I can do it. Right?

Jeff Robinson: And we've done that for giving initiatives, giving testimonies. That's been very powerful. Something I wrote down as far as the evangelism strategy, like what we've done is we last year in the Fall we got together and we strategically planned our outreaches. So for example, we're a little nontraditional here in terms of most SBC churches. So we haven't done VBS in a long time, but I said, man, let's do it. Let's bring it back

this year and call it something different. So what we did is we did VBS on July 8-12, second week in July. We followed it, so it was Sunday through Wednesday and that following Sunday we had a beach baptism. I mean, just real basic stuff.

- Aaron Colyer: Yeah. But intentional calendaring, right? Well let me ask you this question. It's a little bit of a Debbie Downer, but, when change is happening, when the gospel's going out, you've got two opposing forces, sin nature, complacency, apathy, a lot of I just don't want to do that. And, and spiritual warfare. The gospel is going out so Satan's on the prowl, right? What roadblocks have you all seen, if any, to this idea that the congregation is getting a sense of, I've got to be sharing the gospel. I'm going to be having gospel conversations. Identify those roadblocks. And then how did y'all see victory past those roadblocks?
- Jeff Robinson: I'm being as honest as I can. We really haven't had, because of the Church's background, we haven't had any pushback against it. I think that is in part because of our makeup. Again, to go back to the cultural factor. People like you and me, those are usually the ones that you have the hardest time motivating to share their faith. But a lot of our backgrounds, it's just natural to do it. It comes with the territory.
- Aaron Colyer: So you're saying in people who are ethnically minority, maybe ethnically diverse, it's natural to share about Christ.
- Jeff Robinson: So I'll just say it this way. We're finding it's far easier. I don't know how this is going to end up in your study will need to talk about this, but churches who really want to reach their areas, who are in diverse areas, you've got to emphasize nonwhite ministries.
- Aaron Colyer: Yeah. So let me rephrase it.
- Jeff Robinson: You've got to focus on immigrants because it takes a lot more. I'll just say it takes a lot more to, to lead a person who has a lot of walls up. Which would be well educated people with money than it does someone who is an immigrant or someone who English is their second language because they are already at a higher state of desperation in the sense and more open to the gospel. That's (*inaudible*) correct. But that's, I think it's true.
- Aaron Colyer: Let's do this. That's why I'm taking notes. I'm not going to put you in a bad light or anything. Don't worry about that. It's interesting to me what I was hearing, and maybe this is a little wrong now that you clarified was a cultural Christianity. Americanized Christianity has been slower growing among the diverse population of West Palm Beach. So like immigrants or people from other ethnic cultures, like they haven't been heavily influenced by this. What I would say is a tragic, once saved, I do believe in eternal security once saved always saved. But like this, I prayed a prayer so I'm good. And so the God doesn't expect fruit bearing from me or religion and politics is something you don't talk about with your friends, like that idea of American Christianity is, I think it hurting us.
- Jeff Robinson: There is that, but there's also the whole other side of culture.

Aaron Colyer: Okay.

Jeff Robinson: That are Spanish speaking churches are way more connected than the English church. The (*inaudible*) churches, they don't do the signs, the websites. But if they change the time for an event, everybody's going to know exactly when the new time is. That happened to us. They had planned an event. One of our pastors forgot to tell my assistant that it was canceled the next week. I show up with my family and some other folks. Nobody's there. You do that in an American church and you change the time. There's always going to be some people who show up. So it's just a different cultural dynamic. That is what it is. But if you get the, if you get people genuinely converted as tight as that is, it just, it just spreads.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. Because there's a family unit and a closeness and a tightness and a community, that, that's different than ours. We pull into our two car garage and shut the door and don't think about it.

Jeff Robinson: Exactly.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, that's very interesting man. So . . .

Jeff Robinson: Bridge that for the gospel. Then it works for you. Culture works for you.

Aaron Colyer: Right on, man. I love hearing that. Hey, so to give you props, you're coming to the Haitian speaking congregation events, praise God for that. Not that it isn't in my place, but to chide you a bit, while you're trying to push into that culture. You show up and you weren't close enough to the community for someone to call you and say, Oh yeah, Pastor Jeff, don't worry we're not doing that event. Which is interesting, but man, a lot of guys in your position wouldn't even care about connecting with diversity and connecting to those other pieces of the church and influencing the congregation you're trying to shepherd. So that's encouraging to hear you say that. Culture. I'm going to have to think about that. That's not my area of study, but man, there could be a lot of untapped potential.

Jeff Robinson: So, here's one example of that, we did a study a few years ago of how long people stay at Grace who are not a part of a small group and it's like a year or something like that. Our Venezuelan, one of our, we have a Venezuela and Ecuadorian pastor who when asked what about their respective campuses, our Venezuelan pastor said it was something like three months.

Aaron Colyer: Wow.

Jeff Robinson: and joins their church, but they don't get connected to a small group. Because of Hispanic culture they have to have that to feel a part. But like you're saying, man, you're working in a white collar job, you're an English speaker, you come, you do your thing an hour a week, you go home. It's just the way it is, but they cannot not have that.

Aaron Colyer: Wow. Yeah man, that. Gosh.

Jeff Robinson: So familiar and you have that, I'm sure in New Mexico with your dynamics.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, absolutely. So, so the lady I spoke of earlier who kisses me brings us food about once a month. Right? And I know that when she brings me food, she doesn't want to just drop it off at the door. She wants to come in and sit in my home and she doesn't drink coffee, although I always offer it to her, because I think she's Hispanic she's going to drink coffee. But she wants to play with my kids and sit at the table. And like, that's one of the reasons why she's bringing the food right because she wants to be connected to our family in that way. There's something I have not heard much on that topic. Maybe you should write on that.

Jeff Robinson: Yes.

Aaron Colyer: You should write it. Well I did say half an hour. So let me try to press on. I talked about roadblocks. You said none. So praise God. What about things? And you've said some of this earlier, but specific things you want to celebrate, right? So the question is what are some of the greatest stories and successes you would want to praise God for in this season of revitalization? Just to give you an opportunity to put a bow on it and say, man, there was this one person who God changed their heart completely. Now they're sharing the gospel everywhere they go. I mean, anything like that that you would praise God for?

Jeff Robinson: Yeah. We had a couple who were cohabitating. He's from Nicaragua. She is from Haiti. He went to Cornell. Super smart guy working in the private equity firm in downtown West Palm Beach. And they came to the church and he's trying to convince her that evangelical Baptist Christianity is the right way to interpret the Bible. And her (*inaudible*) Roman Catholicism is a cult. And I had a conversation with them. Felt led to say, well, Juan, you're trying to tell Latasha that your position on scripture is correct, but yet are you having sex with her? And he's like, yeah, well you're denying what you say is the correct road? So why should she even believe what you believe since you deny it. I was led to go there. And he talked to another one of our leaders said the same thing. Long story short, she got truly born again, truly saved she was baptized at a beach baptism. He got right with the Lord their testimony. They said it was just transformed our life. And so classic millennials, but confronted with the gospel. Everything changed.

Aaron Colyer: Good, man. I'm encouraged by that story for sure. What else would you add to what's going on at Grace Fellowship and what else would you add to this idea of a being a mouthpiece for the gospel and seeing the church grow, seeing the kingdom grow. Anything else? Any other questions? Anything else you'd add?

Jeff Robinson: I think it sounds so cliché, but just pounding it. Yeah. I think that speaking out against sin, I'm talking about cohabitation, talking about gender identity in a strong way today. There is market share within that. So I think the church growth movement, there should be a conversation about strong, straight forward conversations about controversial topics because we're actually hungry for that.

Aaron Colyer: Seeker sensitive model for sure.

Jeff Robinson: Correct.

Aaron Colyer: Substance and something that's real.

Jeff Robinson: Yeah, that's what we're finding right now. There's even a recent church that closed down that would be like a Northpointe clone. I'm not saying anything about, you know, bad about another church or movement, but it was eye-opening to us because the number of their people came. If you told me as far as method goes and style goes, what church would make it two years ago I was like, well, you got to be super trendy, but that, they folded.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Jeff Robinson: I think people just want to learn about the Bible.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, that's good man. Especially when you get a sense of. I mean all the things C. S. Lewis used to say about a God sized hole or whatever your doctrine is about God's really drawing people. Right? So, so the Scripture and the Spirit coming together when there's power and you need both and the Lord uses both. So that's good, man. That's encouraging. I'd say is keep it up bro. Keep up that, that cultural diversity we're trying to be a culturally diverse. Charged with that really just means Brown and white. I mean that's all we have. We don't have red and yellow, black and white, you know? But we want to be brown and white and we're seeing it slowly get there. We've got things like Spanish translation and singing some songs in Spanish and finally hiring a full time ministry staff person that has got brown skin.

Aaron Colyer: It's going to be, I think a huge deal. So, but, obviously stuff's going on in Florida and I think God's hand of blessing is on you guys. I want to pray for you in this way. Psalm 67, David is crying out to the Lord, bless us, O God, make your face shine upon us. O God, be gracious to us. And then the motive for that entire time is so that the nations might know you so that the people's might praise you so that the ends of the earth, may fear, your name. So God's pouring out his blessing and man, I just want to encourage you. I'm also confident that you're going to want to send that out and say, okay, it's not for us, here at Grace Fellowship is for the king, knows what God is doing is for getting the gospel out and I'd love to pray for you in that way.

Aaron Colyer: Father, thank you for, what's going on in Florida. Thank you for Pastor Jeff. Thank you for his wisdom and leading a team. Thank you for his love for his people, which includes a loving and encouraging these other staff pastors on, on their team that are leading their own campuses. Lord, I just pray for strength and endurance. I pray for a perseverance. I pray, Lord, that more and more people, would look for every opportunity to give a defense for the hope that they have within them, that they would look for that opportunity to be a mouthpiece and a megaphone for the good news of Christ. That they could proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness and into your marvelous light. I'm giving him more stories like this one couple, where the girlfriend or fiancé just

gets radically saved and turns her life around.

Aaron Colyer: And they get to say, this is life transformation. That the gospel confronted them. And a thank you that the spirit brought them repentance and faith. So give more and more of that, Lord, I pray for the beach baptism services that they could really give a picture of the gospel and celebrate those things. I pray for all of the staff and lay leadership that's training people to share the gospel. We want to see your kingdom grow and so in his own words, help them just continue to pound it, to pound the gospel truth into people's lives. But also see your grace. Just have a movement from West Palm Beach, Florida, to the south eastern part of our country, to other nations, to the ends of the earth. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Jeff Robinson: Thanks so much.

Aaron Colyer: You're welcome man. Listen, anything I can do, any question I can answer, just hit me back. But I can't tell you again how appreciative I am that you'd be a part of our research. And if you're interested in reading it, hopefully I will be getting published by January 2019 with the seminary and then my supervisor likely will be writing towards the end of 2019 with all six of these topics with us, six researchers and it'll be his decision how much he wants us to participate. We might just get mentioned in the intro and that's his choice. Or he may let us right on evangelism and get to share stories like you're telling me right here. So, if you want to read that stuff, you just send me an email, let me know. Let me give you my email address because you said about that numbers when you started, you can email me . . .

Jackie Allen

- Aaron Colyer: Okay, on with Pastor Jackie Allen at Cross Church, Arizona, and just to confirm again, you're okay with me doing an audio recording of this interview?
- Jackie Allen: Correct.
- Aaron Colyer: All right. let me read this ethics statement. You saw something similar when you completed our survey. This is the interview portion and note some differences in that. There will be some notes that may get published later in the research, but if there's anything that you want to have be kept confidential, you just let me know and I'll make sure none of that would ever get printed. But here's our statement.
- Aaron Colyer: **Agreement to Participate:** The research in which you are about to participate is designed to determine the critical elements of your church's recent revitalization. This research is being conducted by a six-man research team pursuing doctoral degrees at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for purposes of understanding and encouraging these elements among other churches. In this research, you will be asked to describe your church's experiences. During the interview portion of the research, notes will be kept for your specific church revitalization, which may appear in the publication of the research. If you desire any of the information given to remain confidential, please inform the interviewer. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this Interview, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.
- Aaron Colyer: Any questions there? Any concerns about those things?
- Jackie Allen: No, I'm good. Thank you.
- Aaron Colyer: Alright, perfect. Well, hey, tell me a little bit more about Cross Church, how long you've been there. What you saw in the revitalization process. Our notes that we had compiled from Lifeway research, see that y'all had a season of plateau or decline into a really massive uptick actually, over the last several years.
- Aaron Colyer: Then, we'll go in specifically to talk about the connection between evangelism and an emphasis in evangelism and church revitalization. Then really ask personal experience that you all have had there in Arizona to see how this culture of evangelism has played into what God is doing to see the kingdom grow there. So I'm going to be quiet and just let you talk. And also if I haven't already said it, I just want to say again, thank you for taking our survey and being willing to participate in this. If you have any questions along the way or want any of this information, it is yours. We want to be an encouragement to churches. And so that's the goal here. I've got five primary questions. My goal is to get you offline in half an hour so we could slow down and press in a little or there may be times when I speed up so I can get to every question. Sound good?
- Jackie Allen: Sounds Fair.

- Aaron Colyer: All right. Give me some of that context. Let me, let me hear it.
- Jackie Allen: I've been here about five and a half years. Well over probably five and a half years. When I came here, the church was really originally called Palm Vista Baptist Church. We changed the name of the church, a year ago about this same time, about a year it's been to Cross Church. And there are other reasons for that. But, that was a smooth transition for us and effective one. But when we came here, we had no staff. It was the perfect storm. They had, as you said, plateaued. They had financial resources, plenty of them. But, were low on people resources, particularly our ministry team. And so I got to come and hire pretty much my entire team, which I think was kind of mission critical for us to get a jumpstart.
- Jackie Allen: Interesting. We lost a lot of people early because we started recasting it, another vision, but we would gain as many people each week as we lost. We have a pretty good uptick in growth. And it was like, you know, I think Andy Stanley says sometimes you have momentum and when you lose it, you don't know why you lost it, because you didn't know how you got it to begin with. And, we kind of had a little secondary plateau for us about two, three years ago. It really caused us to go back, well, why, what happened that all of this growth came.
- Jackie Allen: I did some interviews with some of our deacons and we've now transformed to elder led model and some of those guys who are now elders. And I said, man, why? What happened that we had all of this growth and now we feel like we're slowing. And he said, Jackie you don't understand when you guys came, everything changed. In terms of emphasis on excellence in terms of just everything changed. And I guess I just wasn't aware of it because it was just who we were and what we wanted to do. But, you know, we talk a lot about our team, about death by incrementation, dying a slow death of a thousand cuts, you know. It's just easier to make big sweeping changes. It seems to be just as painful to do that as it is to make incremental changes. But the reward and the upside is much, much greater. So I would say for us it was a, just a total culture shift with church and leadership that probably was the fuel that initiated that change or also the byproduct when we're in a really good location. I know not every church in a growing city is growing, but my experience over the years is that most of the really growing churches are in growing places. And so we're in a place where there's a lot of the influx of new people. It's pretty transient. We're very close to Luke Air Force Base. So we get a lot of people in here for two or three years, then they're gone to Germany or wherever. But, it is a good spot. It's a good location. And we also were the beneficiaries early on.
- Jackie Allen: We don't need that as much now, but we had some great lay leaders. One of them, I've preached his funeral since I've been here and he's an African American man, just a great godly man. And he was a catalyst, like, you know, we did stuff, and I remember deacons meetings where it was just like, these guys are in entire failure. He would stand up and say, no, he's our pastor and this is the direction we're going in. We're never going to be the church we used to be. And so we were just the beneficiary, I would say of a lot of stuff around us. A very good environment for change, because we got to bring our whole team together. A good environment in terms of locale and then a good healthy

environment in terms of leadership in our church that wanted to do something.

Aaron Colyer: And just numbers wise, I think I have rough numbers, but something like in, in the last five years, 200 to a 1000 in average worship attendance. Is that, is that correct?

Jackie Allen: Yeah, pretty close. Probably the mid 2's is probably more accurate when we got here. And then, our summer we've been in the nine hundreds. But come fall and spring and fall gets here a little later in Arizona than it does where I'm from the Midwest. It just takes people a while. It's still 110 degrees. But, yeah, that's, the numerical gain so far.

Aaron Colyer: Well, as I said about my research specific, so, each one of us on the research team has an area of focus, right? Whether it's the primary worship hour or prayer or evangelism or leadership structure. Mine is evangelism. And so my question for you is, based off of your answers would you would agree that people in your church feel confident sharing the gospel and that they engage in gospel conversations or that you would say evangelism is important to highly important. What things happen to change the culture at Cross Church, that they really gave an emphasis to fulfilling the Great Commission and what was done by leadership to help change that culture?

Jackie Allen: I think we're, honestly, I think we're still in the process of changing that culture. We just introduced last Sunday, our first mission statement and vision statement since I've been here. I just rebelled against it because we've all seen long, boring, not well, attained vision statement. So we kind of built our church on three value statements which were we wanted to be biblical, relevant, missional. So that kind of gave us the, that helped us build our culture more than anything and defended us when we were like changing stuff. It's like, oh, but this is biblical. Oh, this is relevant. Oh, this is missional. So we're just really getting down into the nitty gritty right now year five of our mission statement, which is to make Jesus known that drips with evangelism. And our vision statement is to make it known that creating a movement of multiplying churches across our city. And so we have a Phoenix campus now. We just started a college campus church this past month and then we have another campus targeted hopefully starting next year.

Jackie Allen: So like right now I'm just studying this, I don't want people to see this, Just Tell Someone by Greg Laurie. We're taking all of our Bible groups through that on how to train them, how to share their faith. I teach a class that I've sort of compiled the material for. It's a class that's designed to teach people just how to use their personal testimony and sharing their faith. We call it Crafting Your Story. So we do that from time to time. We've got two sessions coming up in October and November before the end of the year. And so I think, if we're talking about personal evangelism, we're just really starting to really turn the spigot.

Jackie Allen: But I think a culture of evangelism was created from the, from the pulpit or from the platform, whatever you want to call it. We don't give come forward invitations every Sunday, but, which is not unusual for Arizona and I don't know how it is in New Mexico. I have preached in Artesia

years ago. So not far from First Baptist Church there. So we don't give a come forward invitation every Sunday. But I tell you, the curious thing is every time we do it, somebody usually guns. It's just a fertile field for that. We do, invitations, almost every Sunday using our welcome card, leading people in prayers of faith and then doing the follow up. I have one of these like this is a welcome card. We use a little keyword slot on the bottom if you prayed today to receive Jesus, write Jesus in the keyword slot. And then we do the follow-up with them on that. So that's been, just a culture of evangelism. That's who I am in terms of my preaching and teaching. So I don't know if that answers the question.

Aaron Colyer: No, it definitely does. In terms of your preaching, how important would you say, your people that you're shepherding, hearing and seeing that you're engaging in personal evangelism and how does that connect to their desire to then be a mouthpiece for the gospel?

Jackie Allen: I think it's huge. I think anytime I can tell a story, we really think, and this isn't, you know, everything we're doing, we've stolen from someone else, right? But, we had a guy talk to us about the importance of stories to create culture and so we have a rotation of trying to be very intentional with stories on Sunday. So every Sunday we're telling an invite story, a Bible group story that's what we call our small groups or Bible groups. A give story or a serve story because we want people to invite people. We want people to give their resources. We want people to serve in some capacity and we want people to. What was the fourth one? I can't remember. Anyways. so on a rotation and we sprinkle more invite stories into the rotation than any other stories. So we'll probably do two invite stories a month. And then two other ones. And it's like a video of somebody telling, Hey, this past week I told my friend about Jesus or have a video of a baptism and the story behind that and how this person came to Cross Church. And I think those are probably as powerful to create the culture of evangelism in our church, along with the preaching, but as anything that we do are those stories.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. Well you stole my question from me, pastor. So thank you for that. My third question is, how do you and others on your leadership team develop a system of celebrating victories when it comes to having evangelism as a priority? And so this idea of these videos and testimonies and stories and inviting someone to follow Christ, stories of celebrating baptism, every single one of those has been consistent as I interviewed pastors. The churches that are growing, are taking opportunities to what God is doing in the lives of its individual members.

Jackie Allen: It's one of our leadership axioms is that we get what we celebrate. We also get what we tolerate, unfortunately sometimes. But so we, I think over the years we've talked a lot about it. We don't celebrate our victories enough and if we, as leaders don't lead out in that, nobody else will do it. So sometimes it feels self-serving, but it really isn't. It is really strategically important that we celebrate. And if our people hear us say it's a great thing when you tell somebody about Jesus stories, then they're going to go, oh, I should probably tell somebody about Jesus.

Aaron Colyer: Absolutely. Yeah. And I find also that there's a big difference between hearing a pastor say is a great thing to tell someone about Jesus versus a

peer say I got to share Jesus with my neighbor this week because then all of a sudden there's an expectation of that's your job because we pay you to do that. Versus, oh, that's the expectation that Jesus has on my life. That I would take opportunities to be salt and light and I would look for opportunities to be unashamed of the gospel. So yeah, I think those stories, that's a big deal. I did skip question two and you spoke to it a little bit. Let me ask it bluntly, what are specific strategies and methods identified and used in training church members and tools for leading the church to obey the Great Commission? So you've already mentioned the Craft Your Story testimony time the Tell Someone by Greg Laurie, but are there specific evangelism tools you guys are using? If a church member came to you and said, Pastor Jackie, teach me how to share the gospel. Well, what would you turn to as kind of your bread and butter?

Jackie Allen: Their personal testimony? That's the easiest. They don't have to memorize that. They already have it. Is the old CWT stuff, Continue Witness Training stuff, had a pretty big section on the power of a personal testimony that it communicates. It can't be disputed. You were there when it happened. It was Paul's go to sermon and it should be ours.

Aaron Colyer: No, that's good. That's good. Have you seen any of this, it's a testimony in under a minute, like the be practiced and ready and share with other people. So you know, when that Holy Spirit prompts you,

Jackie Allen: That's the elevator speech, right? We do that in the crafting of the story. We train them to do that during that time. But I think you also should hear that we totally reject any canned, like rehearsed, memorized salesmanship of the gospel. We think it's got to be relationally driven to be effective. And so we just, I've been through all of those, man, over the years. I'm old enough to have gone through EE and CWT and I guess they all were a good tool for their season. We just don't feel like that seasons now. And so we're, going to gear towards relationship evangelism and what's more relational than your story?

Aaron Colyer: No, absolutely. Yeah. I think a gospel conversation versus a gospel presentation is always

Jackie Allen: It's a good word.

Aaron Colyer: a different approach. Is it happening in every dialogue. Can I tell you a time when I was broken? Can I tell you a time when the Lord rescued me? Have you ever sensed that you've been in brokenness.

Jackie Allen: I started to do Bible Group and my wife and I started leading this Bible Group for some young. One of our young couple of groups is a brand new group. So I started Sunday night our first session. Like 20 adults and 20 kids. It was a suit, but we were talking about sharing your faith and one of the things I think is a badge of honor if you can share your faith and somebody says no, but you can still have a conversation with them. So that's, you know, that's like we're not trying to give you salesmanship techniques to close deals and it's so hard line that the relationship gets burned.

Jackie Allen: I mean, I'm in a witnessing relationship with two Jewish guys right now.

One is retired, his son is a professor at Villanova, he's out of California, lives here, and the other guy lives up in Sedona, dating a lady in our church and a practicing Jewish guy. And so I've been meeting for lunch with these guys. I mean, these are hard guys to me to witness to in terms of getting to the point of conversion. I preached the revelation last year and my older Jewish friend, I said, man, I just want you to, I want you to read the book of revelation and I want you to read it as if like, pretend the gospels don't exist and the old testament ended and now Revelation and see if that's Jesus of Revelation could be the Jesus, that's the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, in your mind.

Jackie Allen: So we had these wonderful conversations and dialogue and he texted me last week, hey, it's my turn to buy lunch. I feel like it's a badge of honor that I have this relationship with a guy who's yet to give his life to Jesus. By the way he is at church every Sunday and has yet to give his life to Jesus. But we're still friends. I think that's very, very important in today's culture.

Aaron Colyer: No, that's good. I had a college pastor telling me, when it's appropriate to kind of move on from somebody. You have some of these hardcore, efficient evangelists are like dust off your feet we're moving on if people rejected. And I was struggling because I had a friend who was very hard hearted to the gospel, but we maintained our friendship and my college pastor said, you keep sharing the gospel. If they reject you and they don't want anything to do with you, but they're still interested in the gospel, you keep telling them. If they reject the gospel, but they still want something to do with you. You keep that friendship and you keep telling them and it's not until they reject you and the gospel then move on. But I think written into this idea is that you should not be acting in such a way that they're going to reject your friendship even if they're rejecting Jesus.

Jackie Allen: We know, the power of the gospel sowing seed (*inaudible*) and how God gives the increase. I've got high school buddies that when I got saved when I was 17 year old right out of high school, I have a high school buddy that I witnessed to that didn't get saved right after high school. But 10 years later he called me on the phone in Denver, Colorado, his wife had just left him with his one year old son. I'm ready to get my Jesus. I mean, those are like, you've just gotta love those relationships and those people and sometimes it's a long jog. man. I have, my son's high school basketball coach back in Oklahoma. If I go to Oklahoma tomorrow, I'm probably going to call him and we're going to go play golf. And I've spent hours on a couple occasions pulled over the side of the 18th fairway, between there and the driving range, witnessing to him. He still hasn't gotten saved as far as I know, but when he gets ready, I think he knows where to go.

Aaron Colyer: So you're an Okie from Muskogee, Huh?

Jackie Allen: Not Muskogee, but yeah, I pastored most of my life there. Grew up there, came out here when I was 40 to plant a church. Got that church up and going and in its own facility and then went back to Oklahoma for four years. I've pastored and then came out and this is kind of my Yankee job. So this is my last hurrah.

- Aaron Colyer: Wow. God's calling guys out to the West and I'm grateful for you. I'm answering that call because we're definitely outside the Bible belt.
- Jackie Allen: Yeah, totally. And it's a good place to be.
- Aaron Colyer: Okay. I've got two more. One kind of turns the ship a little bit. So we've been talking a lot about celebrations and victories. Typically when change is happening, and in this case, specifically, a culture where people are being expected, as a Christ follower you should be proclaiming the good news of Christ. And it's not just these Green Beret Christians that are sharing the gospel. As it changed, sometimes there's roadblocks. So what roadblocks were there, if any, when the congregation starts experiencing this change and what did you and the leadership team do to push past those roadblocks?
- Jackie Allen: Yeah, I think you're always going to have opposition. I think we tried to work really hard at defining reality and painting a better future. So, we're all going to be as (*inaudible*) with where we are. So we work at defining reality on a regular basis. Somebody said that facts are our friends and feelings our enemies. So, we just reject (*inaudible*) sweet spirit or whatever. But as we went through this process, we had some and I don't think this would be like unusual. I don't think any. I've pastored for 30 years, I've never had somebody come up and say, I'm leaving the church because you want us to tell people about Jesus.
- Aaron Colyer: That might be why they left the church, but they never tell you that. Now I've had a lot of people left the church here because they didn't like that we got rid of the traditional worship service. And now we're in multiple contemporary services and that's just who we are and that's just it. But in that process of that, I mean we had mass exoduses of people that just got mad and left. Like I said, we would lose 10 families one week and have 20 new ones the next week. And I just think that as the pastor, maybe if it's not number one on your job description, it is way up there on the top of the list. You just have to defend the vision. You have to constantly defend the vision. And then you have to preach the vision like you're preaching to a parade. Because there's a whole new group of people coming that hasn't heard it yet.
- Aaron Colyer: Defend the vision preach the vision. Well, back to the positive side. Then what individual stories of success? They're great stories of, of gospel changed, heart change. You talked about that gentleman who was just a godly guy, that said, I'm going to stand by my pastor. What are some other stories of people that really got it? When it comes to seeing the kingdom grow? Seeing the Kingdom of Christ even be bigger than Cross Church. Seeing a vision for some of these campuses y'all are planting. I mean, individual stories where church members really see God's in this season of revitalization and you just want to give God the glory for that.
- Jackie Allen: Okay. I'll give you two stories. One of the recent convert and the other not so recent. There's a guy in our church, he's like a six, five African American dude. He sits on the front row every Sunday with his wife and a have a baby. Since they've started, they've been coming up with a baby and they don't, they haven't been in church long enough to know that if you have a baby, that front row is not the best place to sit. Right? So the

baby, she's beautiful. We dedicated her this past year during the baby dedication. But he attended our church, for I bet a year, before making a decision for Christ. And I remember him coming up to me after one of our services. I don't know what I preached on something to deal with the exclusivity of Christ. He had his notepad open and he came up to me and in the foyer there were a lot of people and people were back and forth and he kept saying pastor, just a quick question. I didn't know this guy just that he was the big African America who sits in the front row. He said, do you really believe that Jesus Christ is the only way in order to be saved? And I said, man, I do. I'm sorry, but I absolutely believe that. And he said, okay. And he closes the most mad and walked out. I didn't know if I was ever going to see him again. I just didn't know. But about three weeks later, he made a profession of faith for Jesus. He was baptized. I mean, this guy, it's not uncommon. I mean he's six, five. And during the worship service I will look over because he's on the front row and I'm standing on the front row and he'd be prostrate on the floor just face-down worshipping. And he came up to me last week and his big hands and he's like, pastor, that was a great message. I appreciate it. And so that's a new believer who didn't know Jesus was the only way. I thought I might've run him off. He's a barber here in town who God's transformed his life and his family.

Aaron Colyer: Now I'm curious about this guy. Does he ever have some of those stories you call that Stories to Create Culture. And has he gotten to share. He's a barber, so is he talking about Jesus in his barber shop and things like that?

Jackie Allen: That's a big question. I haven't asked him that specifically. I'm going to now.

Aaron Colyer: But I'm just saying I'm seeing them on a little video testimony. Jesus changed my life now.

Jackie Allen: His story has been highlighted. It's been about a year since he made his profession. So I think his story has been highlighted. Yeah. He's just on fire. We're giving him right now tools to do what we want him to do because when we said, last week, our mission statement is to make Jesus known. We're like, we've got to help these people do that. We've got to practically train them and so you know every season of church we've got these structural changes. We've gone through the bylaws and constitution. We've built a new building since we've been here. We've started another campus. Now we feel like we can settle in and really get focused on what's the main thing is outside of all that other peripheral stuff.

Jackie Allen: The other story I would tell you, it has to do with another campus that we have. We have a lady, I can't remember her name. We'll call her Deborah, but I don't think that's her name. She loves the Lord like crazy. And she lives here in Surprise, but when she found out we were starting a campus in Phoenix, which through a series of events, we just got gifted a building, that was an empty church building. It's in a bad part of Phoenix. She said I used to be the apartment manager. It's in the middle of a bunch of really low income apartments. She said I used to be an apartment manager right across the street from there. She said, I want to

go and help our campus pastor there. I want to help him. And so she's been driving, it's like 40 minutes over there. She is a witness. She goes over there and she loves on those kids. She's retired now, but she goes and invests in their lives and is helping. She really leads the Children's Ministry there at our Phoenix campus and is a really vibrant witness for Christ. We have a lot of those kinds of stories, but those are just two of an older lady and a younger guy.

- Aaron Colyer: So on a volunteer basis just pouring out in an area of town that is in desperate need for the hope of Christ.
- Jackie Allen: Yeah. She just had a heart for that part of the city. And when she found out we were going there, she said I'm going too.
- Aaron Colyer: This is a curious question. Not really, associated with the research, but these campuses, the Phoenix campus and the one on the college campus. Are you guys doing piped in video preaching? Or are campus pastors doing live preaching?
- Jackie Allen: We struggled with that question when we started the Phoenix campus. We did pipe in video teaching, because our campus pastor was an HR director. We haven't gotten to the place that we could buy him away full time from there, but he was called to the ministry and all of that. And so once he became full time, he started becoming, part of it comes to our preaching collective. We preach pretty much the same sermons. But, we really have a passion to train young pastors to preach. As much as we can, it will be live preaching at the campus. The college campus is live preaching. They preach the same. Pretty much the same thing that we do on Sundays. We work together collaboratively on the messages. We're looking at one in Wickenburg right now and there may be a season that is video, but I don't ever imagine it being forever that. Because we have limitations video right now and I think it takes a special cat to be able to pull that off too.
- Aaron Colyer: There's something about tagging into the mother church versus being your own expression of brothers and sisters in Christ. In my limited experience, I'm a young guy, but in Louisville there was a multisite church. In Dallas, there's a multisite church and now there's one right down the road in Amarillo where both of my friends are pastors there. That's really the dividing line of are we our own expression of brothers and sisters in Christ and local expression of the bride of Christ? Or is it just this tagging into a mother church?
- Jackie Allen: Our plan is not consistent with NAMB's plan because we still see them as campuses. Because we think that and if our Phoenix campus became solid and they wanted their autonomy, we would grant them that. We would count that as a win. But, we just think that we can provide so much more support. We don't need to re-invent the wheel, you know, graphically and all of that. And from a legal standpoint, all of the stuff. I've been through the church planting deal and had to, you know, I remember I'm running copies at Kinko's and thinking, man, isn't there a church around here that it can help me with this? We want to be that church that you can kind of be the hub. So ours are viewed as campuses. Their staff all answer ultimately I guess to our elder council. We're in the

process of vetting some future elders from the other key that will become part of our elder council. So we don't want no taxation without representation. So we want them to be represented eventually on our elder council.

Aaron Colyer: No, that's good. That was more just curiosity. I pray for you. I'm grateful for you just to take this half hour and really help them get a broad picture. I've talked to churches in Utah, Florida and Arizona, of course. I mean really all over the country, South Carolina, Georgia, Texas, and so, we are wanting to try to put this information together and package it for pastors. Especially pastors that are really struggling and they're looking around saying what is going on and the hand of God has to move, right? The hand of God has to move. We can't manipulate God. But there are certain things that if we're not doing a make me question whether or not God's ready to move.

Jackie Allen: We get the chance to speak in. I'm serving as the president of our convention here in Arizona. This is the last year of that. But when I was asked to do that I told our executive director, I said, you know what? I come out to the west and I hear all these excuses why can't do this, can't do that. But I want our people to know, you can grow a church wherever God places you.

Jackie Allen: What are the fastest growing churches in America is pastored by my friend. But Calvary Baptist in Lake (*inaudible*), if you've ever been to Lake (*inaudible*), you would be like your kidding me there is a church of 2000 plus people. They gather up on Sunday and Lake (*inaudible*). Yeah, it can happen. And so I think that's hope.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, absolutely. Let me pray for you. I've been praying Psalm 67 over these churches and pastors as David just begging God, Make your face shine upon us. Bless us, be gracious to us, but the motive turns not just selfish. We want God's blessing. The motive turns to that the nations might know you, the people's might praise your name. And I'd love to pray for, the brothers and sisters of Cross Church in that way. Father, thank you for Pastor Jackie and thank you that he would just take, some moments away to talk about what you really are ultimately doing. How you are glorifying your name and using him and other pastors and elders there and servants like Deborah, who is just pouring out her life. We give you praise and we honor you for those things. But we also pray, God, that you would not stop, that you would give more, that you pour out your blessing and pour out your grace that you would make your face to shine upon them. That they might turn that blessing from you and be a blessing to the community, there in Surprise or Phoenix and other places where they're seeking to plant churches. As their members gather together on Sunday morning, but then scatter out into the world to barbershops and neighborhoods and places of work that they might truly be a mouthpiece for the gospel.

Aaron Colyer: To have that chance to proclaim the excellencies of you who have called them out of darkness and into your marvelous likeness we pray that blessing over them and over Pastor Jackie's ministry. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Jackie Allen: Appreciate you.

Aaron Colyer: Thanks. Thank you very, very much. I really appreciate the time and if you need anything else, feel free to give me a holler and if I have a little bit of follow-up I might email you, but other than that, we should be in good shape.

Jackie Allen: When do you expect work to be completely compiled?

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. So, you know, here's kind of the tricky thing, and I'm going to stop the recording here, as we just do some personal things.

Jim Jackson

- Aaron Colyer: I am with Jim Jackson from the Orchard Christian Fellowship in California. And Jim just to clarify one more time, you are okay with having this conversation recorded?
- Jim Jackson: Yup.
- Aaron Colyer: Okay. Well, I want to say thank you first of all for taking our survey, we sent that survey out to about 500 pastors that met our metrics for church revitalization and we're at about 130 who have taken that survey and because of your answers I now interviewing you. And so I want to thank you for being willing to do the interview. My specific area of study is a connection between evangelism and church revitalization and really church members understanding that every Christian has a responsibility to fulfill the Great Commission. And based on your answers, a couple things. You said evangelism is highly important. And also maybe even more importantly, you said, the out of those six areas, the greatest member acceptance at Orchard Christian Fellowship is an uptick in personal evangelism.
- Aaron Colyer: And then you went on to say in regards to that there was an increase in personal evangelism. You said strongly agree. That the majority of active members could share the gospel and have gospel conversations you said strongly agree. And then, that they're engaged in gospel conversations on a regular basis. You said slightly agree. So, all those are very strong answers that would have me consider hearing more from you about this culture that is being developed at Orchard Christian Fellowship where people are understanding I've got to be the mouthpiece for the gospel. So thank you. One more time. I do have for academic research purposes and ethic statement that I want to read. Once we get this out of the way, I'll do less talking and do more listening. Okay. This is similar to what you saw on the survey. The only change is, I am asking to use, some of the things you say in our publication in our research, but I want you to know that you can opt out at any time.
- Aaron Colyer: So take a listen and then if you have questions, I'll be happy to take them.
- Jim Jackson: Sure.
- Aaron Colyer: **Agreement to Participate:** The research in which you are about to participate is designed to determine the critical elements of your church's recent revitalization. This research is being conducted by a six-man research team pursuing doctoral degrees at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for purposes of understanding and encouraging these elements among other churches. In this research, you will be asked to describe your church's experiences. During the interview portion of the research, notes will be kept for your specific church revitalization, which may appear in the publication of the research. If you desire any of the information given to remain confidential, please inform the interviewer. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this Interview, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Aaron Colyer: You have any issues with that?

Jim Jackson: Sounds like a dream come true.

Aaron Colyer: Oh, there it is. A dream come true. Well listen, brother, I certainly would love to chat and have a water cooler conversation, get to know you a little bit better, but I want to respect your time. So my goal is to keep us at 30 minutes. So, if you want to talk a little bit afterwards for personal things, let me know. But, let's get this interview done in 30 minutes. I've got five primary questions that are related to the connection between evangelism in church revitalization and we may slow down and say, okay, well tell me more about that or give me an example of that. Or if, if we're running low on time for the sake of time and respecting your time, I may speed up so I can get to all five questions. Are you good with that?

Jim Jackson: Sounds amazing.

Aaron Colyer: Well then let's do it. Based on your answers, it seems that there has been a culture shift where people are prioritizing fulfilling the Great Commission and personal evangelism. What's been done at Orchard Christian Fellowship to change that culture in the last several years. And then also, how long have you been the pastor there?

Jim Jackson: Okay. So my history in brief is, when I was in college at the Master's College in Santa Clarita, I was the first youth pastor of the church that I was attending while I was in college. And that group, God really blessed that youth ministry. And years later I was contacted because I had done a lot of camp speaking and I spoke for FCA and a bunch of other organizations. A guy contacted me about his student ministry at a much larger church. And so I ended up there for quite a few years. And then I ended up planting my own church right off my own couches. And God blessed that a lot. We ended up with our own property in Claremont, California. And we're right next to the Claremont colleges, which, if you're not familiar with that, it's basically the Berkeley of Southern California. And so it is a hyper liberal, hyper. a very antagonistic (*inaudible*)

Jim Jackson: So God miraculously started moving there. And from there, through other contacts I ended up finding out about this church in Temecula, California that had lost her pastor through a moral failure. And they had about 140 people. And I didn't really want to come here. I had never even heard of Temecula because God is really blessing our church plants. And we were exploding there in Claremont, which like I said, it was a miracle of God. But, basically the Lord changed my heart and we came here not knowing one person. The church had been here for 40 years and had never grown beyond 200 people, in a location of about 250,000 that had exploded about 10 years ago and had never grown. But other churches around here had grown tremendously. So it was kind of an odd thing. They own their own property, but it really small buildings, buildings for about 200 people. We (*inaudible*) to this day. Over the next, so I've been here five years. And over about the last four years, we've gone from 140 people to, we just did over 1200 last Sunday. So we have, we're one of the fastest growing churches in the nation for the last three years.

- Jim Jackson: Usually healthy church growth is about six to eight percent. Really, really slamming church growth is, you know, if you're doing over 10 percent a year as far as being able to attract and keep 10 percent over the previous year, that's fantastic. That's amazing, considering most of us are doing zero. The last two years we've been at 43 and 38 percent. So it's just been off the charts. So I say all that to say, I've been here for five years and God has just blown this place up.
- Aaron Colyer: Amen. Praise God for that. And I love that you're giving God the glory. I mean, that's a constant theme that I'm seeing with guys that are seeing God move and give this church revitalization to the places where they're leading is that it's, it's the Lord's name that we're wanting to see go forward, you know, and so I'm grateful for that reminder. Thank you for that background. So then from 200 to 1,200 in 5 years
- Jim Jackson: And less that for about 40.
- Aaron Colyer: Yeah. So in that building, the culture of evangelism, what's been done to build that culture of evangelism?
- Jim Jackson: Yeah, so I can tell you one thing that I had never heard in a Christian school or ever been in a church that had ever done it. God really put it on my heart that really every aspect of the church is evangelism. So what I did it was the budget is evangelism. When I started hiring staff because literally when I walked into this campus it was me and a secretary and the budget was like \$280,000 for the year. And I think this year we're on track to do like one point six, so within four years, not only has the church grown numerically, but amazingly miraculously, usually the last thing is, the last thing to be under the Lord's leadership is people's wallet. People are giving towards it.
- Jim Jackson: So that tells me that we've not only done numerical growth, but we've done the hard work of people buying into vision because people give to vision people rally around vision. So right behind the Lord's blessed the following people here. One of the major things I did was every single thing in the church has to have an outreach element. So every ministry has to have some reality. How is the children's ministry? I'm evangelizing, how is the janitorial ministry evangelizing? How is our executive pastor as part of his role, what's he doing to evangelize. So in other words, evangelism didn't become a section of the church or a guy I hired to do evangelism. It actually became the DNA of our church where we literally exist, not for ourselves or to have some other guy go do it that's hired to go do evangelism, but we became evangelists as a church. So that actually, as we're speaking right now, I just walked out of our sanctuary and my whole staff, everybody, the secretary that answers the phones, my executive secretary, my youth pastor, my worship pastor, my junior high guy, everybody's over in the sanctuary, redecorating for our new series. We go around where weeding this campus, we've got about six acres here. And it's the idea that we're responsible for as a staff, as leaders, as servants of God's church here, to make sure that this campus does evangelism. So in other words, so it doesn't look like trash. So we make sure that everything that we've got is functioning to its highest level of excellence so that when people walk on this campus, they go, wow, somebody cares. So in other words, I don't leave that to the

janitorial crew. They help, but it's a whole thing. I do my staff meetings every Tuesday morning and we push evangelism. How are we, how is every one of our ministries, including myself, we self-dissect every single staff meeting on how we are promoting the gospel in our ministry. So when I got here it was me and a secretary and I literally built this thing from dirt up. As far as the staff I've hired and as far as the DNA that I've set and that's been the major thing is evangelism isn't a thing that we do once in a while and it's not a guy that hire. It's literally who we are as a church. So, I reformatted the whole church to run with evangelism as its core piece.

Aaron Colyer: I love that man. Yeah. That's one of the survey responses that you had like, I think the question was what's been the biggest contributor to the church revitalization and you said everything hinges on evangelism and then that's what you're saying here in your interview as well. So it's very intriguing to me to think about janitorial staff and gospel conversations. I don't want to make assumptions, but do you have examples of, I mean, people are on campus there in, in Tamika, California, is that right? I don't know my geography in California.

Jim Jackson: Temecula, Temecula.

Aaron Colyer: So, someone comes on campus and a janitor runs into them and they're looking for an opportunity to share the gospel. Is that what you intend to say in saying that?

Jim Jackson: So it's both I've got my junior high guy who also doubles as some janitorial during the week. And so not only is he obviously already a pastor of the church, but it's both ends. And so when people walk on here, we immediately assume God sent them here for a reason, whether it's a homeless guy that stumbles off the street and goes, I need some money for bread or beer or whatever he's looking for to the white collar guy who shows up in the seven series Beamer. We assume that God's called everybody out to our piece of dirt through our doors for something more than their felt needs. So felt needs are important. But we use that as a starting point, not an ending point, to push people towards the gospel. So, in answer to your question, yeah, every conversation with the janitor or with myself is a push towards figuring out where their next step is for the gospel. Whether it is that they write commentaries or that they can't even spell Jesus. You know, we look at every opportunity as an opportunity. Whether the janitor here or myself as an opportunity to help them take that next step. And if it's evangelism, if they're totally unsaved and obviously that's the goal. So it's, it's both that it's conversational and make sure that the facilities work to the degree that they honor the Lord as much as we can.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. Yeah. That pursuit of excellence. I, I heard that in your previous comment. Let me, let me shift gears to my second question here. What kind of trainings, what kind of tools are y'all using to equip people to be able to have these gospel conversations?

Jim Jackson: So when you're talking these people, you're talking your church membership, how I do it holistically in the church?

- Aaron Colyer: Yeah. Yeah. Your church membership.
- Jim Jackson: So, number one, I think the number one thing is people have to hear it be important to me first. Here's often what happens is, again, we get stuck in this thing where I've had to blame it on the seminaries to tell you the truth, where they help people dissect the Word and they can dig the truth out of the Greek and the Hebrew and what Paul is trying to say in some of his letters or whatever. But at the end of the day, people aren't leaving with a passion to share Jesus. People aren't leaving with the applicational side of like, who cares about the Greek declension of that word? Who cares about the historical ramifications of 2000 years ago as long as long as it's not applying to my life or how I'm going to let somebody else on board than what's the point.
- Jim Jackson: So my, my thing has been, I have to exemplify that from the stage I have to exemplify when I preached, I direct people to the cross. So I just did 19 weeks in Joshua, pretty much verse by verse. That's a 3,500 year old book with not a whole bunch of gospel type things in there. But man, at the end of this people were getting saved and people were excited about sharing the Lord with people. Because I take off from every passage right to the cross and what at least by the end of the sermon. And so what that does is it tells everybody not only now I see how I can help other people apply what I learned in here. Whether it's dealing with your kids are dealing with how to be a better godly wife or whatever the application is it's always how to glorify God. And sadly guys don't get taught that in seminary for the most part. It's how to exegete a passage, but they've forgotten how to exegete their culture. And if you don't have to exegete your culture, then you're not helping your people go back to their work or their home or whatever and be gospel oriented. So that's the umbrella answer.
- Jim Jackson: As far as specific nuts and bolts answer, we have a bunch of classes that we do. We've run out of space on this property so we don't have a lot of room to do formal type classes during the week. But all of our classes have some element of how to do evangelism. Which is our, Discover the Orchard class, which describes kind of where we've been, where we're going and about the gospel, what we believe in, those kinds of things. And it has an element of how to share the gospel. We run everybody through that class, that's interested in joining our church. We have membership at our church and so from the top down all the way to the bottom, whether it's me on Sunday mornings, people see how important and how to share the gospel out of every passage.
- Jim Jackson: Basically, we do communion every week, so I talk about the gospel every Sunday out right before we close in worship. So, they're hearing the gospel in the sermon they're seeing the importance of the gospel at the end of every sermon, during communion and why you need to get saved. I call people to repentance every stinking Sunday, every Sunday at the end of every sermon, whether I'm preaching on a Joshua or I'm preaching out of John. Because the community, it gives me an opportunity to share exactly the elements of what the gospel about. You need to repent, to get saved today before you leave this place.
- Jim Jackson: So everybody is kind of getting trained every week ad nauseum. And

then the more on the formal side of it is it happens throughout each one of our ministries. So it's Youth Ministry, Children's Ministry, they talk about the gospel. Then during our Discover the Orchard class would kind of, what we would consider at this point the formal way of talking about (*inaudible*). We answer people's questions at the end. You know, the questions they have about the gospel or disagreements or whatever.

Aaron Colyer: Okay. So I have so much rich content, so I have a lot of follow up. First of all, when you say people have to see it's important to you first you mentioned of course preaching. Would you also include in that they're seeing you are actually sharing the gospel during the week, too. Like that you're leading by example.

Jim Jackson: Right. So what I do is I actually right now I'm a football coach for a local football team. So in our valley, football is huge. Outside of California probably only got Texas that's as big, bigger than in our valley. We have nationally ranked on ESPN high school football teams. Literally right here from my valley. I can almost throw a stone to two of them, which is Mira Mesa and a Vista Marietta. So, I'm on a coaching staff here at the high school. Actually, we've got a game today. Funny that you mentioned that.

Jim Jackson: What I don't want to do is sit in my office all day and read these books and exegete a passage and I feel like I've done evangelism myself. Because the thing that really stokes evangelism. Here's the problem is pastors really don't cool off, I don't think, in their love for the Lord because they feel like they're serving the Lord by giving the people the best of themselves when they preach. Which is I'm going to honor the Lord by giving them excellent food to eat. Which is correct. That is their goal. But at the end of the day, you know, Paul tells Timothy, do the work of an evangelist. Jesus was an evangelist and heaven knows Paul was an evangelists. Two thirds of the books in your new testaments hit him going, laying down the foundation for those churches.

Jim Jackson: So you never see in the Bible some guy that went to seminary or went to the synagogue and just called it a day after he just wrote a sermon. You know? So what it does for me is I have to get out of my office and go. What are the things that I love to do? I love football and I've played football, coached football, and so now this is the fourth or fifth year, since I've been in this community where football's a big deal, where I go get on a staff where all I hear is profanity and I see totally lost kids. So I build a rapport of respect with those kids and the staff. And then obviously all the gossip is man, he's a pastor to. So it's this weird world of vulgarity, but the beauty of the gospel ends up there and so it's stokes my fire to continually know what it's like to be a regular person outside my office trying to share the gospel with a lost culture. So it's a touch point that keeps me sensitive to how God's moving in our culture.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, I like it. A quick comment about seminary. I mean, there's lots of things that we can critique seminaries on, but I, in my experience, in doing my MDiv was back in 2006, I took a spiritual disciplines class and every week we had to turn in an evangelism report. Every week it was part of the grade if we did not have an evangelism conversation that we got a low grade on that aspect. We also had to memorize scripture and all

this other stuff. But I mean I'm grateful that that was put in the scope and sequence of that master's program because I think it's trying to push on exactly what you're saying. I mean, let's not just get a bunch of head knowledge and preparation for ministry. Let's do ministry while we're getting this head knowledge. And so hopefully that's an encouragement to you.

Jim Jackson:

So yes, it absolutely is. I can't speak for every seminary, but, I'm an adjunct professor at what used to be Golden Gate. A seminary now is Gateway here in Ontario, which is only 40 minutes away from me. So I'm one of the adjunct professors there. And you know, I talked to Dr. Orange about that. Basically he just came and spoke at our church a couple of months ago and him and I have a good talking relationship. That was one of the things that I was like, hey, you got to make sure that guys that come through there are not just getting practical knowledge of scripture, but are getting practical knowledge of culture. And they're doing a great job. I'm just saying for most of us that have kind of come through, the (*inaudible*) works over the last 20 years of higher education. That tends to be a thing where you kind of lose your passion for the gospel and then by the time you get to the pulpit, you're just dumping the Word, which is great, but it's not dumping the Word with an eye towards helping people know how Jesus can interact not only in their life but somebody else's life.

Aaron Colyer:

No, that's good. Okay. I'm going to pushback a little bit on tools because I could give you a list of 10 right now and maybe I'll just do that, right? So, you've got like one verse evangelism, you got Roman Road, you've got spiritual laws, you've got, you know, God's big picture creation, fall, redemption, restoration. You've got 3 Circles you've got, I mean, there's tools all over the place. I'm really curious specifically about tools. So even if it's in your membership class, in these conversations, in discipleship, what, what's kind of a goto tool at Orchard Christian Fellowship because the tool is not the most important thing. The gospel is, I believe Romans 1:16, that the good news of the gospel is the power to save, but also I think tools practically are important to you as I've talked to guys all the way across the country.

Jim Jackson:

Mine and a lot of the ways that we go about evangelism here is really creation, fall, redemption and times type of Genesis to Revelation type of understanding. I try to base everything really right out of Genesis because what it does is it helps everybody understand. A couple of big hurdles that are, that most people have when they're trying to understand that is why do I get judged for someone else's sin. Why do I get judged for Adam? So even if you started with Roman Road, everybody's a sinner and blah, blah. It's like, to me, even when Paul was writing that they had some background, especially the Jews had some background in Genesis. They already had a previous understanding primarily of creation and it kind of how we got to this point. When he talks to the church at Rome, there are the Roman believers, a good chunk of those guys already know theologically where he's coming from when he talks about what even sin is and how you've got sin or why I've got sent sin. We always, I always try to jump out of Genesis and that's kind of the whole thrust of the way we deal with the gospel, not only from the stage, but also from our Children's Ministry and from our Discover the Orchard class. As far as how we present the gospel is primarily, this is the way

God meant it. So people get a good understanding that, hey, God didn't create evil. It's the whole thing of still protecting God, God's glory in the and his moral capacity and also your own responsibility for how you're going to live your life the rest of the way out.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, he's both just and justifier. So, in before we have used 3 Circles we've bought into that at our church. but before that I used to say there's four elements: gospel, God, man, Christ response. And if you could just remember, God, who is gone, he's holy. He made everything. He has all authority. So he gets to tell you how to live your life. Right? And I think that's what you're saying. Our culture doesn't even ascribe to yes, there is a god who I'm accountable to. They just skip that totally right. So, God, man. God, who is man, what is man, we're flawed, we're broken, Christ, the gospel and there is a response. So no, I think that's good man. You don't have to have tracks or gimmicky. In fact, I think it's better to have dialogue and conversation and you're tailoring the conversation based off your relationship with this person, how much time you have and what they're responding to. But tools are important. I hope you can do this. Next one quick because we're getting short on time. What are ways that you and leaders of your church celebrate victories when it comes to evangelistic encounters? How do you celebrate victories either in your corporate times, in big program time? How do you celebrate those victories?

Jim Jackson: So that's a huge thing for us. That's absolutely a culture, DNA setting, things that I really tried to start from the very beginning. Because I instituted membership when most people don't do membership anymore or if they do membership, it doesn't mean anything. To even serve at our church you need to be a member. Go through our Discovery Arts class. We present you with the gospel in that class. If you're not saved we do baptisms about once a month and for that purpose is that people get on board at all those. So direct answer to your question is we do baptisms once a month, which is a big opportunity for us to go boom, look at how great God is. Look at everything that God's doing. I think in the next two weeks from now, we've got like 22 baptisms and we do it once a month.

Jim Jackson: So it's crazy what God is doing here. So I make a big deal out of baptism. We do it right in the service. We don't have a baptismal. So we got all hull, a big thing and it put water in it, and heat it. I mean, it's a big deal, but it shows people the gospel in real life. We let them tell their testimonies during the, baptism. And so obviously that's an opportunity for them to bring friends and family to the baptism. It tells the whole church, this is what's important to us. At the end of the day, this is the reason that we do church. And secondarily, once people become members, we say, Hey, this is the church. I want to be involved in a blah, blah, blah. That means to us, when they come up to become members, they're saved. They've been baptized and they want to serve. So when we bring them up, we bring a deacon family up with them because as we grow bigger, we don't want to grow shallow, which is the big challenge for when you start getting into the thousands.

Jim Jackson: So what we do is we train deacons that when people joined the church, they immediately are put into a Deacon Group and that Deacon Group, a Deacon family takes care of that family. So we set them up with 12 families per couple to kind of take care of and when we bring them up in

front of the church, we kind of tell their story. So between baptism and joining the church, which we do in almost every service, at least one or two couples, the church gets the idea that, wow, this is how God interacts in the world. And we celebrate it. We go, this is the reason we live as a church.

Aaron Colyer: That's so good. Yeah. Testimonies, baptism videos. I love that idea about Deacon groups

Jim Jackson: I know this isn't the scope of what you're doing, but sometime at some point I need to talk to you about really why the church has not just grown like butts in seats, but as grown like in depth and quality. Spiritually is really the whole format of what I sat with a group. I've never seen it the way that we're doing it in any other churches. Micro Omega it's transformed our church.

Aaron Colyer: That's amazing, man. That's really cool. Yeah. We're pushing discipleship in a big way right now. That there are those one on one relationships. But I think that's creative and very unique way to have kind of those shepherd groups. And actually give very important ministry, service ministry, to Deacons, deacons in the office of the church. That's not an accident. Jesus set up the church with pastors, elders, shepherds, overseers, and deacons. And I want to give our deacons true ministry, not just, well, we, we pass a plate for the Lord supper once a month. You know what I mean? True ministry. And we're doing some of that, but maybe we could do better. So that's a good encouragement, brother. A number four. So this culture shift is happening. People are expecting to share the gospel, which the membership, by the way, we did a similar thing. Membership. We walked through a membership. Covenant expectations. Every person in their pastor interview shares the gospel with the pastor. I don't know if that's an encouragement to you or not, but when we say yes, I commit to look for opportunities to be a witness for Christ. We stop and say, Hey, I don't mean to put you on the spot. I don't want this to feel like a quiz. But go ahead and pretend I don't know. Jesus has shared the gospel with me because if we're going to be united in anything, it's in the fact that we're united in the same gospel message. And sometimes I get this like deer in headlights and other times there are these people who are in their membership process to say, man, no one's ever asked me to do that in a membership class. Like I'm excited that you're asking me to share the gospel with you because you were expecting me to share the gospel as a member of this church. That has been, has been pretty cool.

Jim Jackson: But, a really, really quick to a follow up to that which I didn't get to is. So say you come to our class, you like our church and go, man, I want to get involved here. I want to be on the set up team or I want to work in Children's. And we tell you how to get involved there. Maybe you're already Christian, but you never baptized. We'd walk you through that. Here we do a baptism class so that when you know what you're getting, why baptism is important. You get baptized. Before you joined the church, before you get a deacon couple we do a pastoral interview with you. Very similar to what you do. So one of our pastors sits down, a discipleship pastor sits down with you and goes, here's the gospel if you're not saved. So they try to figure out Cultural Christians. So we do almost the exact same thing as that. I love that.

Aaron Colyer: So good. The question is roadblocks. So during culture shift, you have an element of sin nature. People are getting out of the comfort zones, sometimes do an element of spiritual warfare. I mean Satan realizes, oh, these people are advancing the Kingdom of Christ. Were there roadblocks along the way in the last five years, that really were a concern. And if there were, how were they pushed through? How did you see victory on the other side of those roadblocks?

Jim Jackson: So we've had tremendous facility pressure. So much that I've had to do offsite Easter services. I've had to do offsite Good Friday services. I mean, we've done offsite stuff a lot and stuff that would really, usually tear a church up. Especially if the church had owned its own property none of the guys leave their own property to go offsite to do something. But we really do it literally because we want to reach people. We kept editing more anybody more in here? We're already doing 4 services before noon. We have like eight minute turns, which is crazy for our poor Children's pastor.

Jim Jackson: But so, a big problem for us has been how we're going to continue to reach people. We used to have tremendous pushback from the school district because unfortunately churches have a horrible reputation of taking care of the schools and not treating the janitorial people well. And so, the schools had a huge pushback on us going anywhere inside the school district.

Jim Jackson: And so we were able to work our way in there and God has blessed those relationships now because we really try to love on the janitors and the school district in general. So that was a big thing over the last four years was how are we going to continue to reach people? That was a big barrier that basically what we did was we just loved the heck out of them. We gave them gift cards. We bought the whole school district office lunch and sent over for 50 people. We sent over a whole big thing from a local Mexican restaurant here for lunch after Easter of last year, to let them know we appreciate it because they let us use a multimedia. We did a service at a stadium. at a brand new football stadium here that they never let anybody use a whole district. And it was a big deal for them to do that. On the backside we just, we loved on them. And so, we created a culture that we're trustworthy and that we're going to take care of them and not (*inaudible*) them.

Jim Jackson: So, you know what, honestly, the other thing, we've had some divisive people here and I prayed that the Lord remove them and they've got removed. You know, what Paul talks about, you know, pray that a divisive men of will . . . What does he say? Pray divisive men will, will, God will deal with them or whatever, or we'll stay away. And that's what we've done. God has miraculously removed the pain. Yeah, it's been amazing and I've never seen anything like it.

Aaron Colyer: Man, it seems like there's a sense of God's hand, God's blessing. I've been trying to pray Psalm 67 over ever pastor that I've interviewed, but that idea David saying, bless us, oh God, make your face to shine upon us. Oh God, this unashamed request for blessing, but in the motive behind that is that the nations might know you. That the peoples might praise you, that the nations might fear you. So the blessing is so that we

can also give it away, right? We shouldn't only pray for blessing for us, it seems like God's hand is on you guys and you're doing the right thing and saying, now let's give it away. Let's give it away. Give it away. Give it away.

Aaron Colyer: So final question to kind of wrap things up, what are some of the greatest stories of success or victory? Think about individuals, individual families, individual heart change where people just got it in. And the Great Commission is that there are staff members that you would just want to close out by saying, God did this and I want to praise him for it. What would you answer that question for?

Jim Jackson: We have a ton of those stories. I literally wouldn't know where to start, but I can just cherry pick. We had, one of the women that works in our Children's ministry right now, as you know, she came out of a Wicca background and, the Wiccan, the whole scenario for her was super demonic. And, God totally transformed her life. Like in a radical, a change of mind, change of behavior, from the background of Satan to the light of the gospel. And now she's serving in the church. And this is stuff we tell everybody like it was, I'm thinking off the top of my right now, we've got videos that we've shot of all these things that I'm telling you, a somewhat broad line. And because we showed them in the church and a once a year we do a, a kind of a state of the church type thing where we throw a banquet at a local place and we do dessert in the evening. And basically I walked into the exact things you're talking about is like, people walk up and they give their five minute testimony about how God's changed her life since she was one of them. I wish I would've known that question was coming because I could've given you a ton. We've got multiple marriages that, because, we're heavy on sex roles and our marriages have been transformed by telling the men how they're supposed to be godly and telling the women how they're supposed to be godly. There's honestly so many I can't even pick out one or two or three other than a general statement of what God's doing honestly.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. But that's okay. I mean, that's why I asked that question I think is a good way to cap off and say, you know, praise God for what he's doing, even in a general sense. And you also click back into number two, the celebrating victories that stayed in the church thing and video testimonies. Those are the, that's a loaded question. That's probably the most loaded question of the five, like assuming people are celebrating their victories because sometimes they're not.

Aaron Colyer: Most guys that are seeing growth are and they realize, hey, this is a big deal. Not just for pastors, give illustrations in their sermons, but you know, this guy that's been my friend for 30 years who hasn't shared the gospel with anybody now, now is in this testimony saying he got to share the gospel with his next-door neighbor. He received Christ and he's discipling him and they realize, oh, maybe I should do that too. It's not just the pastors. I should do that too. So I'm glad to know that. Just so I can click that as yes, you know, if these guys are celebrating the wins and, and God's getting glory. Listen man, I'm over my 30 minute mark. I want to pray for you. I want to end our recording. I just can't tell you how grateful I am and truly want to be what Paul would call in Philippians, a mutual encouragement to you just to say, keep rocking it, man. We're on the same team. We're doing this for the glory of the Lord and we're

seeing this is amazing thing, man. We're seeing, the New Testament realities that the gospel is marching forward happening. Whether it's in California or Roswell, New Mexico, which I never thought God was going to take me to Roswell, New Mexico, and it's just, it's exciting, man. It's so. It's good to hear from you.

Aaron Colyer: Let me pray for you and I'll, I'll close the recording and then we could say our goodbyes. Father, thank you for Pastor Jim and thank you for a Orchard. Christian Fellowship. Thank you for the way that, people gather corporately for services, but then they scatter out into the community. I think of the way that they're involved in schools and, in Deacon Mentor relationships and marriages that are being healed. I thank you God that everything centers around evangelism, that people truly are being equipped and trained to look for opportunities to proclaim the excellencies of you, God who called us out of darkness into your marvelous light. I do pray for Pastor Jim. I pray you would continue to pour your hand of blessing on him, specifically on the other pastors, on staff, on the church, and the lay leadership. God won't you just manifest your presence as they gather corporately, but also let them remember this truth from Psalm 67, that they're blessed so that the nations might know you so the peoples might praise you so that the ends of the earth might come to fear your name. and we would get to see and be a part of this joyful privilege of watching the Kingdom of Christ grow and grow and grow. Lord. I pray that you would continue to do that in California and pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Jim Jackson: Thanks so much. Appreciate your prayer.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, thanks again. Let me stop this recording here.

Charles Petty

- Aaron Colyer: Alright, so pastor Charles Petty in Ogden, Utah. Just to confirm again, you are okay if I record this conversation via audio?
- Charles Petty: Yes sir.
- Aaron Colyer: Okay. Well, I want to thank you for taking time to speak with me. I will do my very best to keep this interview at about 25 to 30 minutes. You had been selected after you took our church revitalization survey because you scored evangelism high. You said evangelism has been highly important as part of your church revitalization process. Then also you would agree that members of your church could share the gospel and you also do evangelism training. So my specific area is looking at the connection between an emphasis on evangelism and church revitalization. That's why you've been selected. I have one other housekeeping thing to get through and that's reading our ethics statement. Would you mind if I do that real quick?
- Charles Petty: Okay.
- Aaron Colyer: **Agreement to Participate:** The research in which you are about to participate is designed to determine the critical elements of your church's recent revitalization. This research is being conducted by a six-man research team pursuing doctoral degrees at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for purposes of understanding and encouraging these elements among other churches. In this research, you will be asked to describe your church's experiences. During the interview portion of the research, notes will be kept for your specific church revitalization, which may appear in the publication of the research. If you desire any of the information given to remain confidential, please inform the interviewer. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this Interview, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.
- Aaron Colyer: Any questions there, sir?
- Charles Petty: Nope.
- Aaron Colyer: Alright, well first let me just ask this, can you give me a little bit more information about how long you've been at the church? Really what the process of revitalization has looked like, a downturn and a pickup and worship attendance and just kind of general things going on there at your church.
- Charles Petty: Okay. I think the basic key thing is with emphasis on basically three part mission statement. It says that we are here for a purpose and our purpose is to reach people for Christ and mature them in Christ and mobilize them through Christ. And I think everything else kind of is made from that perspective. So as part of our weekly presentation as we do our call to worship we go from there. We put that on our LCD screens and people know why we're here. What our purpose is. What's our main business because if it is that not our main business, we can become very busy doing

other stuff that is not the main business at all. So I think that that's kind of key to them. Everybody knows they come here and as they continue to come here, they know that that's our mission. So everything we do then is centered around that mission. They become our litmus test. If they ain't helping us reach people, then I'm saying, well, and that's not necessarily wrong with doing it, but it's not what we do. Because our litmus test is they ought to be reaching, they ought to be maturing and have to be a mobilizer. If we're not doing those then let the other churches do that.

Aaron Colyer: And how long have you been there at Second Baptist?

Charles Petty: This is my 34th year.

Aaron Colyer: For 34 years. Praise God. There's a preacher named Mark Dever, I don't know if you know him, but challenge to pastors is to preach, pray, love and stay. And that's what you've done, man. Preach, pray, love and stay. So talk to me a little bit about, the downturn in your church and then the recent growth that you guys have been having.

Charles Petty: Okay. So we say downturn, of course even in your evangelistic appeal and outreach you can share the gospel. That doesn't necessarily mean that everybody's going to come at one time. So even during the down times as far as America is concerned, I look for things like quantitative growth spiritually. A lot of people willing to sacrifice, willing to do certain odds and ends. And so if it does not mean immediate growth it mean growth down the road. It doesn't mean immediate growth and the qualitative goal, and so during the downtime, we kind of use that. I have in the back of my mind, I'm from always thinking if we're really doing it God's way, then God's going to give us a harvest or he is going to obtain a harvest from it. And so, so during, even though the downtime, it keeps us sharp. What is it that we need to be doing? We ask ourselves, do we have ministry leaders needing every so often and then we, so we are intentional about what we need to be doing. Are we doing the right thing and if we are not doing the right thing, what do we need to do to fine tune to sharpen what we're currently doing? Or would we need to stop doing?

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, no, that's good. So then in this recent growth period, what intentional things were done to develop a culture of evangelism among the church members that they're feeling more comfortable sharing the gospel and they know that's the main thing, like you talked about.

Charles Petty: Again, the custom to them being aware of what our mission is and especially as we look at the things that's taking place in our world certainly indicates they we will live in the last days. Which means what are we going to do for Christ? We need to do what we need to do now. We can't wait to do it. We need to do it. One of the things is, I don't believe that you've got to wait until all the parts and the pieces because if you can do that you don't need a faith wall. So it's all right to make mistakes and not do the right thing as long as we evaluate and go, well, that didn't seem to turn out right. So I think some of the reasons maybe some people don't do certain things because they feel I need to know more stuff or I have to have a better feel for it before I really go out there. I'm saying no, go. You can always tell your story what God's done

for you. In fact, you can't (*inaudible*).

Aaron Colyer: One of the things that I've been very encouraged by is a man who, he's a preacher and he's an evangelist and in a podcast he said that the issue in the American churches, we told people you have to sit down until you know certain things. So you can tell a new believer to sit down for 10 weeks until they go through these classes and then they'll still stay sitting in the church for the next two years or . . .

Charles Petty: My philosophy is you got to get them involved early or you lose them anyway. So I do new members orientation classes and stuff like that. But they can be involved in stuff from the time to join.

Aaron Colyer: Oh, absolutely. Yeah.

Charles Petty: While they are discovering their spiritual gift. One of the ways to discover your spiritual gifts is the fact the processor of elimination. This wasn't it.

Aaron Colyer: You got to practice. Yeah, you got to practice.

Charles Petty: One thing about that. It didn't go away. I realized God's got a gift for everybody. And if you don't know what, through prayer and asking God sure you'll get it, but then you don't have to just stand still. You can be a useful in what you think it might be and it could turn out to not be that area, but at least you're working towards something.

Aaron Colyer: I was just going to say, that leads me to the next question about you said classes and training people. Are there specific tools and strategies or methods and sharing the gospel that you guys are using to train people to fulfill the Great Commission?

Charles Petty: I think that in order for us to really to fulfill it you have to know where you fit into it, which means you need to your spiritual gift. Spiritual gifts are given so that we can edify the (*inaudible*), to work for the ministry. And so we need to know what those gifts are. And so in our very initial class in new member orientation, we differentiate between talents and spiritual gifts. We provide spiritual gift classes, not only at the Sunday school time, but, if we get five or more people interested we do it almost anytime time or how often they need to be done. So the people can learn their Spiritual gift calling. In their spiritual gifts you don't have to worry about burnout. You don't have to worry about all the other things that we're about to get 2 people showing up or 500 people showing up. Not to say that we've got 500 people showing up. But, regardless of the number of people that show up that they'd be confident because God gave them that gift. And so we try to identify those because knowing your spiritual gift is a necessity to doing a ministry and go from there.

Charles Petty: And one of the other things is culturally, we kind of change, people change on a regular basis. We just try to teach the fact that God, the principle, God's Words always be the same. The approaches and methodologies that we utilize will be changed based upon the people at that point in time. So you have to continue to evolve even though the principle of God's Words are the same. Most of the Old Testament Bible

stuff was written during the time when people were farming and they had these particular type culture.

Charles Petty: But now the social media and all those types of things, we've got to be able to reach people through their network. Even though I'm an old guy, I realized that, hey, this where the people are. I'm not saying that we water down the gospel by no means. I'm saying we stick with the principles of the gospel. And then we utilize it because Jesus even told us that greater things than what he was doing we would be able to do because of some of these, things that have come to fruition over the number of years.

Aaron Colyer: Will you agree with this statement? Even though the methods and sharing the gospel change over time, that the message always stays the same?

Charles Petty: Yeah. The message is always the same because the news is Christ's death, burial, resurrection. Well, the message is the same, but the messenger could certainly change. And then in my 34 years, I have changed my presentation of the gospel because I come from a southern type of upbringing. Where about African American preachers there was a certain expectation, the what we used to call the "hoopology" part of it and stuff like that. I am talking about you have to kind of change where people can understand exactly what you're talking about it and put it in a way that they can understand it and take it and make it central their lives.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. No, I absolutely agree. Even though that being said, if I'm a church member and I say, Pastor Charles, can you teach me a simple way to share the gospel? What? How would you answer that?

Charles Petty: Well, first of all, I would reemphasize what is the gospel.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. Well, you, you nailed the death and resurrection of Christ. Yeah.

Charles Petty: Yeah. Your opinion of the gospel is the good news. Then, what is the good news? You were on your way to hell. God sent his only son. His son died on the cross. He was buried. He rose again. And so, the simpleness in the gospel is the fact that you know, and you tell people what God has done for you. I'll tell him it's good to talk about Peter, James and John. You could talk Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. But what has God done for you?

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. Tell your story. That's good. Okay. Third question here. How do you and other leaders in your church develop a system of celebrating victories when it comes to making evangelism a priority?

Charles Petty: We do our Great Commission meeting service I should say once a year. We don't do business meetings and a great celebration of the Great Commission meeting. We have a time of celebration. We celebrate the accomplishments that God has done so well. We do love each ministry from (*inaudible*) to our projector ministry. Pictures of ministry in action, not just people sit and spiel. Ministries in action and we only have about 15 minutes allocated to us or take all those ministries and then sometimes we fashion it for them, compile them, put music to them, and we just have a time of celebration. And we praise God for what we were able to

do. We can talk about we were not able to do this, that or the other, but we think of the things we were able to do and they we have always been able to do something to celebrate that.

Aaron Colyer: So, have you found that that that annual Great Commission service is an encouragement for the people in your church that aren't doing those actions that maybe that spurs them on to, to start being more active in their faith?

Charles Petty: Yes. When they see those pictures and stuff. And in fact, my Great Commission attendance . . . because when it comes to the Great Commission, the administrative leaders have met probably eight to 10 times and asked ourselves the question, what is that we feel God has called us to do with the resources that we have, the impact (*inaudible*) God. And so when we come together, basically we have all agreed to a certain degree and then even we don't agree the majority kind of takes over and wins from there. And so most of our people don't even attend the Great Commission because they feel, well if they don't spend all the time putting that together and stuff like that, there's no question for us either for going. So then I'll put through social media network and emails and texts and they find out about this stuff. When it comes to celebration stuff, we present a clip of it during our 2 services that we do so they can celebrate after the Great Commission meetings.

Aaron Colyer: Other than the annual meeting and showing those clips, are there ways for church members to share testimony regularly?

Charles Petty: We do some testimony in our 8 o'clock service is basically for men and women that perhaps maybe like to do sports and golf and watch football and basketball and stuff like that. So they kind of go from there. We do traditional hymn singing. For our 11 o'clock service is typically more upbeat and contemporary in nature. So I've said at the 8 o'clock service they do testimony on a regular basis whereby the 11 clock service, the biggest service, we do not do testimony services as often, but we do allow every so often as the Spirit leads to do that.

Aaron Colyer: Very good. Okay. So let me switch subjects a little bit. When it comes to people sharing their faith and evangelism conversations, have you found any roadblocks? When it comes to people experiencing that kind of change and the priority needs to be, c'mon guys, let's, let's share the gospel. Have there been any people or circumstances that have been roadblocks?

Charles Petty: Well, yeah. I think roadblocks because the fact that they like to say I'm not ashamed of the gospel. I think sometime people are basically ashamed of the gospel and the fact that they don't feel comfortable going out sharing it with various people that perhaps make more money than they do, live in better areas that, drive better cars and stuff of that magnitude. I think they kind of see them as being the instrument involved rather than the gospel.

Aaron Colyer: Wow. Yeah. So what do y'all do to fight that or overcome that?

Charles Petty: Well, I think it just continues maturation, study the Word to the point

where they realize that, hey, you know, we are more than conquerors through Christ Jesus. Yeah. It doesn't matter that I was living on skid road or this or that. I am who I am because God created this is who I am, but by His grace and his mercy, he's no respecter of person.

Aaron Colyer: And that identity piece. I love what you just said. I say that a lot. I am who I am because of who God says I am. Right?

Charles Petty: Yes. And the good news is if we accept him through faith, in his grace, we have eternal life. So who is going to get more than that?

Aaron Colyer: No, I think you're exactly right. Well, let me ask you this, can you think of some specific, and this is the last question. So take your time. Can you think of some specific examples of victories or stories of success in this period of growth going on when it comes to people really getting it. Then we got to be about the mission. You said at the very beginning about the main thing, right? Our main business is sharing the gospel. What are some stories of people really getting on board to that vision?

Charles Petty: Some things that take place . . . In our revival a building expansion right now we just paid it off. We have a 20 acre camp and we just paid it off. God has worked through that situation and scenario, we paid it off in about 10, 11 years. And we had a brand new building we built before we bought the camp and paid it off with about four or five buildings. And, we don't have tons of people. The ones that we do have, all of them don't give to the level that they could, but they are seeing how God can take weakness and affirmative and work through that (*inaudible*) to his way, I think is probably a fantastic that with his help how you are able to do it. It's kind of like the Scripture takes (*inaudible*) and says Jesus is up on the Mount of Transfiguration and then when he came back down only to find out that the remaining nine couldn't heal this man's child. And so the disciples ask a question, why couldn't we do it? You know? And it's because of the lack of faith and an etc. So I think that when they see things that appears not to be normal. And they see how God is (*inaudible*) us through that, I think they get excited about, wow, I can kind of go from there. So I think that our building expansion right now and hopefully it will be completed the next two or three weeks. And then the thing that was done in the past I've got to work through those particular scenarios and stuff. And then just even in our community and the people to take note that we are here. But, you know, I'll ask the question, if we closed our doors tomorrow, would it matter to anybody in the city?

Aaron Colyer: Yeah.

Charles Petty: (*Inaudible*) you have to continue to ask, you know, I can make a difference to you, maybe 10 years ago but what about now.

Charles Petty: Well the other thing is what does the community want. We can't just sit down, behind our four walls and assume anything. You know, we can assume that the problem is drug trade and people out there who could care less about those, they're concerns are totally different. So until you go out and meander with them, converse with them, you really won't know what's on their mind and the hearts.

Aaron Colyer: So being in the community and among people helps you to understand what's going on.

Charles Petty: Yeah, absolutely.

Aaron Colyer: Well, is there anything else you would add about what God's doing there at your church, how you guys are growing, how kind of the whole atmosphere is changing in regards to people understanding the importance of evangelism?

Charles Petty: Well, the biggest part is getting the membership as a total of those who would to embrace the fact that our mission purpose has not changed. It's still reaching people for Christ and are we really doing that. Then having those constant evaluations of how well are we doing that? How do you know you're doing that? What is the evidence that you do on that?

Charles Petty: And go from there. So, I think as long as we keep that . . . even if they (*inaudible*) and there were to occur evangelism, that's fine with me too. Sort of like the woman in Luke chapter 18, she kept nagging this guy to death I'll go give her what she wants to get out of my hair. So basically, you know, if, if for no other reason than that's fine. As long as the gospel goes forth.

Aaron Colyer: You mentioned you mentioned a constant evaluation to make sure you're doing it well. Do y'all use certain tools for that? Is there a certain . . .

Charles Petty: Well, we do questions and stuff. Some of the questions or a made up from us. We ask other churches, how do you evaluate? We take and mold and shape those that ask questions. The basic one is just making sense, it's kind of like how do you know there's a difference. Who goes to make a difference?

Charles Petty: So, it is kind of a basic type question that allows you to be able to go, hmm, yeah, I blew that. Or you know, we did well there. Whose (*inaudible*) evaluation?

Aaron Colyer: So get back up again and keep pressing on for the Lord.

Charles Petty: Yes. It's not perfect. So, we're not afraid of making mistakes as long as we make them with the intent of trying to put ourselves in position to be what God wants us to be and do what he wants us to do.

Aaron Colyer: And I think that helps breed an atmosphere of people, who, might be younger believers or new to the faith. Feeling like it's okay if they made mistakes along the way, when you can model that.

Charles Petty: I tell them all the time, you know, we're not perfect. We've all got faults. We didn't used to have faults but we still have faults. And sometimes we'd need to make those known to people that they know they ain't the only ones doing those things. We don't want to put on a or present an environment that we're super Christians and super perfect. You know, hey, you blew it. We messed up.

Charles Petty: Yeah, the people can associate with it because we are all in the same boat together.

Aaron Colyer: Well, listen, I know you're a busy, busy guy, and especially in this season of ministry, I want to pray for you real quick. I'm especially going to pray Psalm 67 over you. That's what David is saying. Be gracious to us. Oh God, be gracious to us. Bless us. Make your face to shine upon us. But there's that principle coming out of that psalm that we are blessed to be a blessing because the rest of the psalm is that the nations might know you. That the peoples might praise you. That the ends of the earth might fear your name. And so, I want to pray that over you guys at Second Baptist Church there in Ogden and I just want to thank you again for being willing to talk to me. Let me pray for you and then we'll be done.

Aaron Colyer: Father, I thank you for Pastor Charles. I thank you for what's going on at the church that he's leading and I thank you that the gospel is moving forward in Ogden, Utah and I just pray especially over his people in this season of construction and maybe some stress and frustration. Help them to understand that the main thing is to fulfill the mission. That the gospel go out. That they gather together corporately, but they scatter back out into the community to be the salt and light of Christ and so I do just ask for your blessing. I asked for your favor to pour on them. I ask that that your grace pour over them as a church. I ask that you'd make your face to shine upon them so that people may know you and the nations might praise you and people would come to fear your name. The simple message of the gospel, of the life of Christ and his death for our sin and his victory at resurrection would be the very thing that changes people for eternity. Lord, I pray that you would use him and use his church as they seek to fulfill the Great Commission. I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen, man.

Charles Petty: Well, I've enjoyed spending some time with you there in all of this stuff and so hopefully, if there's anything to be ascertained, God, get the glory.

Aaron Colyer: Amen. Yeah. Well thanks again for your help and listen, y'all keep going, pressing on after the glory of God and if I need anything else, I'll give you a call. But this should complete our interview portion and we should be good to go from here.

Jaie Warlick

Aaron Colyer: This is Jaie Warlick from Leonards Fork Baptist Church in North Carolina, and I wanted to make sure that it is okay with you to record this conversation.

Jaie Warlick: Sure, absolutely.

Aaron Colyer: Let me start just by saying thank you. We sent those surveys out to about 500 churches and pastors and we're just tipping that 130 mark. And so, I really appreciate you taking the time. I know you called me back to get that link again a couple of weeks ago and now you're willing to make this interview. So the reason you're selected for myself specifically is the high scores that you put on evangelism. You're not only rated that as highly important, but then when you look at your church's ability to share the gospel, and saying, hey, people in my church have the ability to share the gospel. You rated that as strongly agree and slightly agree. So I'm really interested to learn more about that.

Aaron Colyer: I just want to say thank you for being willing to do this. A couple more things as we get started, I'll do my very best to keep this at half an hour. I really want to respect your time and I think we can get the meat of what we need in that time frame, and I also needed to read this ethics statements put out by our academic institution, the Southern Baptist theological seminary. If you have questions about that after I read, just let me know and then we can keep going. Alright. So similar to what you saw on the survey, but it's changed a bit now that you're in the interview process.

Aaron Colyer: **Agreement to Participate:** The research in which you are about to participate is designed to determine the critical elements of your church's recent revitalization. This research is being conducted by a six-man research team pursuing doctoral degrees at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for purposes of understanding and encouraging these elements among other churches. In this research, you will be asked to describe your church's experiences. During the interview portion of the research, notes will be kept for your specific church revitalization, which may appear in the publication of the research. If you desire any of the information given to remain confidential, please inform the interviewer. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this Interview, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Aaron Colyer: Are you okay with those things, Pastor Jaie?

Jaie Warlick: Sure.

Aaron Colyer: Alright, well, I have five primary questions that are kind of to get the ball rolling and I anticipate we'll have some probing questions, some conversation back and forth.

Aaron Colyer: I've been incredibly encouraged in these last interviews that I've gotten to participate in. Oftentimes it's a mutual encouragement just to hear what

the Lord is doing and so I expect the same thing, in my conversation with you, Jaie. So let me just start by saying, it seems to me based on your survey responses that, the church has experienced a culture shift, right? So, there's a culture of evangelism that's been built in the church membership. In your view, what caused that? What, had been done from you, from other leaders by the Lord to develop that culture of evangelism?

Jaie Warlick: Well, yeah brother and, you know, obviously the Holy Spirit just decided it was time for him to move, in our particular situation. I guess a quick backdrop would be proper at this time that I've been there for five years. In March would be my fifth year. I came home in March, eighth of 2014. And so I was on a little bit before that as a temporary pastor as a part time pastor, but went full time March 8th of 2014. They had went through a time of, definite decline as your research shows. They had went through lots of problems. I wouldn't consider what my church went through was a split, prior to me arriving, they went through a turning away.

Aaron Colyer: Ok

Jaie Warlick: There wasn't a power struggle, there were some individuals inside that just kind of went a different way from what the rest of the congregation felt like they want to do, da, da, da, da. And so what happened was, is they started to decline heavily from the former pastor before the last pastor. And a part of that was because there was some nepotism there in the next pastor after the former who was, who was our pastor, Emeritus, he was there for 30 years. And so the next one was, some kin people da, da, da, da, it just kind of different. There was a different thought processes and he was coming on the heels of somebody that had pretty much raised everybody there. The church went into a major decline because of just whatever the issues there were at the time. There's a lot of sensitive information there that I've been told over the years. But that's pretty much the deal.

Jaie Warlick: And so what happened was at when the pastor decided he was going to make a split from the church, that he just needed a new place to go, a new way to go many of the church just left.

Aaron Colyer: Oh Wow.

Jaie Warlick: They didn't follow him. Some did. But not most, he went to another church just a few minutes up the road, but many of them just fell out of church. They had many of them were going there for years and they were kind of set on what they wanted and when they didn't get it they just kind of all left. So when I showed up at the church that first Sunday, this was a church that used to have a Bowman Youth, 15 years prior had a large congregation, large enough that they grew out of one sanctuary and built another one.

Aaron Colyer: Oh Wow.

Jaie Warlick: And then, so it had a lot going on. So this major decline took place, this splitting, if you will, of the church. And so when we came in and my

family, we were running about 25, that first Sunday morning, 25 or 30. We had about 18 or 19 in Sunday school.

Jaie Warlick: This is my first pastorate. I was an associate pastor at my home church for a little while. And so I got on board with our association, our associate, our director of missions, and they got very close. He really, you know, took the time out with me, stuck up for me in these certain situations and they brought me on board, not really knowing a lot about my history as a pastor because I didn't have one. But anyway, when we got on board there, there was probably 25 or 30 and I had been saved out of a life of drugs, alcohol, pornography, jail. I had, you know, went off to college, young, made it through all that, came home, had a, had a professional type counseling career, and then just got, just started living for the devil continuously. Completely lost my way. I grew up in church, so I was about 16, left the church. My grandfather was a Southern Baptist minister, but anyway, so, so when God pulled me out of that, in 2006, started pulling me out of all that stuff, saving my life.

Jaie Warlick: I always tell people when God got me, he got me. And it was just no ifs, ands, or buts about it. So when I came to this church, you had a church, it was highly discouraged, but highly hopeful. They were discouraged about what they had been through, but they were hopeful that God was going to bring somebody. The core of the saints have been praying. God bring us somebody. I am praying, God, show me where you want. And so when I walked in the door, my preaching style, my method was coming from my background and what God had done in my life was excitement. And so I guess I brought a sense of excitement into the church. And before long little by little people started, some people started coming back, new people started coming in. People who kind of had a past like mine heard my testimony on a daily, on a weekly basis me using that and so they stayed. And over that period of time I would say what, grew our church was the hope of a remnant of the Holy Spirit, obviously all over this. And, God using me and bringing me in into his purpose and his time and for a specific purpose. And so I think it was almost like a perfect storm. They were ready. I was on fire to preach. I was on fire to share. I was on fire to tell everybody in Walmart, everybody at the gym, everybody I could see it coming and going who Jesus was in my life. And these people needed to hear that they needed to experience somebody like that because what that did was that caught them on fire to do the same thing.

Aaron Colyer: Sure. So that sense of excitement. And you mentioned the Holy Spirit. First off, can you give me an example where you've seen the Spirit change an individual, change a group of people, change their priority or give them a sense of urgency for the gospel?

Jaie Warlick: Sure. The first summer I was there, or the second summer I was there, some of the elders, not my deacons, some of the saints, the older saints were worried about money. And I came from, I'm coming from a background of I could care less about the money, I just want to preach God's word. I didn't know anything about the church politics or the church. And so that first summer we started pulling back on some things that I thought we should have been continuing to on. Whether it was, you know, more funding for missions, more things that we should be doing, more activities. And all I kept hearing was, well that's what the former

pastor was trying to do. And people went against it. Maybe we need to hold off whether the second summer I was there, our tithing dropped to almost nothing.

Jaie Warlick: And so and it, it didn't bother me because I was coming out of a background of having nothing. It didn't, matter to me. And so the Holy Spirit led me to tell our people as in the Word, if we don't give, if we don't take what God gives us, he'll take it away from us. He's not going to allow us to sit on money because people think that we just need some type of savings account. I said, he's not going to allow that. I said, so if we'll honor him in our giving, we're going to watch and see what it does. So the deacons decided to side with me and we started to tithe out of our income to multiple missions throughout our community. One, raising are giving to the cooperative program. Two was raising our giving to the local association. Three, we started giving to Christian ministries. Four, we started giving to crisis pregnancy outreach and 5, we started to give to local families in our communities that needed help and we started taking a percentage of our budget and doing that. By the next year, we had quadrupled our weekly tithe.

Aaron Colyer: Come on, man,

Jaie Warlick: And so that was obviously a major mighty work of the Holy Spirit and the people saw it and so I had that to stand on. If you don't use what God gives us and if we don't use it for God's purposes that we're laying out in the word of God, he will take it away from.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. Okay. That's really helpful man. Talk to me about evangelism, specific strategies and methods you mentioned here, Sunday school classes, taught from the pulpit, but were there, tools that you've used or strategies that you've wanted to teach? I know that the gospel can be told in all kinds of ways, but, there are tools that we go to. And so I think of some that I'm familiar with. What tools have you used to really equip your people to share the gospel?

Jaie Warlick: Okay. Well, right now we're going through a group of people were going through. *Way of the Master*.

Aaron Colyer: Okay. Yeah. Is that Ray Comfort?

Jaie Warlick: Yeah, sure, sure. Yeah. I used it with actually, and we're, you know, we're a church on a good Sunday, we might be, there again, just a blessing if you want to see the Holy Spirit at work. Five years ago we were running 30. On a good Sunday. We might run 200.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. Yeah, that's amazing.

Jaie Warlick: You know, and we went from having \$30 in the bank account when I got there to having over \$100,000 now. It just, lots of things. But I just had a group of students come in on Friday we fed the local football team. That's one of the outreach project, brought the football team, the JV football team and all the cheerleaders. And so, I had about 80 to 100 students there that I walked through *The Way of the Master*. And I had about 15 minutes to talk to them before we fed them so they could go

onto their ballgame. But, that's something we're doing. And so I had about 15 of my people there watching also. I have one of my lay leaders who's walking particular people through the *Way of the Master* on Friday nights.

Jaie Warlick: You know, other, other routes of evangelism is I think just equipping people from the pulpit. Like I said in the study, to understand really because they never had an understanding of a lot of people, a lot of our, because we're kind of a small town, we're a very country setting of a church. Kind of out in the middle of nowhere. People have just always done church. It's a lot of families who grew up there. Church to them is the building on the side of the road. And so it, when I came in with my enthusiasm, with my testimony, and letting them know what true evangelism looked like, going out and sharing the gospel with people and letting them know that it's not necessarily walking up to somebody saying, hey, you need to come to my church.

Jaie Warlick: You know, because you're putting it off on me. That's too much pressure on me rather. You know, I said, you can't just invite them to church. I said, you have to be willing to give an account for the hope that's in you. You always have to be ready for that. And I said, whether you're at Walmart, you're at the gym, whether it's your work, you never know what somebody else's sown seed as the Word tells us and we're there to reap it. And you never know when you're sewing, you know, you're always supposed to be so sewing seed because you never know what somebody else is going to reap it. And so that's a lot of my pulpit delivery is always about sharing the gospel. Now since Easter, we've been walking through Acts.

Aaron Colyer: Come on, man, we're doing the same thing, right? You're talking about the Holy Spirit. Cause you are walking through Acts!

Jaie Warlick: And so, you know, and it's really teaching my people, what the early disciples were doing what they were seeing, what they were going through, what they were willing to do for their faith. And so I guess that's a lot of it. That's, it's almost, I don't want to call it dumb luck because it's, God given, but I don't necessarily have except for those few things I laid like the *Way of the Master*, Friday night classes. And some things like that come from the pulpit is just where God's led us. That's the message that God has put on my heart. I'm a firm believer in allowing God to show me what he wants his people to hear each and every week. I've been walking them through that. On Sunday nights we've been walking through first John, dealing with, talking to the believers, dealing with revealing your Christianity and, and not concealing it. Been walking through a lot of that. Then, how do we do that? Well, we got to be willing on a daily basis at work to reveal who we are in Christ. And that in and of itself preaches Jesus. And so I've been telling them all that. So Acts, Sunday mornings, first John Sunday nights, and we walked through Romans to get our doctrine and theology on Wednesday night.

Aaron Colyer: There you go. So when you say preaching from the pulpit, I think you would agree with this statement that if a church is going to develop a culture of evangelism, they have to see their shepherds leading the way and we live by example.

Jaie Warlick: The pastor has to live it. They, need to know always - it's always funny about people will run into me at Walmart, core of a small town. They'll run into me and usually I'm stopping and I'm talking to somebody about the Lord or carrying them about something that's happened over the weekend at church. We're talking about new upcoming things and so God is allowing my people to kind of catch me off guard in those situations. And so it's, we do have a past culture, especially in the Southern Baptist churches, of there being a disconnect between the pastor and his people, between the pastor and what he preaches. Not that he's not a godly man, but, you know, what he's willing to do and what he's living like on a daily basis, you know?

Jaie Warlick: And so, the first couple of years that I was there, I did a podcast and it really, it really changed me. But it also helped a lot of people because people didn't realize what had happened to me. The people who knew me from this town, there again, we're a small town in the old country song whether you're in jail or late for church, everybody knows who you are, whatever. We're in that town. Right? And so everybody knew when I was in jail in my past, everybody knew that I was drugged up, drunk out and laid in a ditch. And everybody knew that was who I was just waiting on me to die. All of a sudden, many of them, they're on Facebook and they start to see these podcasts. They start to see me and then they'd been hearing things about me and then all of a sudden they hear this guy, me talking about a God who will take up a drugged out loser out of the ditch and put him in a pulpit. And so it just, it brought a lot of my people. It showed my people that I was willing to bare all, you know, for the glory of God. And so many of them has started to do that as well.

Aaron Colyer: That's good brother. I could talk to you all day by the way, but I'm going to try to keep it focused here. My third question, how do you and others leading your church develop a system of celebrating victories when it comes to making evangelism priority? So how do we celebrate the wins? Put victories in front of your people?

Jaie Warlick: That's a good one. I'm, I'm my biggest critic.

Aaron Colyer: That's okay. I feel the same way sometimes.

Jaie Warlick: Yeah. I'm hard on myself. I've had to really kind of allow myself to share what me and you are doing now and because it's a blessing, you know, and to see, to let people know what's going on that we see it every day, but it's also being seen elsewhere too. That's been a positive. But as far as, celebrating victories this weekend, Friday, we did that with the football team Saturday. We had our annual mud dodgeball event. We started that five years ago. Now we've grown to over 400 plus people who come and it is all paid for. We feed them. I bring in a special speaker every year, it's a use of it. And so then Sunday I give an account of how many young people we were able to share the gospel with this past week or this week. How much money we raised for whatever we're raising money for. I'll tell my people, I'll have him stand up. Everybody who was involved in the process. And so I've tried to do things like that to keep them encouraged. What they're doing means something. Not only because the Word of God says so, but because we're seeing the Word of God manifested here at our local church.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. That's good. That's good. So a testimony time. Are there ever member sharing testimony? You're talking about leading numbers and people stand up. What does that look like for people to stand up and share what God's doing?

Jaie Warlick: Yeah. On Wednesday nights when we open up our service on Wednesday night, I do prayer time and praise time. Time is for prayer requests, praise time, it is for people to praise God for something that has taken place in their life that week. And so they're able to share what God's done about one Sunday a quarter, one Sunday night, a quarter. We have special music from within we're doing a lot of grassroots thing drive now with our musicians and then we have a time of testimony. So there's people that I, personally put my finger on throughout those that quarter and say, listen, I've been noticing what God's doing in your life. Would you be willing to speak about it?

Jaie Warlick: With all that encourages the rest of the congregation.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, absolutely. I so oftentimes have experienced in our church here in Roswell that someone thinks, oh, well of course the pastor is going to have those stories. Of course the pastor, right? But then when one of their friends that they've grown up in church with for the last three or four decades stands up and says, guys, I got to share the gospel with my neighbor then there's no excuse to distance yourself. Oh, well that's for the evangelists. No, that's your friend that you know, was scared and shaking in their boots and answered the call to have a ministry of Proclamation and they shared the gospel and they spoke Jesus. Romans 10, right? How will they go unless they're sent, how will they hear unless they're told for faith, comes by hearing and hearing the Word about Christ. And then their friend senses this urging like, okay, maybe God can use me. You know what I mean? Maybe they would use me because it's not just the pastor anymore. I mean, this is, my brother that I've never seen step out in courage. And then I saw him do it and I see the kind of joy that he has. And I want to be a part of that.

Jaie Warlick: Only the Holy Spirit will use that to bring that other person under conviction. To where they're like, okay, I see what's going on. Like you just said and they come under conviction, you know, why am I not doing it. Or even when you see I tell you what we do when you see a 30 year member of the church gets saved, or a deacon get saved to, you know, they're just so caught up and they just take it in the morning. They say, you know what? I don't know, but I'm going to know right now. And then all of a sudden people see that and they're, oh my gosh, that's real stuff going on.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. Yeah. No, that's fine. I agree. So we've talked about a lot of positive things. What about some negative things? Were there any roadblocks? When the congregation starts experiencing this change, this priority of evangelism, this sense of excitement the kingdom is growing, we got to obey the Great Commission and then oftentimes we see some, you know, plans of the enemy come in or sin nature come in and people just act like sinners like we all are, and they show how much they need Jesus. So what roadblocks, and I'm not asking you to name names especially because it's being recorded, but were there situations that were

roadblocks along the way and can you speak to that?

Jaie Warlick: Yeah. You know, we've, we, we were early on, we were in a roadblock, a dealing with music. Of being a traditional southern Baptist church in a small town and the outskirts of the small town. We had out of our core, out of those 30 original ones, about half of them, you know, were above 60 years old. And they were set, but they didn't think that God spoke to anything unless somebody was playing out some hymns and that God couldn't use anything else. That it had to be done that way. And so, and, and, and praise God. And I've had some wonderful mentors who have walked me through taking the easy steps and not trying to beat people to death. And that's been a helpful thing because I have slowly tread those waters, little by little so now we have a praise team.

Jaie Warlick: We do two contemporary songs every Sunday morning, mixed with two, hymn our choir does things like that, Aaron. And that was a roadblock that I still pray about it because the devil continuously tries to sideline that. I pray for new artists, new musicians, new singers, things, things that nature. Because in a small church, you know, the pool was small to draw from. But I've noticed just in the past two or three months, He's given us this young lady, a young couple with kids and they really got on fire for our church and all of a sudden she comes up and she says, preacher, I'd like to sing in the choir. Like, well, thank God, you know, we need as many people. And we went from a choir of five to a choir of 30 members anyway. And so this girl comes up, we'll come to find out she was in college. She was a collegiate singer, old the older, the praise team in college and they traveled. And so she gets up the first Sunday, just blasts the roof off the place. She's excited about being in our little choir. And so that's, I've seen the Holy Spirit work in that way. But that's been a roadblock.

Jaie Warlick: Another roadblock was money, not that God wasn't giving it to us, but a lot of the people from this area because of how they were raised and because of the limited amount of money that they need, that they have seen in their lifetime and come into their hands. They kind of want to run the church like the household budget. In the meaning of we've got to put back the nest egg. It's got to keep building it up. And so getting them to understand that God provides for us in order for us to use. And when we step out on faith, because ever since that we've gotten into this, what I've tried to bring to the congregation, stepping out on faith, God will replenish.

Jaie Warlick: We didn't have any technology. No cameras, no music, no nothing. We had some speakers that were old. We didn't have any microphones, nothing. When I got there. Well we have the first year I was there, I told him what I wanted and they said, well, there's just no way. We don't have the money. Well, within three months we had over \$60,000. And so now we've already updated what we did four years ago and we've added more stuff, another \$15,000 we spent last month. And we've never missed it because every time we've done it, people have come and gave. So those were roadblocks. But I will tell you there were roadblocks, that I never felt. I never felt the speed bump or they might've been speed bumps, not roadblocks because I've never really felt it as much as because I just trusted that God was going to take care of it.

Jaie Warlick: And that if I kept praying and then I kept preaching the gospel and preaching to my people what I know to be true, what I know to be right in those areas of giving, of giving of themselves, of giving of their time, of giving their money, of evangelizing, of seeing God's house beautified of wanting to do things in order to make our campus pleasing to new families coming in. And then we'll have to take part in what God's doing here that God would just do the rest. And that's kind of what's happening.

Jaie Warlick: We just, we voted on the playground. You know, we've never had a playground and you know, we've got so many new families and children and I said, you know, we're going to have a battle, but God's going to overcome it. And everybody came ready for battle.

Jaie Warlick: Not one person raised their voice. It was a great business meeting. All we was trying to do was raise \$10,000 by the time that the meeting was over, all the church needed to come up with was \$2,500. So the people were so worried to death about that \$10,000. We could spend it somewhere else. We could use it for a fellowship hall, new fellowship, but we could use it. I said, this is what's in front of us. This is what I believe God wants us to do, you know, we're going to talk to people and we got people who want to help us with this. Somebody throws your hand up. I want to give \$1,500. I want to give a \$1,000. So the Church has got \$2,500 left on our plate and more than likely by the time that the playground equipment gets to us, that'd be gone too.

Aaron Colyer: So your business meetings starting to like a an auction, 1500, 2,000.

Jaie Warlick: That's right. That's right. That's okay with me brother.

Aaron Colyer: I love it. I love it. Okay, well that leads me to my last question. So the last five years and really think about specific to, cause you said the greatest thing that you saw the greatest member acceptance out of our six areas was evangelism, right? So, people get it in regards to evangelism. What are some of the greatest stories of success where, you just want to praise God and say, God did it. God took this person that I never thought would share the gospel or whatever it would be in regards to, they really get it. We have a culture now where people know it's not just my job to share the gospel, it's our job as believers. What would you share and how would you want to praise God with those stories of success?

Jaie Warlick: Well, I mean, I guess just instead of individual stories of success that really, and I know the probably what you're looking for. The church as a whole is a story of success. That the first year we were there, we had 10 volunteers for Vacation Bible school and probably 50 kids. By the third year we were there, we had more volunteers than we had kids. And so I asked why the volunteers, why so much because they felt a need to share the gospel with this new group of kids, this new generation. And that I believe was one of the things or many other things that have come. We've got discipleship classes that we've started, life group classes and things like that. Then on the heels of what has taken place in our community with our people, evangelizing and going out and share the gospel, inviting people to these classes so they can not only hear the gospel but also walk through the gospel and hopefully get saved obviously and those things.

Jaie Warlick: But I think just the church as a whole is a testament to God. Of when hope meets preparation and passion. I think that God is just bound to do mighty and wonderful things. I had an absolute passion to share the gospel with anybody going are coming. I try to continuously be prepared to do so. I had a body of believers who were hopeful that God was the God was going to use them once again in a mighty way. And so I think that all that comes together and now there's a level of excitement where people want to share the gospel. I don't think that there's one specific time. I think that just if we're trying to create a culture, as you said, and a new generation of people that they just expect that that's their job.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. Come on.

Jaie Warlick: You know, there's not any more of, okay, I want to work myself through this. I'm trying to create a new generation. And I love my older folks. A lot of them are set in their ways and that's, you know, that's okay. I keep preaching to them too, and God keeps working on many of them, but this, generation coming up, the problem with the Southern Baptists and probably many of the other denominations as well, is there's been a gap between whatever year and now of intentional evangelism.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, yeah.

Jaie Warlick: You know, people just think getting well, if somebody need saved, they'll show up here to church. Well, that's stinking thinking. That's the not the way it works. And so I'm trying to start a culture in our little part of the world and our little community of people who just expect that that's what they're supposed to do.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. Well, I want to tell you, you are huge encouragement to me. God is using you. And what you said about money is also true about a people that God's using as leaders, right? So you said, if you don't use it, you'll lose it. So man, God's given you all kinds of passion and vision and encouragement for your people. And I was to tell you the same thing, man. Just keep using it. Just keep, just keep using key being used by the Lord and make sure that you're pointing out to him and he's getting the glory because as you continue to pour out, then he's going to continue to pour in. Right. And so . . .

Jaie Warlick: So that's what I've been sharing with my deacons. You know as long as we keep doing that. Why would God, Aaron, and this is for anybody. God starts pouring say children into your ministry. I mean just baby after baby after baby after baby. And then you say, you know what? We need to work on our nursery. And somebody says that we got money that can be spent better somewhere else. And so you have to look at them and say the Holy Spirit, God is giving us these things and He's expecting us to do something with them.

Aaron Colyer: Come on. Yeah.

Jaie Warlick: And so part of that is being obligated to use the blessings. As you said, he's given you gifts. He's given me a passion to be able to use the blessings in which He's bestowing upon you and your church and your ministry, and if it's creating a new sanctuary because you outgrow the

other or a fellowship hall, a new nursery, a new youth room, whatever, and he's given me a 100 youth. You better figure out what you need to do with them because if not, he'll cut it off.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah.

Jaie Warlick: You're an encouragement to me brother.

Aaron Colyer: Good, man. I've been. I've been praying that prayer from Philippians that we can be mutual encouragement. Let me pray for you and I'll stop the recording and I want to pray specifically Psalms 67, and it's this idea where David is praying for blessing. Bless me. Bless me. Make your face shine upon me, right? So he's unashamed to say, God, I want your blessing. But then the rest of the Psalm is that the nations might know you, that the peoples praise you, that the nations might know you. It's repeated over and over. So God's blessings to us are not for us, there for us to pour out, blessed to be a blessing. So I want to pray that psalm over you and Leonard's Fork and then I'll close out the recording.

Aaron Colyer: Father, I just thank you for Pastor Jaie and, how you're using him. And, and I pray, God, I pray that you continue to pour your presence into their corporate worship setting, into the hearts of the believers there, the saints they gathered together, that they would say less of me and more of you and then they would see your glory that they would truly understand, as they are getting to understand this, that it's a privilege and an honor and a joy to be about advancing your kingdom. To be about seeing the Kingdom of Christ march onward. And they get to lock arms as it says in Philippians chapter one, that they strive side by side for the sake of the gospel and give them that kind of clarity of mission. I thank you that you've given them such a leader. I pray, from Pastor Jaie that you would put other leaders around him to help lift up his arms when he's tired, give him endurance, continue to give him the passion. Let it be true and a reflection of his alone time with you that he would never feel like he has to produce it on his own strength. You always give it. And truly Lord we pray this Psalm 67, you would bless them, that the nations might know you, that the peoples praise you and I prayed in Jesus' name. Amen.

Aaron Colyer: Hey, thank you so much. Absolutely grateful for you. Thank you. Let me stop this and I want to, I want to ask you something about a pastor that you remind me of. So I appreciate you, man.

Cory Thomas

Aaron Colyer: All right, Cory Thomas from Flat Creek Baptist Church. I'm on with you just to confirm it is all right if I record this conversation.

Cory Thomas: It is.

Aaron Colyer: Okay. Thank you very much. I want to let you know that, I really appreciate you filling out that survey. We had over 500 people invited to take the survey and roughly 130 have taken it. So you are, in the lead there helping the odds. I also appreciate you being willing to interview with me. The reason you were selected for myself is we have a six person research team and my area of focus is evangelism. You rated that as highly important on your survey. And so, the questions that you're going to have today are revolving around your church's revitalization experience specifically connected to building a culture of evangelism.

Aaron Colyer: I've got an ethics statement that I need to read just to fulfill our academic institution protocols. Let me read that real quick and then if you have any questions before we begin, you fire away. Here's our statement:

Aaron Colyer: **Agreement to Participate:** The research in which you are about to participate is designed to determine the critical elements of your church's recent revitalization. This research is being conducted by a six-man research team pursuing doctoral degrees at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for purposes of understanding and encouraging these elements among other churches. In this research, you will be asked to describe your church's experiences. During the interview portion of the research, notes will be kept for your specific church revitalization, which may appear in the publication of the research. If you desire any of the information given to remain confidential, please inform the interviewer. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this Interview, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Aaron Colyer: Any questions about that my friend?

Cory Thomas: None.

Aaron Colyer: Okay, perfect. Well then let me tell you one more time before we get started. Thanks again for your willingness to participate. I want to give some direction to our interview. It's going to be about half an hour and I want to really press to keep it at half an hour to respect your time. I've got these five primary questions and there will be times when I kind of slow down and probe in and ask for more details and then maybe for the sake of time there, there might be a time where I say, that's okay, let's move on so I can get all five of these questions in. All right. Does that sound okay?

Cory Thomas: Yeah. Good.

Aaron Colyer: Okay. First tell me just a little bit about the church, how long you've been there, what the decline period was and then how you saw the Lord kind

of grow you guys out of that time.

Cory Thomas: I've been at the church as Pastor I began as interim pastor in July of 2011 and I became a permanent pastor in January of 2012. Previous to that, we as the church had, had a long run of about eight years of good growth with a strong pastor in his early to mid-sixties. We built a new sanctuary after he left in about 2007. There were two short term pastors there and the church had fallen down. When I got there in 2011, I'm going to say we were probably maybe running 40, 35 to 40 in Sunday school. And we have seen, well, it's kind of been an up and down the revitalization over the last say three years probably. We've really seen it and I don't know that it's complete. It's almost like we the Lord moving at random. I mean we've seen a move of it in the last six months and so I don't know that we are through with the revitalization.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. Well, and that's why they call it a process, my man. So revitalization process, I think even your healthy churches still need to be asking the same questions about what is the Lord doing? Are we focused on the right things? Do we have the mission in front of us? How are we executing that mission? Are we doing things for the glory of God or for other motives that are not going to be good ultimately for the kingdom. So those are the questions every church has to ask. Let me ask specifically to evangelism though, what was done to develop a culture of evangelism among the church membership these last six or seven years.

Cory Thomas: I guess through enhanced discipleship to begin with, and then just trying to transition from being the mentality of a rural community church to putting the focus outside of the walls of the church. Somewhat of a culture change. I wouldn't say a challenge, but a change that we had to reemphasize the focus to get outside of the walls of the church to do some things different and unique that had never been done before.

Aaron Colyer: Right, right. Can you give me some examples of those things?

Cory Thomas: We began a youth crusade four years ago that we did for three or four years. We did some special services in August, I called them the sizzling Sundays of August where we did just one. Suddenly the whole church went and we had a service at the nearby lake. We try to focus on everything being outreach from our fall festival that's coming up to our Easter egg hunt. We have an annual fish fry that we, it kind of just started out as what is the word I want use here? Just kind of started out as an idea of having a fish fry and maybe putting a speaker on the program. And it just kind of manifested. We've been doing it for eight years now. They actually did that a year before I got here. But we just took it and grew on it to try to become an outreach event for the church to lead people to Christ and to grow them as Christians. And see evangelism to me as a two-fold purpose. It is to call those in that are lost and hope the spirit speaks to them and saves them. But also for those that are within the church to continually to disciple them and grow them in the Lord.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I mean, that's the full picture of the Great Commission. Go make disciples, baptize, teach them to obey. Right? So I appreciate your perspective there. Let me ask this and start a second question. What strategies or methods, identified for being used for

training the church members, tools to share the gospel. So you talk about even like the fish fry people going and sharing the gospel. How would they have been trained for those gospel conversations?

Cory Thomas: Predominantly by myself and some of the other leadership in the church. And you know I'll read a lot of evangelistically . . . I'm a big advocate and a big fan of Tom Rainier. I subscribed to him and some of the other areas of that nature that I receive and I try to stay on the edge of, I don't want to use the word technology because we do believe in technology, but I like to stay on the edge of what's going on and new ways. I'm a big advocate of the gospel never changes, but our method to get people has to change whatever it takes. If it works, fine, let's keep doing it. If it's not, if it's a sacred cow, let's kill it and get rid of it and try something different.

Aaron Colyer: Absolutely. So one of the other guys I interviewed said, there's all kinds of methods, but there's only one message.

Cory Thomas: Yeah, that's it. Another area that we took on about, I'm going to say about probably halfway about three years ago, as we began, we have a very active Facebook community and we stream all of our services live to Facebook and that's been another huge outreach for us, for people to be able to see a presence in our church in a sense of community. Letting the community know that we're here. We're not just putting in a country club where people come and gathering and assemble, but that we're a part of the community. We, our church is located, we're in the middle of nowhere. We're 10 miles there are three cities that are exactly 10 miles from where we are. So we have three different markets that we can reach from and draw people in. That's what we try to do this, whatever unique ways. We've done festivals where we had a booth and give away balloons, give away tracks. Any time that we can be involved in the community to show the community that we care and are willing to meet needs. Those have been, I guess the bedrock of our outreach programs.

Aaron Colyer: So let me follow up on that. Training is when you said you train most people by yourself, what are you training them in? Are you equipping them with like a Roman Road. I know you said you follow Rainer. You've probably heard a lot about 3 Circles. I mean, when I say tools, what are your go to tools when you're training somebody?

Cory Thomas: Roman Road is our main tool. I have used them. I have taught on 3 Circles. The Roman Road is probably our main focus seeing the lost saved. We have recently have been doing this, you belong here, the national back to church thing in the middle of the month. We ordered some custom printed postcards with all of our church information on the front. And then on the back we put the Roman Road to salvation. If someone that was inviting someone to church actually has the Roman Road to salvation on the back of the card. That they can easily clearly present the simple gospel.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. So, then I think you would agree with this sentiment, it's not just the pastor's job to share the gospel. It's not bring him to church and I'll share the gospel with them, but it's every believer has a responsibility to share the gospel.

Cory Thomas: And it's a continual repetitive cycle of I'm trying to indelve that in people's minds and in their spirit that the Great Commission is not just for pastors. We've got to be involved and if the church is ever going to fulfill its mission, then it's got to have the whole, every member working corporately.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. That's good. Well, let me move on in, number three here. I'm curious how do you develop a system? You've been there for, going on six years, when you want to celebrate victories or wins in the kingdom where you see the Great Commission really be a priority in an individual's life, what system do you have to celebrate those victories currently?

Cory Thomas: I would say encouragement is the most part. Letting people know because see, where I am is totally volunteer led. I'm the only person on staff. I'm bi-vocational and I'm the only person on staff. So I try to celebrate my people and even new Christians coming in, that are part of the body, I try to celebrate with them, their involvement in the body and continue to encourage them to be involved in the body. Because what I think that we're doing by that is we're creating a culture of discipleship in that because part of discipling is teaching people to be functioning members of the body,

Aaron Colyer: So this, this gift of exultation and letting that multiply. What about, are there intentional times of sharing testimony, anything like that?

Cory Thomas: Yeah, we do about once a quarter or maybe generally on fifth Sunday nights. We get what we call preparation and testimony. And then of course we do random testimony in other times, but we'll come in and we'll do the whole service is dedicated to, we'll sing a couple of praise songs and then we'll ask for volunteers to give a testimony of what Christ is doing in your life right now. When we do those. I'd say on maybe three times a year, probably need to do them more. But now I'm quick. If I feel like someone, if God is moving in their life and I feel like the church needs to know about it, I'm going to ask them, say, "hey, would you be willing to share this with the church?" Because I believe that that's how we grow and I believe that's how God gets glory and credit, but that's how we grow. People must see, they can hear me preach all day long, a simple message on salvation, but if they see lives changed in what God's doing in people's lives, that moves more people than all the preachers put together in the world preaching messages.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. No, I agree with that sentiment for sure. So, if you're doing those intentionally quarterly, how often would you say someone gets up and gives a testimony about sharing the gospel?

Cory Thomas: I would say usually each time we do one. So usually each time we do one and then sometimes they'll share, like we have intimate groups on a Sunday night and Wednesday nights. We teach on those and in all the adults are in one area but it's a little more intimate than like Sunday morning. And sometimes, you know, they'll want to share then and if they ask, I'm most definitely never would never subdue anyone from doing that. And it actually occurred. You know we do that that at random.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, I've seen that be very helpful in our groups is that they'll ask every week did anyone have a gospel conversation this week and even that simple question knowing that you're going to be asked, what it does is it gets people coming ready to share that story. And when they know they're going to be asking, they don't have a story. Then it's that reminder, hey, I, I need to have a gospel conversation. It's been a long time since I've said I've had one, you know.

Cory Thomas: Well, and one of the things that I face as a challenge that you may not, you're in New Mexico, right?

Aaron Colyer: New Mexico. Yes sir.

Cory Thomas: One of the things that you may not face out there, as a matter of fact I read an article recently where Dr Michael Capp was referring to Colorado. We have a lot of cultural Christianity here. If you follow what I'm saying, most people self-identify as a Christian maybe because mom and dad was a Christian or because of the area we live in. I mean, they just naturally assume that they're a Christian and in essence, I mean if the truth be known, their name is not in the Lamb's book of life. So that's a battle that we face. I'm trying to overcome that cultural Christianity and one of the focuses that God is really directed towards in the last little while is to make sure that we understand and Christianity through osmosis as well. Well, mom and dad were saved, so you know, I'm, I'm a Christian.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. And you're in Georgia right? So there's that deep South,

Cory Thomas: South Georgia too, you know what I mean? I'm, I call it the buckle of the Bible belt, but still our state association, they feel like that roughly 90 percent of the state is lost. And we're the buckle of the Bible belt.

Aaron Colyer: The buckle of the Bible belt. That one is probably going to be quoted in my thesis. Thank you for that sir. And you mentioning some of those challenges leads us to our fourth question about roadblocks, right? So what roadblocks are there? And I appreciate you saying that Cultural Christianity. But even more specifically when you're trying to get your average church member to have a weekly might be a little strong, but just often, right? Often and frequent gospel conversations. What excuses might you hear or roadblocks might you hear to, Oh, pastor, you know, I know that I'm supposed to do that, but this is why I'm not going to .

Cory Thomas: Excuses I've heard have been I'm introverted. If you want to know the truth of what I feel in my spirit is the largest is apathy. Apathetic, too busy. I really think apathy is one of the largest. I'm okay. My immediate family's okay. You know, I like to come to church and I like the worship. I like to fellowship with other students. But, and here again, here's, this is another stereotype of southern rural churches, preacher, that's your job.

Aaron Colyer: Oh yeah, man, I tell our church all the time, it is not just the preacher's job. If you are a Christian, you have a ministry of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5, if anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation. The old is gone, the new has come. Everyone knows that part. But if you keep reading, it says you have a message of reconciliation and a ministry of

reconciliation. And that means if you're a new creation, you also have a ministry of reconciliation. And yeah, we're teaching that a lot here. So then let me ask you this. Apathy, business, introversion, my family taken care of. What do you do then to fight that excuse. You know, what are you doing as pastor shepherding these people at Flat Creek to say, no, we're going to go beyond those excuses.

Cory Thomas: Continue to continue to preach and teach. I try to gear my, see I teach, I preach on Sunday morning and then I teach Sunday night and Wednesday night and I try to pick studies that we can do that will motivate them to not only live lives that are more pleasing to the Lord, but do fulfill the Great Commission. And, and I try to remind them and I do it through the preaching and through teaching and even in all of the outreach efforts that we do. Listen, it's not about you being proficient in being able to stand here and preach, just tell someone what God has done for you through salvation. He saved you, but where you've come from and what he's brought you through in your life. But it's a repetition. It's a continual, I don't want to say a battle, but it's just a continual, repetition of preaching and teaching. We must do the outreach. And again, and I don't know if this is part of Culture Christianity in the south. We have to reeducate people. What I said before, we've got to get outside the walls. The church is not just inside of the confines of our little box of the four walls that are sanctuary is in. We come here to be refueled. We come here to be encouraged and energized and to worship God. And then we get outside and take the cross to the world. And, and I think part of that is a mindset. I mean, it's maybe over the course of the last 40 years historically that churches in the southern, I think they have become country club churches to a degree.

Aaron Colyer: We have to battle that for sure. You know, you are not the first person who has talked about we have to get outside the walls. I think we're at about, six interviews and maybe four or five of those guys have already said we've got to get outside the walls. We can't expect our church to be gospel focused if we don't get outside the walls.

Cory Thomas: Yeah. Our church needs to mirror our community.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, absolutely. Okay. Well, then that leads me to my final question, when you think about specific stories of success, specific victories, what are some areas you want to give God the praise for during this season of, and it's a process up and down, but this season of revitalization. Are there specific things that you would say, man, when God changes the individual's heart or when God just started, we really turned the tide when we saw this happen because God was doing this. What, what would you praise God for in that moment?

Cory Thomas: Probably the fact that God brought in some visionary people and God changed the hearts of some people that were entrenched in the status quo of the church and he changed hearts and attitudes to be more vibrant and want to do things differently because they were tired of the status quo, always getting the same results. And it meant changing not only the culture of the church, but changing people's vision in how they saw things being done. That's probably the biggest success is the people that he's brought in. And the wave of change that he has brought about in

people's heart. And I'm talking about the elderly people in the church that I've got right now. Do you know the person that leads my technology part is a 70 year old lady.

Aaron Colyer:

Yeah, that's great.

Cory Thomas:

I mean, she's the one pushing me. We met on the phone Sunday afternoon. She's ready for a mobile church app. She's ready for Pushpay. We've got our Facebook, she's always wanting to enhance. And it was through a 70 year old woman's change in her heart and the way she looks at Church that God was able to bring about some of this.

Aaron Colyer:

That's good. I was going to ask you for a specific example. So other than this lady who's 70 years old when you were talking about individual changed hearts, what comes to mind?

Cory Thomas:

What you mean now? Explain.

Aaron Colyer:

Well, I mean an individual's, right? So, you say individual changed hearts. So. One is this lady who's totally changed her perception of what church is supposed to be. What's another one of those stories about an individual with a changed heart.

Cory Thomas:

Oh, our worship. Moving from, I mean, I'm trying to be careful here and be nice. A staunch traditional worship service to a contemporary blended worship service with a full band. That now instead of and I'm going back to my senior adults because you got to understand a lot of the times, especially where I am, the senior adults can be the inhibitor to cutting edge things in ministry. But instead they have been on board. I had a senior adult lady that came up to me, a month ago and they visited another church where they went back to just a piano traditional service. And she came back and she said, I never thought I would say this, but I'm thankful to God to be in the church that I am in, to be able to have a worship atmosphere that we have here.

Aaron Colyer:

Yeah, it's interesting to me there is that trend as I talked to these guys, that it's an older population of the church that is changing, that's helping the general culture of the church. I'm curious, you know, how that's going to play out in the rest of the interviews,

Cory Thomas:

Well had I not been able to have had God to have changed the hearts of my senior adult. I don't think we could've accomplished the spirit in the church, the outreach endeavors in the church and the vision to do things differently than we've ever done them before in the church. Had God not change the adults of that core group of senior citizens that had kind of, at one time our church was family owned and operated for follow ups.

Aaron Colyer:

Well, and I'm glad you mentioned that about God. God changing the hearts but then also the Spirit at work. Can you tell me about that? You know, of course you're preaching and you're casting vision, but, you're giving all the glory to God. You're not saying it's my vision. You're saying, God, God did the work here, so is there a sense of really tangible presence of God through the Holy Spirit among individuals, among corporate worship?

Cory Thomas: Yeah. And how long, how God reaffirms that. Here's the thing. Anytime someone comes in that is against a preacher or against the music, one thing that has been common that they have always spoken to me was, Pastor, your church has a Spirit, like no other. Guard it.

Aaron Colyer: Oh Wow. Even though they're against some of the things that are happening.

Cory Thomas: No, this is outsiders I'm talking about. They come in and see the space. Sometimes we don't, people don't that are among it. You have to have someone else with a fresh opinion to see it. And I know I can sense that as the pastor, you know, when God is moving in a powerful way spiritually in our church because I see it evidenced in the fruits of growth in people's lives, but when an outsider comes in and maybe they get just come to a worship service and they, they're able to sense it even in the warmth and the welcomeness that the people extend to people. I mean, God has really blessed me. I really believe that God has transitioned our church from just an old traditional country, Southern Baptist church into a true spirit of community and believers coming together and are welcoming of other people and want to manifest the Spirit in our church. Not be run by the pastor, not be run by the deacons, but a total manifestation of the Holy Spirit leading, guiding, and directing our church.

Aaron Colyer: Come on, man. Listen, that will get people excited right there. I have a good friend who says, he doesn't want people to come to their church because of the show, because of the music, because of the preaching, because of this or that. He wants people to come to church because they know that that's where God's presence is. That, if they can have that sense, it doesn't even matter what songs they sing, that God's presence is there and that's the most attractive thing.

Cory Thomas: Well, I tell them all the time in terms of my preaching, I tell them, you know, my wife reminds me all the time that God even spoke through a donkey. He can speak through me.

Aaron Colyer: Amen. Amen. Well, listen, I want to close out here. Do you have any other final questions about our project, our research, what we're doing. I'm going to spend some time praying for you, but give you a chance to . . .

Cory Thomas: I would like to be able to. I'm assuming that someone will let me know when it's published. I can read part of it.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, absolutely. You know, once it's published, it'll probably be in PDF format and we're doing it in stages. If, if I stay on schedule, I'll be graduating this December, so it'd be towards the end of the year, that you'd have that opportunity to, but I'll make, I'll make sure if you don't hear anything, just contact me and I'd love to get that in your hands. Absolutely.

Cory Thomas: That is great. I appreciate the opportunity for who you are allowing me to just to be a part of it.

Aaron Colyer: Well, the feeling's mutual. We wouldn't have the research without talking to these pastors all over the country. So thanks again. Let me pray for you and I'll be in touch. All right.

Aaron Colyer: Let's pray. Father, I appreciate just this conversation and getting to hear specifically what's going on at Flat Creek Baptist in Georgia. I pray for Pastor Cory and I pray, God, that you would continue to use him in a huge way. It's fun to hear him say, it's not about me it's about the glory of God. It's fun to hear him say, it's not about the things that we're doing on Sunday morning, it's about the Holy Spirit being manifested and people seeing that. So I could only expect that with that attitude that you would continue to pour out your blessing on him. I think of Psalm 67. David says, bless us. Make your face shine upon us that the nations might know you and so help them to receive your blessing, but also realize that they're blessed to be a blessing not only to churches in Georgia and down in the south, but to the ends of the earth where we have this gospel and we thank you. That is the power of salvation for those who believe to the Jew first and then to the Gentile. So let us always not be ashamed and always look for a reason to give a ready defense for the hope that we have within us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Brad Delaughter

- Aaron Colyer: We are starting the interview with Brad Delaughter of Satsuma Baptist Church. And Brad, just to confirm you are okay with this conversation being recorded.
- Brad Delaughter: Yes.
- Aaron Colyer: Okay, good. And then also for academic purposes, let me go ahead and read our ethics statement. If you read it when you took the survey, it's very similar. The only change is during the interview portion, we may be publishing some of the things said so listen towards the back half of this and make sure you're in agreement with it.
- Aaron Colyer: **Agreement to Participate:** The research in which you are about to participate is designed to determine the critical elements of your church's recent revitalization. This research is being conducted by a six-man research team pursuing doctoral degrees at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for purposes of understanding and encouraging these elements among other churches. In this research, you will be asked to describe your church's experiences. During the interview portion of the research, notes will be kept for your specific church revitalization, which may appear in the publication of the research. If you desire any of the information given to remain confidential, please inform the interviewer. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this Interview, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.
- Aaron Colyer: Any questions there, Brad?
- Brad Delaughter: Nope. No, no.
- Aaron Colyer: Okay. Well, let me, let me tell you a little bit of what we've found so far in the survey. We've sent out to 500 churches that have met our metrics. We've had about 130 people take the survey. I am specifically looking at the area of evangelism, so I want to see the connection of evangelistic fervor and church revitalization.
- Aaron Colyer: So, that's my bent man. I'll just be honest with you. I thought that we're going to find everyone writing that as the highest importance, but out of our six topics and really six guys of evangelism leadership, preaching, prayer, missions, discipleship, It's been pretty even throughout the board. And so that, that's been surprising to me. Now obviously all of those elements are important. But I thought for sure evangelism was just going to win the day. The reason I'm interviewing you is I think you would tend to agree. Even in the survey you said that you've seen an increase of your church membership, engaging in gospel conversations and you said out of those six topics, what has received the greatest amount of membership acceptance, and you said evangelism. And so I want to hear specifically those stories just for structure's sake.
- Aaron Colyer: I want to let you know, I've got five primary questions that I'll be asking and my aim is to keep this at a half an hour. So in those five questions I

may slow down and probe a bit, hey given example there. But if I need to rush it or speed it up then, then I'll say, hey, let's get to the next question. So we get all five answered and we have a consistent interview among the 10 to 15 pastors I'm interviewing. So I want to respect your time, but I also want to let you know where we're headed. Any questions about our research so far?

Brad Delaughter: No, I've never been published.

Aaron Colyer: Well then make sure you say that at the end and you shoot me an email and I'll be happy to forward to you when I get published.

Brad Delaughter: Is this a project for school or just going into each of your dissertation or projects?

Aaron Colyer: Yes, to both. Right. So, so it started with our dissertation. We were Ed.D. students and so that's an Ed doctorate in Christian leadership. But it's because of our connection to the school that we were really able to pull all the annual report data from Lifeway. I mean that's a huge endeavor and I mean if I was just doing one Ed.D. project, they probably wouldn't let me do that. But because it's this kind of bigger project and we got six guys on a research team trying to do some cooperation. And ultimately, I mean if I'm really honest, our supervisor, Dr Michael Wilder, will likely be the one publishing a book out of this thing. It's going to be up to him what involvement he wants us to have individually, whether it's just a thank you to this research team or if we get to write a chapter, that'll be his decision.

Brad Delaughter: But I'd be really interested to see across the board, I don't know if y'all or delineate the different size churches and location areas, regions that those churches are in cities. Love to see you know, what they look like across context and obviously geographically area in different church sizes.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. I think that would be a part of the greater big picture research that Dr Wilder wants to protect until he publishes, but I will tell you that churches I interview and in regards to the topic of evangelism, all that's going to come out my dissertation, so on the short term, hopefully you can have that in next the few months. In the long term, be patient for a book to come up. Yeah, that's. I mean that's what I can say about that. Hey listen, let me ask you this specifically about Satsuma Baptist. Give me kind of the broad brush stroke picture, how long you've been there, what you've seen change, and then towards the end of your answer, really tailor make that to talk about what was done to develop a culture of evangelism among the church membership during this revitalization process.

Brad Delaughter: Okay. Well, one, I still think we're in the revitalization process we haven't arrived. I personally think we are about midway through where we need to be now. We're on a good track. I think we're moving towards a more healthy where we need to be. I think we are about 50 percent to go. So I've been here 7 years. November 1st will be seven years. I actually came from a background. I started there as a prison chaplain at Angola prison. The nation's largest prison and so I had no pastoral experience at all prior to coming here.

Brad Delaughter: So I founded a church at Angola prison for people that live there, but outside of that, no pastoral experience. So I got here, the church we ran about 70 on Sunday, something like that. No, the people were lovely. They were lovely people, wasn't (*inaudible*) with the people, there wasn't a whole lot of sin in the church, there was no overt antagonism in the church. None of those things. They were just four walls concentrated. I just concentrated on just taking care of membership. And that was about it. They didn't do any outreach or anything like that. And so I knew I needed help.

Brad Delaughter: So, I started the DEdMin program in church growth in Churchill's at New Orleans seminary and three of my classes were focused on church revitalization. Church growth (*inaudible*) and those were one of the best classes I've ever taken in all. Honestly. We're not even halfway through my PhD right now. And those three classes are still most beneficial. And so, it's just taken a lot of those principles I learned and just slowly but surely just applying them in a church, just one at a time, not necessarily so much all at one time. So now I say that right now I'm kind of doing all at once.

Brad Delaughter: When we started doing is just immediate outreach out in the community. So, everyone I say outreach and I want to be very clear because we did do outreach on the ground and we would do backpack drives and things like that and invite people here to serve that way. We will also get out and go serve people, whether, you know, it was in the park doing stuff in the park, water bottles, the ministry to the homeless, all that stuff. Every bit of it was 100 percent was caked in sharing the gospel with every person we meet in some way, shape or form. Whether it's telling a personal testimony, giving a track, whether it's sharing Jesus without fear with a Bible. You know, just the one on one conversation, personal evangelism. Every person. The idea was that all we had contact with, we would leave them some way with the gospel.

Brad Delaughter: Everything we've ever done is that. We have that backpack drives here. We do help the community. I will bet that we had people show up here just few weeks ago, at the beginning of August. Every single person, every single person got the gospel shared with them personally, got a gospel track in the backpack on a (*inaudible*) with the gospel, you know, every time. And so everything we're doing is new and towards that and it's just slowly but surely adding those types of things to build a culture of we're going to be out of these walls. It's not just about here. And so I intentionally started corporately that we would do these things together as a church, over and over and over and over to be able to sense that it's natural to do it. So we've done it corporately and over the past year we've been shifting to, maybe 18 months, and then shifting to take this corporate thing and now they'll put it at your jobs to take it into the supermarket. They'll take it into the doctor's offices, you know, go take it to the family meals that you have on Friday nights. And so that's kind of where, where we've been moving in a lot of programming and events and training has been geared directly towards that.

Brad Delaughter: And so when I say training, like we've done special Sunday school classes just for evangelism, whether it's how to write your personal testimony and share it, and we spent eight weeks on doing that. We've used 3 Life Circles, you know, how to have a gospel conversation with

the 3 Life Circles spending six weeks on that. I've even taught that from the pulpit, told them from the pulpit on how to share your testimony, how to have a gospel conversation using 3 Life Circles, corporate things, but also small groups to train as well.

- Aaron Colyer: I love it man. So that, that leads me right into the second question. What specific strategies and methods did you equip your church with? So tools. You talk about 3 Circles. *Sharing Jesus Without Fear*, Sunday school classes for personal testimony.
- Brad Delaughter: So over the course of the seven years, oh, probably every single year I have at least one sermon that is geared directly towards how to share your personal testimony. Personal evangelism is in almost every sermon I preach every single sermon I do the shotgun approach of we're called to go share the gospel. In that I've used various things throughout the years of whether it's teaching them *Sharing Jesus Without Fear*, the Net. Louisiana Baptist has a really good one.
- Brad Delaughter: WhatIvaluemost.com. It's really awesome. It's a where you put your testimony online and you have a little card that says This s whatIvaluemost.com on the backside of it it has a little gospel presentation, but also has a spot (*inaudible*) to go to this time. Then you can hand that out to anybody. You don't have time to share your testimony. Then they could click on that link anytime, put your name in the keyword and your testimony pops up. They can read it anytime they want. And so I love that. We've done that.
- Brad Delaughter: We did the 3 Circles, sharing your personal testimony as well. And we've taught, we have evangelism training, at least small group training at least once a year, sometimes twice, but at least once a year. And so this past January, we had the whole month of January. Every single service was geared towards personal. I had my associate pastor preach on it. I had an evangelist come into preach on it and I got the executive director come and preach on personal evangelism. So the third week in January we put it, started putting in bulletins, a evangelism explosion cards.
- Brad Delaughter: And so what that is it's just a card that goes into the bulletin. It says, I've been obedient in sharing the gospel this week by . . . And you could check sharing the track, sharing the gospel presentation, given out a Bible or sharing my personal testimony and at the bottom of told (*inaudible*). At the front of the church as they walk out we've got tracks. I've got Bibles, I've got pamphlets, I've got door hanger cards. Every resource they need to pick up and grab on their way out. And so, all of that is geared toward them doing it in their individual lives. And so our goal for the year was \$1,200 for the year by December 31st and right now, I have 1200 right now. Oh, we just finished calculating them up last week. So as of September 2nd, we have like 1,208 gospel contacts for the year.
- Aaron Colyer: I absolutely love it, man. We did something similar. I didn't know about that EE card. So that's the Evangelism Explosion. That old textbook they have these response cards is preprinted or what?
- Brad Delaughter: No, I just googled the name Evangelism Explosion. I did the Evangelism

Explosion for the year. That's our thing. I didn't want to kind of (*inaudible*) the book, but the check list, I did that myself. And so we can be accountability. You don't put your name on it. Some of the stories I get are just amazing.

Aaron Colyer: 1200. What's y'all's average worship attendance right now?

Brad Delaughter: Average worship attendance is right about 98. Which is small, but it's pretty good percent growth from when I got here.

Aaron Colyer: That's why. That's why you're on our metrics. But when you talk about 100 people, having 1200 gospel conversations, they need to each, each average worship attender needs once a month. I mean, that's a good stat. I love it Bro. I love it.

Brad Delaughter: Oh, it's really interesting because, we get kids doing it. Going to school sharing then giving the track out. I have my little girl, she's eight and she's inviting teachers to church and praying. I've got this one lady, she's just a real frail old lady and she's like late eighties and she's just a super shy lady and so what she does, but she's standing in line at Walmart she slips track in people's purses in front of her in the line.

Aaron Colyer: I love it, man. I love. I love hearing that. For the sake of time, I want to move on. This is kind of a loaded question because it assumes that you're doing it, but how do you and others in your leadership team develop a system of celebrating victories when it comes to having evangelism as a priority in your church membership?

Brad Delaughter: Maybe give a little context. So what we did for our leadership for my weekends and my staff, oh, we kind of have a deacon elder elders here because a lot of them kind of overflow into teachers and other leadership roles. It's kind of like that, but every one of them, I feel that every one of them it's our job is to share the gospel. If we don't do it. They're not going to do. You have to be able to share the gospel testimony. So I actually get them when we have staff meetings and deacon's meetings, we go over practicing our testimony. I'll just pick one random person to the share their testimony. Right now, you know on the spot. Because if you can't share it to us you can't share right here with this group of people on this spot then you can't share it to the waitress at the restaurant in (*inaudible*), you know, and so we do that.

Brad Delaughter: Then we also, I'm very big on accountability of I hey who did you share the gospel with this week. Just asking point blank. Can you share the gospel with somebody so you can tell me about it on Sunday so we can celebrate this? We go to the Nursing Home Ministry twice a month. One of our church members is that home, she's 95 years old and she just led her nurse that takes care of her at night. Just led her to the Lord last night.

Brad Delaughter: We build on that because we have accountability for everybody. And one of the ways we do that, every week from the pulpit during our welcome, I'm sharing stories of what I'm doing because I don't think it's right if I'm telling them to do it, but they don't know that I'm doing it. Other people share with me throughout the week or I'll get someone to come up from

the congregation. Hey Brian, who's our sound set guy? You know, he, he did the 3 Circles with a waitress last week. Brian, come tell us about that. You know, just different things like. Not every service, do I get someone from the audience or the congregation, but once a month, hey, this is what this person is doing. This is how God's working in their life. This is what they're doing to share the gospel.

Aaron Colyer: That's a consistent theme, Bro. That's why I have that question is because every person that I'm talking to says we have people share testimonies, video testimonies, a big once a quarter of prayer and praise, and we do like two-hour testimony video of who you're discipling, who you are sharing the gospel with. That's so interesting to me that we're finding every one of these churches that's experiencing revitalization and especially in the area of evangelism, people are talking. I think there's a connection between, you know, people expect you, Brad, Pastor Brad has to share the gospel with that waitress. That's his job. He gets paid to be a professional evangelist, blah, blah blah.

Aaron Colyer: But when homeboy that's had his friend, you know, he's retired 65, 75 and his friend at church is his best friend for 30 years and he's up there saying, hey, I haven't shared the gospel in 30 years. I've invited people to share to who have said I'll pray for you, but I've not shared the gospel and said, do you want to repent and believe? Do you understand that there's only two ways. You're either going to stay on the wide road that leads to destruction or you're going to be on the narrow road that leads to eternity and Jesus died on the cross and rose from the grave that you might be on the narrow road. And he gets up and he says, this is how my gospel conversation went. Then his best friend who probably has the same story of I haven't shared the gospel in 30 years, either, can't use the excuse that he hasn't done that because he's not a pastor and he's not a Green Beret Christian and he's not an evangelist. Because his best friend is up there on the platform saying this is what God did.

Brad Delaughter: Absolutely, we do it. Every, event we do our outreach, we intentionally include aspects for every age group from a five year old to 85 year old to get involved in some way. Like we went did an outreach in an apartment complex. We got loaves of bread and put those cheesy Jesus says I'm the bread of life sticker on it. We put the church information on it and knock on the door just to say, hey, we're here. We'd like to tell you about Jesus, can we pray for you? But if they weren't home, we put a door hanger on their letting them know about Jesus that had a track on it. And a lot of older people couldn't participate, couldn't go out into the apartment complexes. So we gave them all those door hangers and in there Sunday school classes, two weeks prior, let them fill it out and own that. So they couldn't go out of this space, but they participate in evangelism, by helping us do that. Even though they're homebound and the only time they get to go out is to come to church or go to their doctor. They get to do that. In some way, include them in the ministry of the church.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, that's so good. You want to be a multigenerational church. And someone says, well, I'm on a walker. How can I go to a door to door? Well, you can pray and fill out these cards that give people our church information and then pray that we get to share the gospel when we go out on Saturday.

Brad Delaughter: We went to the park at Easter. We took a whole bunch of people to the park to go share the gospel. We gave out snow cones. I had 500 tracks and I gave him to from a six year old to a 13 year old to a 20 year old, a 30 year old, 40 year old and a 60 old. I gave them about 500 tracks between them. I said, don't come back until they're all handed out to somebody. And they all came back about an hour and a half later. They all handed out their tracks. I wanted the eight year old looking for other eight year olds. The 13 year old, he's going to look for the 13 year olds or 60 old is looking for 60 year olds. So, it was across the spectrum. Let's do it, you know.

Aaron Colyer: I love hearing these stories. All right, this is going to turn it to potentially the negative just for a minute. This is my fourth question. So seven years revitalization. The church is growing. The culture is changing. People are sharing the gospel. You've got to two very real negative aspects. People in their sin nature can get uncomfortable and say, I'm not doing that. Or spiritual warfare, right? The kingdom is growing and Satan's like, we got to start attacking. So have there been any roadblocks along the way as this priority has been shifting in your church? Have you seen roadblocks and, and if so, what were they specifically? And then how did you push past them and have victory because Jesus already gives us the victory.

Brad Delaughter: Just the general gist. Anytime you have any change of programming or style people buck. That's just a natural thing. So like we were just recently changed the worship services to be a blended service. And people got upset about. We didn't like it. So for a solid year prior to this, I've been sprinkling in contemporary music once a month during the specials. So when we started, it wasn't like such a shocker to the older generation. And the reason what we did it is you have people jump on the wagon, as soon as that happens. You'll have some people a light let it go around you a couple of times before they jump on it. You have some people that are complacent and just don't care either way anyhow. So go throw rocks no matter what wagon. So you know, you've got those four types of people in the church. And so what we did. . . If singing this type of music, if simply just opening the church to this type of music will help get your grandson and granddaughter in church would you be willing to do it? That was how we got the acceptance on that.

Brad Delaughter: And the second thing, simultaneously, in the past two years, we had been moving to more of a family equipping model in our programming and in how we're addressing just in church ministries. And that's a big shift, you know, because you're actually having to do stuff with other generations where you didn't have to before. We're expecting the kids in youth church to get involved instead of one camp Sunday a month. And that takes patience. It takes change. What we're doing here, is help with moms. we're not going to see results in the next 30 years. It's going to be five, 10, 15, 20 years down the road. I said, but the idea is (*inaudible*) Talk to different groups at different times, you know, build these little coalitions as we go.

Brad Delaughter: So, we had a group of guys, I looked up to Mr. Mike, you're raising your grandson because your son and daughter-in-law are crackheads. I said you can't do that on your own. I said, wouldn't you love help doing that? He said I see you. I said, that's why we're changing up the way we do some of these things. I said, so the idea is that Hunter is going to be able

to get to know a Brother Don better than he ever would because you know because once a month we're having family potluck. And we're having the adults and youth and kids at a table. They're studying the Bible together and praying together and they're praying for his mama and his daddy and so in five years when he has several problems. Guess what? He's not going to call his daddy the crackhead and he probably won't talk to you because your grandpa and you got to be a (*inaudible*) parent, but he can call Brother Donald with it.

Brad Delaughter: Guess what about little Mary? You know, she's 13 now and her boyfriend's pressuring her to have sex. If she can't talk to mom about that. But guess who she can talk to? She told Miss Debbie because Miss Debbie's been praying for and asked her every week for the past five years how her life's been. What can she do to help her? She took her shopping and she's talked to her about other things. So guess what? She's built a relationship. And so in five years, in 10 years, 15 years, when these kids graduate high school, they're not going to leave because we are their family because we're no different than family. They have not just been in a building or (*inaudible*) building where we only see them at social services, but they are part of the church now. And we're using that, coupling with the personal evangelism, building that into everything we do. To feel that in house system where we're literally trying to plant and grow our own disciples.

Aaron Colyer: I want to tell you, I've interviewed like nine guys in the last two weeks. Your pastor's heart is shining through this. I just want to tell you how much I appreciate that. I mean those pieces of those conversations and your ability to shepherd individual people with God's heart and God's vision for them, right? So be obeying the Lord and looking for opportunities to stir one another up and love good works and man, it's just an encouragement to hear that. So I would just say keep it up. Let me, let me close with these thoughts. What specific victories or stories of success would you want to praise God for in this revitalization process? And specifically when you think about people getting it for fulfilling the Great Commission people getting it for evangelism, what kind of success stories would you want to say, man, praise God for this. Praise God for that. I want to make sure that this specific story is, is added into this interview. What would you say?

Brad Delaughter: I just told you about that 95-year-old lady and the homebound members of our church, sharing the gospel with her nurse and leading her to Christ last night. That's got to be top of the list. I just heard that just two hours ago. That was phenomenal. I, I'll tell you one, I don't know how much success but forma traditional style of church for this to happen. Just last week, we were sitting there talking. We've been growing in our attendance and so we've been running probably about 110 for about the past three months. It won't take, but about honestly, about five more percent before we're hitting at 85 percent mark.

Brad Delaughter: And can I just simply mention that to the (*inaudible*) of our Wednesday nights. Wednesday nights have probably grown by 30, 40 percent in the past three years of attendance, adults and youth. And so I just mentioned that and the chairman of deacons, you know, he's a great humble man, but he just never has changed at all. He said, well, I guess that means we're going to have to have a second worship service, huh? I almost fell

out my chair backwards. I asked him, well, yes we can. And so that is a success story.

Brad Delaughter: So another success, that was two years ago, I was trying to get some home small groups going because we just built 3000 square foot for new Sunday School space. We're already running out of space. I filled all those rooms for Sunday school. And so this guy who's two years ago told me small groups were stupid and would never work two weeks ago, approached me at the church one Wednesday night and said, God really put on my heart to start a small group in my house. Can you help me? Yes we can. And so he started a small group and I got another guy started the small group for young adults, so it's in two weeks as well. So I'm really, really proud of those two things.

Brad Delaughter: I think overall successful is the church, it is important, they value missions and ministry. And when we say missions and ministry, we mean meeting all the church property and doing stuff and meeting needs all with the gospel. I'm really big on it because when I think about doing ministry or think about doing mission, to me it's not true biblical mission and ministry if the gospel is not front and center in all those things we do.

Brad Delaughter: When I use those words, it's not just giving somebody a hamburger because they were hungry, it's giving someone a hamburger, but spending 10 minutes to get to know them, to share the gospel or somehow lead the gospel available to them when I leave. So we have seen exponential growth in people participating in these events. I mean from two people to 30 people.

Brad Delaughter: Oh, and another thing the church voted on. So we give to programs when we give 14 percent off top to the CoOp program automatically on top. And so we voted to give an extra five percent that we developed our own missions and ministry team at the church. Their job would be to simply find ways to administer ministry outside the Church to get the gospel shared in as many situations as we can. The church has voted to take five percent of our budget and has increased it's giving two percent to help meet that five percent budget. Everybody, increasingly giving two percent to fund that, so we can have our own disaster relief trailer and our own (*inaudible*) for a trailer, and other things, but also to fund it throughout the year to help the church equip us to go do ministry and get people out in the communities. And not just that, but also let's say Emily wants to have a ministry to, this is a real thing, because she had a miscarriage and she knew what it was like to go through that. She has a ministry to which she can give a stuffed animal, to any woman at the hospital who had a miscarriage, with a Bible and Biblical literature for individuals having miscarriages. She come to us. She had that mission. So we said, you know what, we like that. We want to sponsor that. Here's \$500. Go make that happen. And you come back and tell us about that. And you tell the church about what we're doing through that ministry. Just simple stuff like that.

Aaron Colyer: I love it. I love it, man. I absolutely love that. I don't, I don't really have anything else to say other than you're a huge encouragement. I don't live anywhere close to Louisiana, but if I did, I'd want to come down and buy

your lunch and just pick your brain and being encouragement to each other. Brother, I, I'm very encouraged by this conversation.

- Brad Delaughter: I've learned. It takes, (*inaudible*) from everything I've read, and experience now. Oh, we have to increase pastoral tenure. If we want revitalization to happen.
- Aaron Colyer: That is in my dissertation. Preach, pray, love and stay. Mark Dever, man.
- Brad Delaughter: It cannot. It will not happen for years. It's not you haven't been there for three years, which is average in the state now. You know, I think it increased 18 months to 36 months. You haven't been there long enough. You haven't buried enough people in three years to get clout, if I can say that.
- Aaron Colyer: Yeah, I agree. I agree wholeheartedly. I've been here in New Mexico for going on five years and just recently I feel like man, people's hearts are getting softened and they're seeing that happen there. They're starting to have an affection for their pastoral team. We're walking through change and they're there. They're ready to do it because they've seen. What I'm doing is based off biblical principles. I'm not trying to lead us down the wrong road. And so you're right about pastoral tenure for sure.
- Aaron Colyer: Listen, just in an effort to not keep this going too long, let me pray for you brother. And I, I want to pray specifically Psalm 67 over you. This psalm David is begging God for blessing. Bless us. Be gracious to us. Make your face shine upon us. And then the rest of the psalm talks about so that the nations might know you. So that the people's might praise you so that the ends of the earth would come to fear your name.
- Aaron Colyer: What's happening there in Louisiana seems like God is just pouring out blessing. And I think you already know this. He's pouring out blessing so that you might be a blessing outside the walls of your church. So, you might get the gospel out. So that the nations might praise God and so receive that blessing. And then make sure you're giving it away and giving it away and giving it away. It seems like exactly what you're doing. So let me pray for you in that regard. I'll shut off the recording and then I'll say goodbye to you.
- Aaron Colyer: Father. Thank you for Pastor Brad. Thank you for Satsuma Baptist Church. Thank you for what's going on in Louisiana. Lord is exciting to know just the growth, but beyond that, we don't want to just play church and we don't want to just have a, a successful church growth plan.
- Aaron Colyer: We want to see the gospel go out and we want to see your glory be known and your name be made famous and lost people come to a saving knowledge of Christ and you take people out of the domain of darkness and transfer them into your marvelous light. So make Satsuma Baptist a place where people are eager to proclaim the excellencies of God who called us out of darkness and into light. Make them, people who are eager to give ready defense for the hope that they have of the gospel. Give them a sense of that Romans 1:16 and are unashamed of the gospel for the power of salvation, of those who believes to the Jew first into the gentile. I just asked for Pastor Brad, that you sustain him. Give him

strength and energy and passion. Give him perseverance. Thank you for that vision of a long tenure in staying and making a difference and loving people while shepherding people well. Continue to give them insight to fulfill 1 Peter 5 to shepherd the flock among him. These one on one conversations that he's having to just help people click why he's making some of the decisions he's making. Well, they're just thank you for him personally and for his ministry and for the encouragement he is to me and I pray, God, that you would only use this local bride of Christ in massive ways. That the Kingdom of Christ might march forward. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Hey, thank you. Thank you. Thank you again. Let me stop this recording and then we can have any personal remarks afterwards.

Scott Flynt

- Aaron Colyer: Okay, on with Scott Flynt from Mississippi. Pastor Scott, just to confirm one more time is it okay to be recording this interview?
- Scott Flynt: Yes it is.
- Aaron Colyer: All right. Let me read our ethics statement. It's important that we get this out of the way. I'm really just looking for your affirmation on your consent to use the information you give. And so, let me read it.
- Aaron Colyer: **Agreement to Participate:** The research in which you are about to participate is designed to determine the critical elements of your church's recent revitalization. This research is being conducted by a six-man research team pursuing doctoral degrees at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for purposes of understanding and encouraging these elements among other churches. In this research, you will be asked to describe your church's experiences. During the interview portion of the research, notes will be kept for your specific church revitalization, which may appear in the publication of the research. If you desire any of the information given to remain confidential, please inform the interviewer. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this Interview, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.
- Scott Flynt: That's perfectly okay.
- Aaron Colyer: Well I appreciate you doing it. Let me just tell you one more time, for the record, thank you for getting back and thank you for participating in this interview. The reason you were selected was from that survey that we sent out, the church revitalization survey, on it you marked evangelism as highly important. Then later in the evangelism questions about are members prepared to share the gospel, you said strongly agree. Are they engaging often in gospel conversations you said agree. Then in regards to training you're training once a month and actually practicing, which I think is so important. So, my emphasis in the church revitalization research is the connection to church revitalization and evangelism. So, that's why you're selected to work with me. And I just, again, I appreciate you being willing to do this.
- Aaron Colyer: So there's five primary questions that I'm going to ask and if we're slowing down, I may push you forward. It's important to make sure all those questions are asked in every interview. Then if I'm wanting to probe a little deeper, I may say, tell me more about that. That's the structure and my goal is to get you off the phone in about half an hour, so you can go to your (*inaudible*) and activities.
- Aaron Colyer: First, give me some more context. How long you've been there at Fellowship Baptist. Your pastoral tenure there, but then your overall pastoral tenure, as well. How old are you? And then how are things going in this revitalization process? Your church was identified, saw a plateau or a dip and then you all have been rebounding away from that. Just generally talk about that a little bit and then we'll get into these

questions.

Scott Flynt: I'm 58 years old. When I came here, the church was, we had gone through a hurricane back in 2005 and it was about seven years later that I came here. Six years later, the building needed some major renovation. We actually tore down our old sanctuary building. We have built a new one, modernized it a little bit. During that particular time we had to move out it. The old building was condemned and we had to get out. Taylorsville is a small town of 1500 people. Not a lot of reason to come to Taylorsville. We're about 40 miles north of Hattiesburg, Mississippi. If you get a map out you can find us on the map. Not a lot of industry, in fact, there's only one paper mill here, a pulp wood type place. The power company has a big substation here and also the main office for Southern Pine. But there's not a lot of reasons for people to come to Taylorsville.

Scott Flynt: The ones who graduate high school from the local school, they typically leave and they don't come back. So, it's really hard for a church in this environment to see growth. And during that time we met in our Fellowship Hall for a year and a half while we were going through the rebuilding. There are some legalities. It was an insurance claim there was damage in the hurricane, Hurricane Katrina. It took a while to get everything in order. We met in our Fellowship Hall and during that time we actually saw some growth. Yeah, meeting in the Fellowship Hall. That was quite exciting. We, on Sunday evenings after church, would convert the Fellowship Hall back into a Fellowship Hall so we could have our activities in there after Wednesday night supper. After that we would convert it back into a Sunday worship activity place. We put a piano, an organ, set up a little choir loft. That was really exciting during that time.

Scott Flynt: We got into the new building. We've seen a lot of people come back into the church. Former members or members that had just quit coming to church for whatever reason. During that time, my goal has always been outreach evangelism, sharing the gospel.

Scott Flynt: In the last year, year and a half, several of our church members have started riding motorcycles with an outfit called Hellfighters, located in Laurel, Mississippi, which is about 15 miles from here. That's the nondenominational motorcycle outreach. They also have a recovery center and our Church financially supports that. I go there on Monday nights and help with the Bible study for men.

Scott Flynt: I'm just saying that to say this, that has transformed, our involvement with it, has transformed a number of people in our church wanting to reach out more. In the last year we have talked about starting our own motorcycle ministry. A lot of people ride motorcycles around here. We've got good weather year round for that. So, we started with what we call the Faith Riders, a motorcycle ministry based just outside of Jacksonville, Florida. We commissioned a chapter back in July. We had been busy on a monthly basis even before that having . . . how to share your testimony, how to reach out to people. The motorcycle ministry has actually drawn even more people into that and we meet once a month for a training during our monthly meeting.

Scott Flynt: And then also we have just monthly, like I said, with Taylorsville being a small community, you don't have to visit, go out and look for new people every week to get everybody covered. You can just about do that in a week. We're going in once a month on the third Tuesday of each month and we have about 10, 12, maybe 13, 14 people show up to go out and visit. We visit church members and prospects in the community. I get information from our Baptist Convention Board, the demographics around our area, and we just concentrate within about a mile and a half, two miles of where our church is. We go to see people, Church members naturally, that need to be visited, but also non-church goers in that area, because we can do that. That's pretty good for what we do. But we keep teaching people in our church to see the importance of that.

Scott Flynt: And also they're learning. I don't believe Pastor, and I am going to tone it down just a little bit, but I don't think anybody in this church, up until about four months ago, had really shared their testimony outside of the church itself. And I say that regrettably, but I believe that's the actual truth. But we have done a lot of sharing since school got out, back in May, over here. We have gone out and we have shared the gospel. Even this Friday, we're going over to the high school, the local high school, feeding the football team their pregame meal and sharing the gospel with the football team.

Aaron Colyer: I get the privilege of having interviewed these pastors. You're my 13th interview. Guys all over the country, all of them have experienced revitalization in their churches and all of them have indicated evangelism as a priority. Everyone has a story like that, just God has caused a fresh fire in our church and it's fun. It's just, I get to be on the part of hearing that. I mean, of course there's an academic reason, but it's personally, it's fun to hear that,

Scott Flynt: We just went through our nominating committee process for our new church here and we saw people wanting to work in some classes and do some things like that and that was a first. People volunteering. If you need me, I'll do that. If you need me in the nursery, I'll be happy to do that. You know, those kinds of things.

Scott Flynt: A lot of times after seven years, I've known a lot of my friends who have pastored after five, six, seven years, they started thinking, well, I'm fixing to go find me another church. They've pretty much had a gut full. I'm 58 years old. I'm in pretty good health. I like to do a lot of stuff. This could be my last church. It may not be. I don't know what God has in store for me. But if it is, things are going in a direction where a pastor would love to see it go. Now we've got 200 members. I've got a list we're going through to see if on that list of members who is still in the community who is still around and who's not. Some may have moved off. If there somewhere else we're going to ask them, to send a letter to them, and go through that process of sort of cleaning up our church roles so we know who is and who's not in the area. The church has never done that before.

Scott Flynt: I'm a little bit of a renegade or rebel in doing things. I don't mind taking chances and doing things differently and trying new things to get people. One of the next things that we're going to do, and I don't know if this might help you in another question, but we're going to change

implementing some differences in our worship service, in our worship style. We're getting a lot of younger people coming into our church. I think we need to address that. It is not going to be well received by a lot of people, because we are an old church, 148 years old. We were talking about that Sunday, but there's a way to get through that moving slowly and diligently with it but not giving up. I think we can cross that bridge and see even greater growth in our church.

Aaron Colyer: One thing I missed, how many total years of ministry experience do you have?

Scott Flynt: Oh, 12.

Aaron Colyer: 12 years. That's one of the things that I'm finding is a lot of the themes that are coming out of these interviews is God's been doing this in our church. It's consistent whether you've been in ministry for 30 years or some guys have only been in ministry for five years and that says something about the research we're doing. So, you pretty much answered my first question, what was being done to develop a culture of evangelism? And you talked about the outreach. You talked about that, the motorcycle riders, people sharing their testimony going out on Tuesday nights. You talked about some people for the first time in the last four months have been sharing their testimonies. All of those things are amazing. So let me ask you the second question. Were there specific strategies and methods for training members and what tools are you using right now to share the gospel?

Scott Flynt: As far as training? Of course, you can find all kinds of stuff from Lifeway. Before we started the Faith Riders ministry, motorcycle ministry, and you don't want to be a motorcycle rider to be a part of Faith Riders, that's the neat thing about it. For the last year, year and a half, I have been looking at it their plan, their mission. They have training tools, how to share your testimony, how to witness to people. We use that. They've got videos and we use that in our monthly training, where you can share your testimony in three minutes and not have to bog somebody down for a half hour or an hour like you've got to preach to them, you know?

Aaron Colyer: That's good. If I was to come to you right now as a church member and I've not seen those videos and say, Pastor Scott, there's a guy at work, I've been trying to talk to about Jesus and I'm having a hard time knowing what to say. What tools would you put in my hand aside from those videos? If you just said, here's something, here's a way I would engage him.

Scott Flynt: Well first off, that three minute testimony that we use, the first 45 seconds is just tell what your life was like before Jesus Christ came into your life. You don't have to tell a big, big story or anything like that. The next 45 seconds tell what it was like when Jesus was dealing with you. The Holy Spirit was convicting you of your lostness and your need for salvation. Then the last minute, minute and a half, tell what life has been like since you trusted Jesus Christ. You don't have the perfect life, right? That faith, that trust that what Jesus Christ did for you on the cross and what he's doing for you now, getting eternity ready for you, your home in

heaven. I believe that to be the truth, and it's all about faith. That's why we call it Faith Riders.

Scott Flynt: We use that and we've got what we call hand-to-hand evangelism. We use our hand to go through, once they say, well, I want to know more about the plan of salvation. We teach our people the first thing is that God has always had a plan for everybody to go to heaven. We use our thumb on our hand to point to point to heaven. But there's one thing that prevents us from going to heaven and that's sin. There can be no sin in heaven. So the next thing I put three fingers up that represents Jesus in the middle. He's on the cross.

Scott Flynt: We put our other hand across these three fingers to make like a t. It says Jesus died on the cross and he hung with thieves. And you know, Jesus was perfect. There was no sin in him. There was none, he was not a criminal. One of those men on one side admitted that he was perfect, not a criminal and did not deserve to be there. The other man cursed him and we go through that. You know that picture, using our hands, to help us go through the plan of salvation. Then we use our ring finger and I'm pointing to my right ring finger, we make a commitment. We use that. You have to make a commitment to Jesus Christ. As little as our little finger is, when go to the mustard seed, the grain of a mustard seed and how small our faith can be to enter into that salvation experience with Jesus Christ.

Scott Flynt: We have to make that commitment by faith. And once we make that commitment to Jesus Christ, we hold our hand out and say we're in the palm of his hand. We can't jump out of it. We can't be pulled out. The wind can't blow us out of it or anything like that. We're secure in his hands once we make that commitment. Of course, that's all in the video. That is what we share in our testimonies is that hand-to-hand evangelism. We go through in all of our monthly meetings. We tell them, you don't have to have a bunch of Bible verses. You don't have to preach to them or anything like that. Always have a few, you know, like John 3:16, the most famous verse in the Bible, Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Romans 10:13, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved". Just a few verses that you have to have that you can help somebody experience the salvation of Jesus Christ. We try to keep it just as simple as possible.

Aaron Colyer: I love it. Let me ask you this next question. How do you and others in the church leadership team develop a system of celebrating victories when it comes to having evangelism as a priority?

Scott Flynt: Explain a little more.

Aaron Colyer: So, when I say celebrating victories, I'm saying opportunities for the church to hear positive examples of people sharing their faith. How is that done? Is it done regularly? Are there modes like testimony times or video times?

Scott Flynt: A lot of times on Sunday nights, we're relaxed on Sunday nights, during our discipleship time we will have those who may have gone out the week before or to whatever event they may have gone to, you know, the

visitation or a motorcycle event. And well here's an example. Back about four weeks ago we went up to what's called Little Sturgis. Not the big Sturgis in South Dakota, but little storage in Mississippi. We had a tent with some other Faith Riders. Friday and Saturday we shared our testimonies to 403 individuals. There was 50 that made a profession of faith right there on site or it may have been afterwards. Well, when we got the results the following week, the next Sunday on Sunday night, I had those from our church that went and shared their testimonies and about the experience. We were out there in the church sharing what we experienced that day. I guess it's a pep rally after the fact. That's what we do. We, we always, when we have our monthly visitation, we always share the results of that. Not necessarily the church members that we go see but also the non-church members and the response that we get from them. Whether they come to the church or not and visit, you know, that's later. We always come back and say what we experienced the night of the visitation or the outreach.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. I think sharing those successes is a way of building that culture that hey, this is expected not just of the Green Beret Christians, but this is all of us and we all have a part.

Scott Flynt: Right, exactly. I mean, if you don't tell people they don't know what it's like and chances are they may not ever feel the need to go and visit and join us on that Tuesday night. I've been thinking about actually moving or having a visitation on Sunday afternoons as well, at a different time during the month. A lot of times during the week we miss people. This little community are softball fanatics. They play softball 12 months a year. And I understand that. Nothing wrong with softball, it is a good thing. But actually thinking about moving the visitation outreach to Sunday afternoon. We have visitors on Sunday morning, go see him that very day. In a church that we used to be part of in Alabama years and years ago. That's the way they did it and I think we're going to try that ourselves in addition to our Tuesday night outreach.

Aaron Colyer: You talk a lot about Tuesday night outreach, Sunday night training. How important do you think it is for your church members to see you in action?

Scott Flynt: If you're going to talk it you better live it. I think it's paramount that they see me doing evangelism. I mean, I would do it by myself if nobody else would. I believe that is where you're going to see a church growth. I tell people earlier on Sundays when I preach a salvation message, it's not about joining this church. It is do you know Jesus Christ. We go out and plant the gospel. We plant the seed in people's lives weekly. I have that unique opportunity to even in what I do at school, what I teach and the way I teach and where I get to go each and every day while I'm at school. So, it's all about planting that seed and doing it everywhere you go.

Aaron Colyer: That's so good. Alright, so this next question might take a turn for, we've talked all about positive things, maybe some negative things. What roadblocks were there, if anything, when the congregation started experiencing a change in the priority of evangelism and the Great Commission?

Scott Flynt: Well, I don't know. I don't know enough about the Bible to witness.

Aaron Colyer: Oh sure, sure. Yeah. That excuse of I don't know enough.

Scott Flynt: Right. And then some people are I just can't go and get in front of somebody and do that. I just can't talk in front of you people you know. So, you do it every day.

Aaron Colyer: So, what are y'all doing right now to overcome those roadblocks?

Scott Flynt: We keep promoting the importance of evangelism. Don't, don't let anything . . . I'm going to share tonight for business meeting about Timothy's hot call. We're in the same boat. God has called us and don't let our fears or anything like our insecurities stop us from sharing the gospel throughout the world. And it's just a repetitive thing over and over. Yes, yes you can and being positive about it. That is a negative.

Scott Flynt: I can remember years ago my dad is a pastor. He's 87 years old still pastoring and I always use the excuse the reason I couldn't go and witness it because I didn't know enough like my dad did. It's not about what I know or my dad knows is what God wants me to do for him.

Scott Flynt: I just keep, you know, I'm the cheerleader. In the majority of my messages, not all, but the majority are about reaching because I believe we're at a point in our nation where that's the priority of reaching. Jonah and the whale and knowing the arc, all of that is extremely important. There's great lessons about salvation in those and the security in Jesus. But, you know, that rich man had everything on earth, but he didn't have Jesus. Lazarus and the prophets in that story in Luke 16. I can preach that three Sundays out of the month because of the importance. That's the way I feel and I'll share that with our church. And that we don't need to let our fears hold us back from going out into the community wherever we're at and the share the gospel.

Aaron Colyer: Absolutely. So this last question is just some specific stories of success that you want to praise God for either things generally that God is doing to sweep through the church or specific stories of people, if you need to change their names it's fine, where there's been a heart change or God's done things that you just want to give specific examples of what God's doing. What would you say there?

Scott Flynt: One thing that I see, and I won't have to use any names or anything, but, but we have people who have come around. They are saying, even as I said earlier about volunteering, to serve and to help in the nourish and do things like that. They are excited. They are participating in our outreach program. Seven years ago they would not do that. Then we have our third Tuesday of the month of visitation night and the door opens and in this individual walks in. And wow. You wonder, the only reason that person is here is because it's something that God has done in that person's life. To get up, go and share a testimony with somebody. It's not rocket science. It's really basic, really simple to being very positive about what each Christian has the ability to do that God has given them the strength and the power through the Holy Spirit to go out into the community.

Aaron Colyer: I'm so glad that you mentioned that about the Holy Spirit. That's another thing that a lot of guys are mentioning. You know, if there's going to be any heart change in the lives of our people, it's what the Holy Spirit is doing. And I think that's what pastors need to hear that are wanting to see revitalization. If that's true, then we've got to be on our knees asking God to move. Sure, we can do a lot of the right principles and trainings, but if the Holy Spirit's not moving in people's hearts then we're spinning our wheels. So, I'm the pastor that wants to see the same amount of emphasis given to prayer and seeking the Lord and asking for heart change as we are with training. And I think most guys see that. We just lose sight of it. So anything else you want to add, Pastor Scott?

Scott Flynt: Well, brother, if there's anything you need to ask me later, call me, text me. But like I say, what we're doing is not rocket science. Just sort of, say we have dumbed things down. We have simplified it, made it real, real easy to where there's no excuse not to.

Aaron Colyer: Remove all the excuses. I like that.

Scott Flynt: You know another thing, we're doing a lot of things, throughout all ages of our church. Here in a couple of weeks the youth are going to hear Tim Hawkins, down in Hattiesburg, the comedian. But we opened up to the adults and then they started asking, Hey, can you get me a ticket? Can you get me a ticket? We're doing things as a church. Having a fun night together. Spending time together like the New Testament Church did. We're going to say Tim Hawkins. We go to concerts? About every three months we'll go to The Newsboys or somebody. It's not just the kids that we take, we opened it up to the entire church. Whoever wants to go and it makes a big difference in the church.

Aaron Colyer: That sense of family, that sense of multi-generation. Listen, I know you've got to get to your Wednesday night things. Let me pray for you and I want to specifically pray Psalm 67 over you. This idea where David's asking and really begging for God's blessing. Make your face shine upon us. Be Gracious to us, bless us, O God, but never just for David and not just for our church in Roswell or yours there in Taylorsville. But, so that the nations might know you. So that the people might praise you. And this idea of God grant us your blessing that we might be a blessing to others in our community and our state and the ends of the world. So let me pray for you. I'll let you run. Okay.

Aaron Colyer: Father, I thank you for a conversation with Pastor Scott. I thank you Lord. Just for the things that are happening there at Fellowship Baptist. I pray for more and more and more of it. Let us praise you where we can praise you, but then don't let us slow down or get satisfied to the point of not pressing in as much. And honestly, Lord, I just ask unashamedly that you would pour your grace and your blessing and your face towards this church that they might bless others. Lord, thank you for Pastor Scott. Thank you for the things that he's saying about individual members. Heart change, the excitement. He is 58 years old, seven years in. Let's do seven more. Let's do more than seven more, to see this church changed. See the community change through the gospel. Go out to see lost people walking out of darkness and into your marvelous light. We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

Scott Flynt: Amen. Pastor Aaron, I appreciate that.

Aaron Colyer: Absolutely. Listen, thanks again. I'm going to stop this recording then we can just finish up, but I really appreciate you being a part of our research.

Paul Eckley

- Aaron Colyer: All right, well Paul Eckley, I just wanted to ask if it is okay that I record you, this conference call going to be recorded. Are you okay with that?
- Paul Eckley: Yes.
- Aaron Colyer: Alright. Sonship Baptist Fellowship in Bremerton, Washington.
- Paul Eckley: Oh No. Sonshine. S H I N E, S o n s h i n e.
- Aaron Colyer: Thank you. Sonshine Baptist Fellowship . That's actually correct in my notes. I was just speaking from memory, so I'm fine. Thank you for the correction, Sonshine. I also wanted to take an opportunity to read an ethics statement for the record. It's the same one that you read on the survey. The only change is listening towards the back half about the interview process. We're going to keep a little bit better notes.
- Aaron Colyer: **Agreement to Participate:** The research in which you are about to participate is designed to determine the critical elements of your church's recent revitalization. This research is being conducted by a six-man research team pursuing doctoral degrees at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for purposes of understanding and encouraging these elements among other churches. In this research, you will be asked to describe your church's experiences. During the interview portion of the research, notes will be kept for your specific church revitalization, which may appear in the publication of the research. If you desire any of the information given to remain confidential, please inform the interviewer. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this Interview, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.
- Aaron Colyer: Are you okay with this, Pastor Paul?
- Paul Eckley: Alright, well perfect.
- Aaron Colyer: Hey, before we get started, I just want to say again, thank you very much for your participation, for taking the survey. This is very valuable information for us. We're up to, over 100 pastors who have taken that survey. And, I also want to let you know that the course of this interview, I want to do my best to respect your time and keep it at 30 minutes. So I've got five primary questions that I'll be asking about, Sonshine and specifically what's happened there in the area of evangelism. So my focus is evangelism and church revitalization. And then as we speak, I may ask some probing questions. You're free to ask me any questions about things that I've learned in my process along the way and also may throw out some of the specific data that you gave in your survey response. So then, let me just ask you this, based on your survey, when it came to evangelism, you would agree that, people in your church are equipped and able to share the gospel. That is correct and that they're, active in sharing the gospel. And then, you said strongly agree when the activities of the church regularly engage in gospel conversations for the purpose of personal evangelism. So I love to hear that. The question

primarily is what was done in your church to develop this culture of evangelism among the membership?

Paul Eckley: Well, number one, lift up Jesus. Preach about him and him and his ministry and the mission of the church as a whole. To not necessarily I've been to CWP I've been to a Master Life. I've had all these things in the past that I went through for training and things. And they always have a format that you, go and follow mentally. And then you kind of bring the people in, whether it's Romans road or something. But I like to encourage the people to just remember that they need to tell the folks, that they interact with, what Christ has done for them in his sacrifice on the cross. So, anybody can share their own personal experience. And they're doing that and then that's leading them to deeper, conversations and finally sharing with them the gospel in terms of; have you accepted Christ; and do you want to do that; brings them to a place of salvation.

Aaron Colyer: So, I just wrote in my notes "run to the cross" and I use that language all the time. If we would just run to the cross, we would have plenty of opportunities to share the gospel. When you say, when you said lift up, Jesus, I thought I heard you say in all of your preaching, just lift up the name of Jesus, but you may have been talking about specific gospel conversations. Can you clarify on that?

Paul Eckley: Well, the Lord said, if I be lifted up, I'll draw all men unto myself. So I try to, yeah. In my preaching, I try to focus on Christ, not so much social issues, that type of thing. Just good old gospel preaching the Bible, the word of God, and that everybody can by the power of the Holy Spirit, speak what God has done for them. So when they are talking and engaged in conversation, wherever they might go, the Holy Spirit will lead them into a place of saying, hey, share the gospel or talk to them about, do they go to church or something to that effect. So just focus on the Lord and what he has done. Not so much on a lot of other things that, might ultimately be the goal of the person that's sharing. In other words, you want to start out by, a social conversation, just the kind of a get together acquaintance type thing, but then focus on the fact that the Holy Spirit at some point is going to say, okay, here's a door that's opened. And then also at some point he'll say, okay, that's far enough. You don't need to go any further with your conversation.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, absolutely. Is that idea of really listening to the leadings and urgings and the Holy Spirit is that something that your church membership was pretty familiar with before you came to Sonshine, or is that something that you've had an opportunity to emphasize? It's just from your ministry experience and really pressing into God's presence through the Spirit.

Paul Eckley: Yeah, so I've had to let them know that's how I believe that the Lord works in evangelism, so they didn't know that or some of them may have a little bit but, but just the, constantly remind them that God, the Spirit is going to be moving them to share their faith and be listening for that.

Aaron Colyer: Absolutely. Absolutely. And I would ask as a brother pastor, we're preaching through Acts here in Roswell and that's been a constant emphasis is her following the leadings of the Spirit. So what would you

say, to a church member that's scheduled a time, a lunch appointment or a coffee with you that said, Pastor Paul, I just, you talk about following the leadings of the Holy Spirit or pursuing closeness with the Spirit, but I don't know what I'm doing. What wisdom or what counsel would you give that person?

Paul Eckley: Well, I would give them this counsel that as they speak the word, they're going to be impressed in their mind by the Holy Spirit. Absolutely that. Okay. Now, insert something about the gospel. Something about your faith in Christ. So you'll be talking about just random things and then they'll say something about, maybe they experienced a close call or an accident or maybe, their grandmother's not feeling good or maybe they're struggling at their work or something. Then that could be a trigger from the Spirit and they'll know when to basically insert something that the Holy Spirit's going to tell them. Matter of fact, the scripture says, They shall turn to you for a testimony. Settle it in your heart not to meditate on what you'll say for I will give you words and wisdom, which all of your adversaries cannot gain, say or resist. In Luke, I believe.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, I'll be looking at up. Settle in your hearts.

Paul Eckley: Settle it in your heart not to meditate on what you'll say, for I will give you words and wisdom which all of your adversaries cannot gain, say or resist.

Aaron Colyer: Amen, brother.

Paul Eckley: Oh, it's good. Yeah, it's good. And he'll do it. I love it. I love that, 21, I believe it is. 13, 14 and 15. I believe it's in there somewhere.

Aaron Colyer: Twenty 13 through 15. Perfect. Yes. Perfect. Well thank you. I'm very encouraged already and we're just through the first question. So, hey man, here's another, were there specific strategies and you mentioned some trainings but, you said beyond that there were just more general things, but what strategies were used to train members in leading them to obey the Great Commission and have gospel conversations.

Paul Eckley: Simply knowing what the church is and encouraging them to realize that they are a part of the church, the church isn't the building, that type of thing. But the church isn't just something that somebody thought they would begin or start or it was a great idea, and that kind of kind of a thing, but the church, the bride of Christ, the individual that's a believer of Christ baptized and all, that person is just as important in the church as the next person. So I try to preach or teach the fact that every member of the church is vitally important in carrying out the plan of God during this period in which we live. And that the church is really, really important to know what the ecclesia of what that really is. And that's what helps me to encourage the people. It's to let them know they're a vital part of the church, of the living God. The pillar and the ground of the truth. Yeah. It's important because they're an active part of what, got asks of the churches he seats with. They're an active part of what's happening in the local assembly.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, absolutely.

- Paul Eckley: And participating in that, then collectively they can go and do missions, evangelism projects and different things like that.
- Aaron Colyer: So speaking about identity, who you are as a believer and then even who you are and it in a greater way of being part of the church, I think of passages like 2 Corinthians 5 that you are a new creation. You have a ministry of reconciliation that's not just evangelist, that's (*inaudible*) believer. I think also have 1 Peter, what is it, the priesthood of believers and rocks built upon each other that we have the job to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light. And that, that corporate sense to write that, that we are a holy nation. I'm speaking of a royal priesthood and in this sense that the church is built upon, this collection of believers that's the bride of Christ. I love that. I've actually. No . . .
- Paul Eckley: Because Peter quoted the scriptures in Exodus, Israel was that elected priesthood, sojourners and all and so the church is that, it's a privilege to be a part of the church. There's no doubt about it.
- Aaron Colyer: Well that' should get our people excited. Right? I mean it's, this is a . . .
- Paul Eckley: You will find it out and I'm sure you found it out right away in the book of Acts.
- Aaron Colyer: This next question might appear a little bit loaded. Just because I think it's important to celebrate victories, but how did you and others lead the church in developing a system of celebrating victories when it came to having evangelism as a priority?
- Paul Eckley: Share results.
- Aaron Colyer: Okay. And, and what specifically was your, your way of sharing results?
- Paul Eckley: What would happen if you and I were out at work or wherever and we were sharing the gospel with somebody and we had an encounter. We've come back and let the church know, hey, I, this week I had an opportunity to pray for x, y, z person or this week I was able to share the gospel with this person. just let them share their experience. As often as possible without having, we don't really have a testimonial time in which I invite people up to give their testimony. That can be kind of odd sometimes, but just let them share in kind of a general way as we congregate and just kind of minister to each other about what they did in terms of yielding to the Holy Spirit in witnessing and sharing their faith during the week.
- Aaron Colyer: Yeah. So no formal testimony time, but you want people talking about, hey, I was praying for this person. Thank you. This. So is, is that setup through Sunday school? Is that set up through, do y'all have an extended kind of greeting time? What, what practically does that look like? What, where did they have that opportunity to share as the church meets corporately?
- Paul Eckley: Well, it is generated within the general fellowship before Sunday School or before church service. And then oftentimes when we have

announcements or we discussed during Sunday school different, issues concerning the lesson, then people will have an opportunity, hey, I did this and it always pertains to the lesson. It's amazing how God dovetails everything during the services on Sunday. It kind of all dovetails together whether the message, the music, the testimonies, and he does that without even us talking to each other. Really? I'm going to preach on this and you say these songs or I'm singing these songs to preach on it. It just kind of works.

Aaron Colyer: No, I love. I love. When God puts something together for sure.

Paul Eckley: It does, it does, it really does. Yes.

Aaron Colyer: Well, let me ask you this. So there's a lot of positive things. There's some victories and changing a culture evangelism, but let's think the other way. What roadblocks were there, if any, when the congregation was experiencing change to seek primary evangelism. Were there people that kind of kicked back? Was there some frustration? Anything like that?

Paul Eckley: Here's the opposition that I've faced. Most of it comes in terms of people trying to interject their own theology. In other words, they think they've got a better way of expressing, how do I want to say this? They, it basically is a doctrinal thing. In other words, they'll try to come in and they'll try to promote their agenda. Some people have done that and it's easy to just say, okay, we don't want to deal with you. You leave, leave the church or whatever. You have to work it out. You have to minister to them. You have to help put the fires out if they start some, because of their slant on, their salvation. Because we get a lot of people, not a lot of people, but some people that come from other denominations or other thoughts of what church or what the God is all about, so you have to be real gracious, but yet real intenteive, at least I do, on what the people are saying and correct them if they need correcting. And the ones that are real adamant about their stance, you have to just really be even more adamant about your stance. You don't want to say, well, I'm the pastor and this is the way it's going to be. You can always revert to the word of God and the word again.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, I was going to say I appreciate your ability to say you've got to be gracious, to shepherd them. I heard kind of that language of really walk them through. But you're exactly right when you say, well, because I'm the pastor and that's the way it's going to be. That just kind of shuts it down.

Paul Eckley: Does it never, never should be. That is the Lord's Church. So he's got the final say for sure.

Aaron Colyer: How long have you been there at Sonshine?

Paul Eckley: Probably 20 years.

Aaron Colyer: Okay. So, you're speaking from 20 years at this specific church. So then let me ask you this, without naming names, of course, what were the top three you said with their own theologies? I wrote kind of pet theology, right? So there's some that come up in my mind, but I'd rather you kind

of brainstorm the top three people that came in and they wanted to push this instead of lifting up Christ, as you said at the beginning. What were those pet theologies in the last 20 years?

Paul Eckley: Okay. One of them was King James only version, right? Right. One of them was absolutely, if you don't use the King James version, you're leading the people down the primrose path. Not only that, but they would make tapes, they would hand out these pamphlets and do things like that. And it was real frustrating. So, that was one of them. You know what I'm saying on that?

Aaron Colyer: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, yeah. I've heard all the arguments and I think it's really silly. Oftentimes they don't even realize that the Greek and Hebrew is the original texts. They twist it into thinking that the KJV is the original God given God spoken text. And I don't even know how you would think that, but it certainly twisted. So . . .

Paul Eckley: Well, you and I know though Scripture is of any private interpretation. Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. So God can use obviously the creation to testify of his greatness. So to throw out all the other. I wouldn't preach out of Living bible but, I certainly have read it just to kind of clarify some things and I'm reading in terms of (*inaudible*) and numbers and different things like that. Okay. That's number one.

Paul Eckley: Number two would be people generally think of a Baptist church. Now you're a little closer to the south then we are up here in the Pacific Northwest where the guy is so liberal. It's incredible. Even Billy Graham, years ago when he came, he said that the state is the least churching state in the union. Yeah. That's what his testimony was when he came up to Tacoma and preached some evangelism services and stuff. But anyway, so people have this idea that Baptist churches somehow are all hell fire and brimstone, okay. And many of the people have had bad experiences with some of these hell fire and brimstone preaching preachers, you know? So people have this stigma in their mind, as a matter of fact, we've had Baptist churches, not Southern Baptist churches, but churches that have been Baptist churches that have changed their name because they don't like using Baptist anymore because it's some kind of a cultural taboo.

Paul Eckley: You might. So you always want to deflect what you're about and you're preaching and what the church is about. You always want to deflect that mentality of, oh, this is just the Baptist Church as opposed to a Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, a nondenominational or anything. You want to get them back to thinking about, okay, this is the Lord. We just participate in a Baptist church. Which we love, but it's God isn't a Baptist, This ministry that we are about is in the Bible. It's preaching Jesus Christ and what he's done for you, your need for him, what you can do as a minister of the gospel in your own right and as a disciple and as more moral issues develop these things that we preach are not Baptist things. They are God things we belong to a Baptist Church. We love it because we participate in the cooperative program, things like that and help missions and missionaries and we pray for chaplains and do all that. So I deflect that. And I don't

get up in the pulpit and preach Baptist stuff. I preach Jesus, but I, I'm there to support the special offerings and let them know about all that stuff too. And number three, you wanted a third thing?

Aaron Colyer: Yea, if you can think of one.

Paul Eckley: Alright. A lot of people that come into the church, sometimes these people that have an agenda, have one single agenda. Whether it's they're confused about election, predestination, whether they're confused about the church, whether they're confused about okay, I want to preach about being a bondservant. Everything is centered around that one specific topic. And so everything they say is about that one particular soap box that they like to get on. You have to deflect that because the word of God is more than just that particular soap box or issue with the president or the government or whatever. So you have to kind of generally make sure that when people oppose what you're doing, they're not just saying, okay, this is what I believe and I'm going to preach it. They've got to come to an understanding that you have an opinion. I have an opinion, and God's given all of us a different ministry within the body of Christ. And so they're just as important in their opinion and in their position in the churches and that person. So don't try to take center stage.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. No, I mean you talked about that earlier about everyone being a part of the bride of Christ and there's value there. One of my professors through this doctoral work, mentioned this statement that's really stuck with me. In his pastoral ministry, he says, he tells church members all the time that he's just a brother risen up among brothers that, okay, there's a calling on his life and there's a task on his life, but he's a church member and he's also the pastor, and so he's just one of them risen to lead and shepherd them. And I think that helps. That helps promote that sense of value that every person within the body of Christ has a sense of value because they're covered by the blood of Christ. So what could be more valuable than that? No, no gift or skill or talent is more valuable than the fact that you're covering,

Aaron Colyer: You, you hold onto that truth. You'll be blessed by the Lord with that particular group. I had something similar to that happen. I'm talking like maybe 30 years ago or more where we had an associational meeting and there was a fellow Bob (*inaudible*), he was in northwest Baptist Convention. He was a Sunday school director. I forget exactly what his position was, but we had a meeting down at Aberdeen Avenue Baptist Church. They've since folded and whatnot, but he was one of the speakers and he was up on stage. I was kind of a new Christian, I think, I'm not sure if I was even ordained yet or not, but he said this, so it might have been like 35 years ago or something like that because I've been ordained for 34 years. But he said this, he says there in the church, there is nobody that's basically, and he was identifying himself as an associational and a convention leader. He says, nobody's got the upper hand on anybody. We're linked arm and arm marching forward. That's what he said. He said, we're holding arms, linked in, armed arm, moving forward. Nobody is to be out there in front of you leading. Jesus is the one that's doing that. So I always thought that was just a wonderful thing. It's similar to what you learned and heard.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. Well let me ask you one more. We're getting close to that 30 minute mark.

Paul Eckley: I've enjoyed this.

Aaron Colyer: I have to. This is one of the best parts of this whole research, being the academic culture and writing and all that stuff is not on the top of my forte. But knowing that this was going to happen towards the end was something that I kept pressing forward to. So I appreciate you. So here's the last question. What are some of the greatest stories and success you would want to praise God for in this season of changing culture for evangelism or even knowing that your church is growing, it's marked as a revitalization in process. Are there specific people or stories where someone really just got it and you just want to make that a part of this interview to say praise God, but for this one specific memory that I have, what comes to mind when I ask you that question?

Paul Eckley: Okay. I think what encourages me and I guess could be a constant source of praising God. We're not a big congregation. You probably see that on your statistics and stuff. We're not a big congregation. I feel like our church for instance, has been a church that has brought, that has attracted people through the Lord's Word and then they go from where we are at. They were either transferred or they move along to other areas in the country and in the world and they always report back saying how much they've appreciated their time at Sonshine Baptist Fellowship and they are experiencing some of the power of the Lord in their ministry, whether it's in a new church, whether it's back at home preaching to or sharing the gospel with their family. I guess what it, what the excitement is to, is to hear that what we're doing goes with the people to wherever God sends them next. And then they report back and say, my experience there, there's nothing like it and I haven't quite found a church yet, but I'm looking at and they basically want to take a leadership role in the group of believers that they find a fellowship and commonality with wherever they go. And that's been a source of blessing for us.

Aaron Colyer: Absolutely. I think of, I don't know if you've read his book, but it's been important to my research, *Gaining by Losing* by J.D. Greear.

Paul Eckley: I haven't read it, but that I, I can imagine what it's about.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. I mean, just the title really says it all. He speaks about sending out some of his best leaders and rather than being depressed and mournful about the fact that his best leaders are always having to go. He said, I want people to switch and say we're excited about where they're going. We're excited that they've had a season here with us and part of our church family. Now they're going to take that somewhere else and that's exactly what you're saying. You're saying that people are reporting back and encouraged to lead and saying, I still want to see God use me and move in big ways where he's put me and, man, what a testimony

Paul Eckley: And that's not just in America. I mean we have folks in the Philippines, we have folks that are doing work in Haiti that have been a part, Korea, different places like that. So, that's awesome what God is doing through folks like you in Roswell and other places. I just thank God for my

brothers and sisters in the Lord, you know.

Aaron Colyer: Absolutely. Let me ask you those guys, in those countries that you mentioned, are they with the IMB? Are they just taking job assignments in another country? How did that work out?

Paul Eckley: No, they're just a common people you might say that have been here in Kitsap County and then they've gone on. And matter of fact, I met with one up in Pennsylvania right now to finally use the (*inaudible*), I don't know if you want to say his name, probably not in the interview process.

Aaron Colyer: That's fine. I won't use his name.

Paul Eckley: But, he appreciated it. He just came over here from work because he's involved in some nuclear programs with the government and instead of for instance, looking up some of his work mates, he said, no, I want to go to visit with Pastor Paul and talk about things. He was only here for a couple of days. We have Brother, Ike Haun from Korea that comes up here every once while he visits with it. So these guys aren't with the mission board or sent out by the church or anything. They're just people like us that go with the passion to share their faith. And sometimes, I don't know if you want to share this, but sometimes the criteria that the NAMB and all of them require, a lot of people don't meet that requirement, but they still have a passion for Jesus.

Aaron Colyer: So you mean in regards to like having a Bible degree or a master's degree, things like that.

Paul Eckley: A Bible degree master. Yeah, master's degree. Bachelor's, doctorate. Like what's your, you have those and you're going for your doctorate and things like that, but just some kind of a, credential. I mean we had some people that wanted to be involved in helping homeless, not only homeless people but unwed mothers and things like that. Well, the fact that they were, had been divorced, years and years and years ago, they were kicked out of the system because of that issue and different things. So, I mean, some of it is like the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life, so that's kind of a bad thing, but that's the way it is.

Aaron Colyer: Well you just see, I mean, you, you just keep it up and you keep your ministry up and you keep having an influence and regardless of whether they can team up with NAMB or not, there's ministry, there's street ministry all over the place. And so. Well

Paul Eckley: There is and praise God for that and one thing, you don't want to be a lone ranger out there doing your thing. I think that's not what God wants. And you'll see that in the book of Acts He wants us to be connected so we don't promote yeah, just go out there and do whatever you want to do. But the point was that they've been exposed to the Word. They get a passion for the Word and for telling people about Christ and what He's done for them. And then wherever they go, they're doing that looking for opportunities.

Aaron Colyer: Come on. Well, hey, we are close to that 30 minute mark. I do want to pray for you and for Sonshine and just praise God for you and what's

going on and ask for his hand in blessing to continue to be there. Something that just shapes this idea is Psalms 67. Paul is praying for God's blessing and for God's face to shine upon him. But then the rest of the psalm is so that the nations might know you so the peoples might praise you. And so, is that old adage that we're blessed to be a blessing and that's certainly if God's going to pour out his blessing on a Christian, then that's for ministry. If God's going to pour out his blessing on a church, then that's for ministry and for His glory. So I went to pray for you in that way.

Aaron Colyer: All right brother. Okay. Thank you. Yeah, let's pray. Father, thank you for Pastor Paul, thank you for Sonshine Baptist Fellowship and thank you for his long ministry tenure, 20 years there in Washington. I praise you for these relationships that he has, where people have gone out, but they still take the experiences and the training and equipping they had at Sonshine and continue to do ministry. What a blessing. I think of Paul writing the epistles, talking about it is for my joy that I hear and follow up and know that you're being used by the Lord. Continue to give that to pastor Paul and we pray for the church that you will pour your blessing out on that church, that they would have people who continue to have gospel conversations. We do pray for salvation. We can't produce salvation. You do. And so give people eyes to see and ears to hear. Give people repentance and faith and help them as a church to see that there are people in their community that are not yet Christians that you could change and redeem and then make the greatest Christian leaders in their community.

Aaron Colyer: And they're not even in the church yet, give them that kind of excitement and anticipation for the Kingdom of God growing. I do pray for pastor Paul and his health for these surgeries coming up. Just give him a sense of strength and endurance that he knows that you are his rock and his refuge. And we proudly sings in Jesus' name. Amen.

Paul Eckley: Amen. And Lord, I just pray for Aaron and his Ministry of the Church and a survey and he has a doctorate to pursuit. Lord, we just know you're going to bless him and his family and the church in this endeavor as long as well, the other folks that are involved in this ministry and father, we're thankful that you've authored both of us and all of us to be together as your children in this great opportunity in ministry called sharing the gospel and the good news of Jesus. So help us to be empowered by your Spirit to do the work of evangelism. And that will be forever grateful. And we thank you for your love for us. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Aaron Colyer: Thanks brother. God bless you and, I don't know when the next time we'll talk is, but I'm sure it'll be an encouragement if we do. Okay.

Paul Eckley: Amen, brother. God bless you too. Okay.

Beau Lamb

- Aaron Colyer: All right, online here with Beau Lamb from First Baptist Santa Rosa in New Mexico. Beau just let me confirm one more time that you are okay with me recording this conversation.
- Beau Lamb: I am.
- Aaron Colyer: **Agreement to Participate:** The research in which you are about to participate is designed to determine the critical elements of your church's recent revitalization. This research is being conducted by a six-man research team pursuing doctoral degrees at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for purposes of understanding and encouraging these elements among other churches. In this research, you will be asked to describe your church's experiences. During the interview portion of the research, notes will be kept for your specific church revitalization, which may appear in the publication of the research. If you desire any of the information given to remain confidential, please inform the interviewer. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this Interview, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.
- Aaron Colyer: But you had no other questions about the ethics statement?
- Beau Lamb: I do not.
- Aaron Colyer: Okay. Well then let me tell you my desire is to keep this at a half an hour. I've got five primary questions I want to ask specifically connected to my area of study in the revitalization research team is the emphasis of evangelistic fervor and training evangelism and pursuing evangelism conversations and how would that connects to the church revitalization.
- Aaron Colyer: So, those are the questions I'm going to be asking and if I need to slow down and ask some probing questions, I may do that. But for the sake of asking all of my interview questions and that there's a consistency for every interview I may have to speed up and get to the last one. Alright, first, just give me kind of a context we saw from your annual church profile numbers that y'all had a period of plateau or decline. And then now you all are growing. Our metrics are a 10 percent average worship attendance every year for a three year period at two out of those three years. And then the baptism to attendance ratio is at least one person for every 20 people attending. So if there's 100 people attending that's baptizing at least five people in that year. If they're 60 attending that's baptizing at least three. And that's about the national average is three baptisms for Southern Baptist church. so tell me kind of your context, how that's been happening in Santa Rosa, How long have you been the pastor, where you saw that plateau and then the turnaround. And then we'll get to my primary question's.
- Beau Lamb: Okay, well we'll jump right in. I've been the pastor at First Baptist Santa Rosa for seven years. As far as a revitalization standpoint, the Sunday that we moved our letter to Santa Rosa, we doubled the active member

membership. So they had a whopping six, five to six people on an average Sunday.

Aaron Colyer: Wow. So for seven years ago it was less than 10 people.

Beau Lamb: Yes, yes. As far as the record keeping when it showed up over 50 members off and on, but those would be either a nonresident members or inactive members.

Aaron Colyer: And so now you guys are somewhere between 50 and 60 on a given Sunday

Beau Lamb: This year's been a little lighter than the previous couple of years. So we're going to be rock in there at about a 38 to 40 on any given Sunday.

Aaron Colyer: Then this year has been lighter. Tell me in connection to your responses on evangelism, you said evangelism is highly important. And then when you were asked about does the average church member understand how to communicate the gospel, you said strongly agree. Are they having gospel conversations, strongly agree. And then, during kind of the revitalization season where your church was growing there was an increase of people having gospel conversations. So my question then is what was done to develop kind of that culture of sharing the gospel and communicating the good news of Christ in this season where you've seen God grow the church?

Beau Lamb: Sure. As far as from a pastoral point of view, it's coming from building trust with the rest of the congregation. And as we move forward with that, being as we have, you know, very few numbers either way, as far as scores, the folks that we have coming now are truly 98 percent are active members. And as far as where that would come from is as a trust and rapport have increased with me. And I'm basically using our family as the springboard for our church. After they build trust and they understand where we are leading and they trust that we're not going to lead them astray. It has given us the opportunity to really lead by example. So as we share the good news, it is instilling in them that our church members would have the same heart for following Jesus as we do. We don't ask our church to do anything that my wife and I and the kids aren't doing already. I feel that leadership by example is the strongest point, especially in a very small church setting because it is more of a house church, a small group setting for our actual church itself. We do have our corporate worship and whatnot. But developing the relationships with our members is what really drove them to be willing to try out what we were doing as far as having an evangelistic outreach mentality on a daily basis.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, absolutely. I hear you saying what a lot of other guys have said in regards to leading by example and making sure the church sees that you're not expecting them to share the gospel without you leading the way. Right? So exactly how do people hear about those things? How do they hear about your gospel conversations?

Beau Lamb: We take them, we do visit them as far as in our, in a small group setting, but, we've done a lot of it, hands on, splitting into groups and going out.

But, our main focus is that is relationship evangelism. So we go, we live with the people where they live. We do serve in a community that are like culture, like minded and like direction as we do. But as we grow relationships then that's what propels us to be able to have our, beyond just being a friend, but then to actually be obedient in sharing the good news with them. So, we'd have some practice times, and this is what the group . . . Okay, this part is going to kick in about year two and a half, give or take, where our group as a whole was willing to learn how to share, whether it be 3 Circles or Answer Track or Roman Road or *Sharing Jesus Without Fear*.

Beau Lamb: We in our community have stepped away from the way (*inaudible*) as the confrontation. The gospel is confrontational enough as it is from the get go and we have noticed in our community that that will call our people to kind of draw away. And then we get a lot of, we lose some confidence in our people, in some self-confidence to go and share the good news. So we stepped with, we started with those, the more open gospel presentations and that we would train them and then we would actually send them out or encourage them to invite a pre-Christians to their homes. And basically, just encourage them maybe the first time we would go over and meet with them as they were preparing to share the good news and then possibly say the follow-up week they would be able to do that themselves and to work through questions.

Beau Lamb: Our community is a very slow-moving community, especially with the old world Roman Catholic Church. Anything new is taken in very small increments and it takes many years for it to reach that community. So we just stood behind our people in that. Keeping them encouraged and keeping them focused on the end goal is to share the good news and to form that relationship that will help them lead them through the discipleship process entirety. Not to just leave them at here is the Word, but here is how the Word can apply to your life. o that we can have a more lasting, I'm more lasting individual, someone who is going to be capable of being discipled and reproduce themselves.

Beau Lamb: So it does start off in a slow process to get our people involved. But even if we work through something in a small group, say we'll go across and we'll go to the park and they will implement whichever strategy that God's laid on our heart at the time and give them opportunities to do some straight cold call evangelism. But honestly in our community, building the relationship first and then encouraging our people to not just get stuck at that point of relationship, but actually take the evangelical step of sharing that good news and living that good news out so that these folks can see it.

Aaron Colyer: That's good. So you beat me to my second question about specific strategies and tools and methods. So, you mentioned 3 Circles and *Sharing Jesus Without Fear*. Also, just the importance of relational evangelism. But let me ask you something that you said that I have not heard anyone else talk about. You said the term pre-Christian. Invite a pre-Christian to your home. So how do you define that? When your church, I can assume what that means, but how do you define that when you're talking to your church about pre-Christians?

Beau Lamb: Oh, that'd be very simply. That will be going straight forward with a lost individual that was destined for hell and a lake fire. But if you go from the pre-Christian standpoint, then you are already setting yourself up for a positive experience. And it also improves your prayer life as you move forward with it because you're not praying for someone who is lost, but you're praying for someone who is going to have the opportunity. Because if we call out unto the Lord, for one's salvation and we are standing firm in God's word that as has we ask according to his will, it will be done. That lost person is not going to be a lost person. But that's the pre-Christian side of it, that's before they're going to come to that lasting relationship with Christ.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. That's a very unique perspective in that I'm encouraged by, is that something that you, that you studied or read somewhere or someone disciplined you into that way of thinking?

Beau Lamb: From that point of view, I picked up some from long lines from when we were in college ministry for about a decade. And, one of my main mentors would be John Randall. That was the gentleman at Texas Tech for ever and ever and was involved in the Paradigm Ministry there in Lubbock, Texas. And then has also worked through a Paradigm group which would have been out of First Baptist in Stephenville, Texas. But as it was developing and as that mentality went through our college kids. You could see the immediate change in, maybe they're going to get saved to this person will come to know Christ. Because we're speaking in the truth of what it is, but we're not speaking in the negativity and speaking, well basically breathing death into those lost people's lives. But go ahead and get into this is a pre-Christian. This is the first step in what God's going to do in their life.

Aaron Colyer: Well let me move to question three then. How does your church or the leadership in your church develop a system of celebrating victories when it comes to having evangelism as a priority?

Beau Lamb: As far as celebrating that, as for the most part, we sit, come within [*inaudible*] as that, as evangelism works and as people come to know the Lord, then that also increases just the numbers that are there. And then there's, you know, the angels rejoice over each soul that is saved. That in itself is a lot. But to keep them encouraged in that is just basically coming from just the standpoint of encouragement for them of, hey, man, you're doing a great job, let's move forward in that. We don't have as much as you would say, here's our new members and then here's the people that were instrumental in bringing them to the Lord. Because of our closed community that makes it very difficult to celebrate with them in that sense. But on the leadership team side of it, on those that we have that are going out, that's where it makes the difference for them is just more or less have an attaboy or you're following the direction for God's will in your life. Then it's so easy to see that reward because we don't just leave them at the evangelism stage because we have so much unlearning in our community to do that. It's really a hand-in-hand ongoing process.

Beau Lamb: Then from there we've talked about what form of tools that we're using to get our people to that point. We've taken and kind of applied many of the things that Jim Putnam runs through with the *Real Life Disciple Makers*.

And that's been instrumental in helping us to see where people are. Whether they are pre-Christian. Whether they're an infant Christian. Then how we can help that discipleship come about so we don't have a 70 year old person stuck in infancy in their walk with Christ. Then not having the tools or the confidence to get to the evangelism stage where you are reaching out and making new disciples.

Beau Lamb: That would be one specific spot that our people that were there when we got there, that would have been where they were. They've been saved for years and years, but had no confidence and no, I couldn't see God's desire to further the kingdom through evangelism. So that would've been that constant encouragement, that constant reassurance I guess would go back into this question as well. Just from church leadership standpoint to our people that are going out there and actually on the ground. They found, I don't know how this fits in or where it fits in, but especially being bi-vocational, I'm not going to be the one that's going to be knocking on the doors every day. It's 45 minutes from my house just to the church. So that's where our folks have also felt an urgency to step in the gap as it's not just being a pastor's job to do all this, but it's our job to train them to go out and do all of this.

Aaron Colyer: Well, I'm glad you said that because that's one of the things that I've found in having these conversations with pastors is that question about celebration typically spurs something about testimony and people sharing their testimonies. When a pastor says it in his preaching, I got the opportunity to share the gospel with this guy the other day at the gas station. People can just slug that off as, okay, well that's your job. You're a pastor. Good for you, but don't expect me to do that because that's not my job. But when their best friend of 35 years who they eat breakfast with every Thursday morning and drink coffee, gets up and says, many of you guys know this story. I couldn't be more excited. I finally took an opportunity to share my faith and this is how it went. Now that person's sitting in the seat saying, I can't say that maybe it's not my job anymore because I'm just the same as that guy. And maybe God is expecting me to share my faith.

Beau Lamb: Sure. And that's where it leads from our standpoint. The few that we had that were still active members when we came, God had already prepared their hearts and given them the resources to get started. They were just looking for a leader to, to truly give them the okay, this is the exact direction we're going to go. And yes, we understand that our church is dwindling and our church was going to die and that we have to have new people. So in that they were willing to change everything. Not just the evangelism outreach direction, but the growth in the Word, the direction we go there, the outreaches we did, the way we ran the service, the color of the chairs, the color of the carpet. They had understood that at that point, okay, we're dying and we're almost done. So how do we come back?

Beau Lamb: And they had to be willing to trust us that God had spoken to myself and to my wife and this is okay, this is the direction God's leading us. They jumped right in and went with us. I would say if we would have met resistance in that, we would only now be getting to the point where our church is. We're talking, you know, even seven years in for all the unlearning that would have had to happen with an unwilling heart. You

can't really give it to us as much as you can to God for already working in the hearts and lives of our people. Because, we basically just came along where God was already working.

- Aaron Colyer: That's good. I like that emphasis that God was already working in the hearts of your people. Well, you mentioned resistance. That leads me to my fourth question. What roadblocks, if any, were there when the congregation was experiencing change and seeing the priority of evangelism in fulfilling the great commission? If there were roadblocks, how did y'all get through them?
- Beau Lamb: Sure. That that's a super question and I want to tell their story and it's going to be absolutely useless for your research. But as we moved to Santa Rosa, we moved up there to come alongside a pastor as we've been in college ministry up for about 15 years. We'd been in children's ministry total of almost 20 years prior to moving to Santa Rosa. And, we were looking forward to an opportunity to be in more of a support role. But two weeks prior to our arrival in Santa Rosa, I received a call from THE deacon at the church asking me to be the pastor for the church. And I immediately slowed him down and I said, you know, let's, let's get to know each other first and see where God's leading in this.
- Beau Lamb: And as the process worked forward. I had asked him, okay, now you've heard me, I've heard you. We've been speaking to God about it. Where are you at on it? What's your pastor's search process? He said, I do not understand what you're saying. What we do is we have our regular scheduled business meeting and afterwards, after we have heard you preach and you have checked us all out in that regular scheduled business meeting, we have someone make a motion to make you pastor. Someone seconds the motion to make you pastor. And then we all vote yes.
- Beau Lamb: So about six weeks after we arrived in Santa Rosa, that exact process happens. So you can see there that unanimously when you don't even step out of the room. So from that perspective, that just drives home, you know, the thought that hey, God was already working and willing and prepared. The few group of people that were there had been praying for the previous three years for God to put together the combination that would best reach our community.
- Beau Lamb: As far as what roadblocks we countered, I'm honestly, we're truly blessed in that we had a one lady that was a fairly weak in her theology and fairly opinionated. She didn't like me so she left. An older gentleman did not like our outreach methods. Whether using puppetry or the inflatable outside bouncy houses or the door to door or the feeding kids or the anything like that. Because he looked at it more from a social group perspective and didn't want to get the church dirty. And he stepped back of his own accord. And really those were the only two individuals in relation to the church that weren't for moving forward with where God had the church to go.
- Aaron Colyer: So in your situation, you saw just kind of a pruning effect that those that were disgruntled just kind of left?
- Beau Lamb: Yeah, they walked away and honestly one of them has a zero Baptist

background or beliefs in doctrine. The other one is looking for things to go back to 1965. So with those two, obviously out of the loop that would really the only mild pruning was the only thing that went there. And they would follow us in some things we tried didn't work, but it didn't faze our folks. They were still excited about moving forward because our approach is more from a relational standpoint through evangelism. So it would give us time to see what, when that pre-Christian was ready to hear the good news and, and they're always needing to hear the good news. But, along with John Randall as well, but it takes about 25 touches for someone to come to Christ. And that's been said in many books in different ways, but they need to have an encounter with the Holy Spirit 15 to 25 times before they're really willing to truly give their life over to Christ. So having patience in that and continuing to provide those opportunities for them to hear the good news is how we move forward in our evangelism process.

Aaron Colyer: I like what you said about having an encounter with the Holy Spirit. Okay, last question. So you can take all the time you need. I really want to hear about some of the greatest stories of success that you'd want to praise God for in this season of growth in the church that you're leading. And think specific stories, specific heart change, maybe specific things where people, got caught on fire for evangelism and sharing the gospel and praying for their neighbors and family members. What specific stories, if you need to change names, that's fine, but real specific stories

Beau Lamb: We'll start with one specific family. They're a pretty neat group of people. It's a single mom. She had six children. And our first outreach, our first touch for her and her family would have been at the parade. We were handing out flyers for them to come to an outreach event for the children with some puppetry and some other things along those lines. And she would come down, she didn't have a car and with a push the stroller with the youngest one in them and they would all come to church. They came faithfully for about a year and a half before God really started moving in their lives. And then the eldest daughter got saved. Then after another couple of months two of the other daughters were saved. Then one of the younger sons was saved. And then finally, after a period of about two years, thinking in Santa Rosa perspective that two years is like overnight. But honestly with them two years, it is a very hard time to stay patient as a church for people to come to Christ. And at the end of that period of time, the mom was actually saved and baptized as well.

Aaron Colyer: Wow. That's amazing.

Beau Lamb: Yeah. For that perspective, there's five in one whack. Then as far as some others, with our investing in people's lives, we had one on family that the husband was absolutely sure that the wife was in trouble. She had trouble with alcohol addiction. They basically moved in with us for about eight months and God delivered her from alcoholism. And as they move forward, she and her husband and the two kids, at the end of that time, he actually became our deacon, one of our lead outreach guys and evangelists for our cowboy group. And also was a deacon in our church. So being sold out and having that direction of things just continually moving towards the cross and is going to strengthen our ability to reach pre-Christians because there's already been a pretty negative light shone

on us.

- Beau Lamb: Next down the line would be a family in crisis with also dealing addiction on the father's side. And literally turning over and stopping the drugs basically overnight, restoring his family, restoring relationship with his wife, with his two sons. To see him now, he preaches a few weeks a month and has since moved out of our church. Because our church, as we move forward and we're sharing the good news, we're not called to stay. We're called to go out. So we've had about five families come through there. One of them the second story, and one of them is a story about the man who was on the drugs to literally go out and now they're doing the same thing that we're doing in other communities.
- Beau Lamb: In the midst of our coming together. We had a gentleman from Portales who was struggling with addiction. We literally had six men come out of our church, which we had reached with the good news to come and to spend 24 hours a day with this gentleman until he had dried out. They gave him a job and gave him direction so that he could lead his family are some of the top ones. And it can't. It doesn't stop simply with us and evangelism. It goes through the relationship building and then the investment and then bringing that discipleship background. I'm the last one that we stayed with for so long. He actually leads a Celebrate Recovery in Portales, New Mexico now.
- Aaron Colyer: Yeah. That sense of evangelism and discipleship go together.
- Beau Lamb: Yep. Yeah. They really are hand-in-hand with us. It's going to take that, especially in our community because our community moves very slowly and they have to see. They have to see our lives. They have to see how the Holy Spirit's work in our lives and then they're prepared for the evangelistic side of it where they can truly believe what we're telling them. And are willing to open their Bibles and once we give it to them and help them to seek out the truth. So we've had many, many events that have come about like that or just blessings we've had. So many that have come, we've prayed for it seems like forever, come to know the Lord. Most of them have moved on and God's using them somewhere else. Where our church is, even though we we're going through revitalization, we are more of a staging ground for lack of a better word, for, for sending others out to go and share the good news.
- Aaron Colyer: Do you think that sense of staging ground, has been a discouragement because, oh, we're always losing our best people? Or do you think that that has, has been a motivator, for the whole church really to continue to make outreach a priority.
- Beau Lamb: As they're moving out, it's always really, really sad to see them go because they're the best ones that you, you know their heart and they know your heart and they're prepared. But nowhere in the Bible does it say get disciplined and stay. It is heartbreaking and from a pastor's perspective to have people growing up and then you lose your help. Then it really is a start over. In our ministry in Santa Rosa, we've had several folks say, Oh, you're going to build your leaders from within. We do build our leaders from within and then we send them out. That's a ministry that God has actually called my wife and I to. We had initially

thought that there would be some difference because in college ministry, you know, you have them for four years and then they're gone. But with the, with the small town, we were thinking they were going to be there to say. But yeah, it's, it's all of the above. It's heartbreaking to see him go. But it's such a blessing to see them plugged in and sharing the good news and living out the calling and teachings that we have before us.

Aaron Colyer: Absolutely. Well listen, pastor, I am very encouraged to hear these things. I'm getting a chance to put this together with pastors from all across the country. It's been fun for me and you're saying a lot of the same things that other pastors are saying that are experiencing a revitalization in their church. So our biggest goal is just to make sure that we can write it all up and be an encouragement to pastors that are just kind of banging their head against the wall saying what do we need to do. I really want to pray for FBC. Santa Rosa. We continue to pray for you guys and then I'll stop the recording and then maybe we can just have a couple personal remarks and then I'll let you on with your day.

Aaron Colyer: Father, thank you for Beau. Thank you for his family. Thank you for their ministry and FBC. Santa Rosa. Thank you just for the way that you have seen people break the bondage of sin and repent and believe and find rescue and forgiveness in Christ. But more than that find a mission that you call us to have a ministry of reconciliation and a message of reconciliation. We praise you for that. Lord, I do pray, Psalm 67, over Beau and the church that he's leading that you would be gracious to them and bless them. Make your face shine upon them so that the nations might know you. So that the peoples might praise you and that your name might be feared and known. Lord, won't you do these things for your glory and for their joy. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Beau Lamb: Amen.

Aaron Colyer: Well, thanks again. let me, let me stop recording here and then we can catch up a bit. I appreciate you.

Josh Goepfrich

Aaron Colyer: I am speaking Josh Goepfrich from Warsaw Baptist Church in Warsaw, Indiana. And I want to thank you for participating. We send our survey out to about 500 churches and we're just topping the 130 mark, so I really appreciate you taking the survey and then also agreeing to this interview. I want you to know the reason I'm interviewing you is because you scored very highly on evangelism. So this is the area that I'm looking at, the connection between a church fulfilling the Great Commission and having a culture of evangelism and gospel conversations and the church revitalization. So, let me read to you are our ethics statement and we'll go from there. It's changed slightly from when you read it on the survey, if you took a chance to read it.

Aaron Colyer: **Agreement to Participate:** The research in which you are about to participate is designed to determine the critical elements of your church's recent revitalization. This research is being conducted by a six-man research team pursuing doctoral degrees at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for purposes of understanding and encouraging these elements among other churches. In this research, you will be asked to describe your church's experiences. During the interview portion of the research, notes will be kept for your specific church revitalization, which may appear in the publication of the research. If you desire any of the information given to remain confidential, please inform the interviewer. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this Interview, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Aaron Colyer: Any questions?

Josh Goepfrich: No, sir.

Aaron Colyer: Okay, perfect. Well Josh, like I said, I just wanted to thank you again for being part of our research. It is very interesting to me that what we're getting back from the surveys from these 130 or so pastors that have responded. The rating of highly important for our six categories, which are evangelism, discipleship, missions, corporate worship leadership, and there's one more I'm not thinking of right now, it's really across the board. And so for me personally in my research for the importance of having gospel conversations and seeing the kingdom grow, I expected to see that way off the charts and then it's just kind of equal.

Aaron Colyer: Every situation is unique and so that's why this interview portion is going to be very helpful for us moving forward to see exactly what God has done there at Warsaw Baptist. I want you to know, again, like I said, the reason you were selected as you said, evangelism is highly important. Then when asked specifically about are there individuals that are able to share the gospel and have evangelistic conversations you said, agree, strongly agree and agree. And so I'd love to hear more about it.

Aaron Colyer: I want you to know the format for this interview is five primary questions that I've got here. Some follow up questions that we may probe into, but my desire is to keep us right at half an hour. I want to respect

your time and I think the meat of what we're going to be discussing can be determined in that first half hour. So I may press forward a little bit and could feel quick or I may slow down. If you have questions along the way just let me know.

Josh Goepfrich:

No worries.

Aaron Colyer:

Alright, so first off, tell me a little bit more about, how long you've been at the church. And then specifically, it seems to me, based off the answers in your survey that this culture of evangelism has built and grown. What was done to develop that culture of evangelism in your church and among your church membership?

Josh Goepfrich:

Well, I'm 4 1/2 years here. So we're coming up on that critical five year mark here pretty soon. And we had to, really, to use a political term, drain the swamp first. The church did not want to do a restart. They want to do a revitalization. And what happened was we came in with the intent of, the church had told us that they didn't have a bad testimony in the region. They had no testimony. And I said, guys, no testimony is a bad testimony. And so we started changing. We started the process of changing the DNA of the church to where evangelism was. a gospel presentation is primary. So one of the things that we did, and we still do, is we changed the format of the Sunday morning service to the point where even today . . .

Josh Goepfrich:

Well, let me take a step back. We got rid of the term Great Commission. We went with a new term that has been going around for about 10 years now in youth ministry called the The Cause of Christ, with a capital T. One of the things that we taught was, specifically is that this culture and especially younger people are looking for a cause that they can believe in and what is greater than the cause of Jesus Christ. So that's where we started. Through that we take anywhere from five to 10 minutes every Sunday morning to give time for people to share what has happened in the last week with the cause where God is working in you, around you and through you.

Aaron Colyer:

And that's on Sunday morning?

Josh Goepfrich:

On Sunday morning in the service. And we do it during our offering time is what we do.

Josh Goepfrich:

And in that we, we go into Matthew 28 and we week by week talk through what is the cause of Christ. It's making disciples. It's baptizing them. It's teaching them. At least once a quarter I stop us from all the good and say, okay, who believes they failed miserably in this this week. Take a look around you're not alone that you thought you failed this week. And so trying to build a community of understanding, we're not all getting it right every single week. There are times that we've mess up and you're not alone in the mess up. And so we'll change the format of what's being shared from what's going on with gospel message to what's going on in the teaching portion. What are you teaching and what are you personally learning? Because the gospel is not just what am I claiming, but it's as important to me this moment as the day I got saved.

Josh Goepfrich: So we're trying to embed that into the entire church. We do it before we leave, before we dismissed the kids to Children's Church, any of that. So the whole family's taking part. We've had kids who've given a testimony. We've had adults who've given testimony. Teenagers who have given testimony. That's one of the major things. On the back of the sanctuary we painted what we call the Cause Circle. At the top it says, pray on one side, I say side, it's a circle and it says pursue and then it says persuade. It's just kind of that idea of you're always praying for people. You're pursuing a God conversation with them. Anything that will open up spiritual conversations. Then when you get to the persuade to get there, you have to build to the gospel conversation. And I take a lot of time and talk about the difference between having a God conversation will never get to the gospel. You have to have the gospel conversation. It's not just belief in a god, you've got to get to the gospel.

Aaron Colyer: So differentiate between a god conversation and a gospel conversation.

Josh Goepfrich: Yes.

Aaron Colyer: Do you have a picture of that circle that you just talked about anywhere in your office or could you draw it up on a sketch?

Josh Goepfrich: Yeah, actually I do. Really simple it comes out of the Dare to Share ministries out of Colorado, actually.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, yeah.

Josh Goepfrich: Are you familiar with them?

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, a youth pastor that I was on the phone with is one of their master teachers and emcee's the events and all that.

Josh Goepfrich: I've been dealing with and work with Greg Stier for over 40 years now. So that's what it looks like.

Aaron Colyer: Okay, good.

Josh Goepfrich: And then that area up there that says ABC. That is not what we, those of us who have gone to Southern would say ABC. It is, it stands for Accept Christ, Belong to a church and Commit to the cause. So it's training disciples who make disciples.

Aaron Colyer: Oh, that LTC event Lead the Cause.

Josh Goepfrich: Yeah the Cause University. Surely you're familiar with that. Did y'all take teenagers to that or . . .

Josh Goepfrich: They started that the year after I came here. So I switched chairs. and so we were part of the last meeting year where they were doing the full Dare2Share events before Greg stepped into his current role.

Aaron Colyer: And again, man, so evangelism is your heartbeat, Bro.

Josh Goepfrich: It is for me personally, evangelism and discipleship are, I think you can't have one without the other. Two sides of the same coin for sure. And that's one of the things that we did when we set up the our mission statement. Warsaw Baptist Church exists to be growing and going in the love of Jesus Christ.

Aaron Colyer: Growing and going. Tell me about, where Warsaw, Indiana is.

Josh Goepfrich: Are you familiar with the state of Indiana?

Aaron Colyer: I lived in the southern part of Floyds Knobs, Georgetown, right outside of Louisville. So that's where I lived when I went to seminary and did church planting work there.

Josh Goepfrich: Okay. Well the other end of the state where South Bend is.

Aaron Colyer: Nope.

Josh Goepfrich: Okay. You know where Notre Dame's at?

Aaron Colyer: Nope.

Josh Goepfrich: Okay. So if, let's say Indiana is our square on our screen. South Bend is right at the top, almost in the middle.

Aaron Colyer: In the North. South Bend is in the north?

Josh Goepfrich: Yep. Fort Wayne sits over towards Ohio on the border there. Warsaw is right between them almost halfway between on US 30.

Aaron Colyer: Okay, good. Good. Well that was more just a personal question. I want to focus us on evangelism and you talked about, some tools, but I'm curious if you talk about others. Were there specific strategies, methods that you identified and used for your church members in leading them to obey the Great Commission? I know you said you're not using that language, but, other than the language of the Cause, other than Cause circle: pray, pursue, persuade. Are there other tools?

Josh Goepfrich: We do. We try to do at least one evangelism tool each year. We have done the 3 Circles from NAMB. I personally don't like it, but there are some in our church who do. We've done the Way of the Master, all that. What I tend to do is use gospel, Life in 6 Words. Are you familiar with that?

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. God. Our sin. Pain. Everyone. Life.

Josh Goepfrich: Yep. And the reason I liked that one, and it's almost in every sermon as well, is because you could start on any point and get to all six.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. I have found good success with the 3 Circles, so I don't want to defend it or come back forth. But that's also true of 3 Circles.

Josh Goepfrich: The reason I just personally don't like it is to me it was cumbersome for

me personally. But for some of our people, it was very simple and they liked having the app on their phone. And so I look at it and say, listen, the method is less important.

Aaron Colyer: Absolutely. And I was going to say something similar. It seems to me like you understand doing a new tool every year that the tool truly is just a tool. And Romans 1:16 would tell us that the message of the gospel has the power to say, right, I'm not sharing the gospel, it's the power of salvation to those who believe, Jew first and the gentiles. So, I think you're exactly right. The message, what'd you say? The message is more important than

Josh Goepfrich: the method.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. I'm recording this so I could have gone back, but I just wanted to make that note. That's good, brother. Well, let me ask you this. I have found a theme and so it's a little bit of a loaded question, but those who are changing a culture do a good job of celebrating victories. So what ways are you or other church leadership developing a system of celebrating victories when it comes to having evangelistic encounters or gospel conversations as a priority? How are you celebrating those victories?

Josh Goepfrich: That's a great question. And it's something we're working on on a consistent basis, because, and this is one of my failings, honestly, is I don't do well in the little celebrations. I do well in the big celebrations. So I had to surround myself with people who do well in the little celebrations.

Josh Goepfrich: So a big celebration, for example, is just last week ago, Saturday night. One of our families, one of the dads just led his youngest son to the Lord. So we've made a huge deal of that during our Take 5 time on Sunday. Mainly because that's something in a celebration thing, we talk about getting prayer requests from people and he had specifically asked the entire church to pray for his son's salvation and he responded. So we had time to praise, which we don't generally get. And so we make that a priority. We are renaming our Sunday service to, similar to what other churches do with Weekend Celebration. Just to get into my mind. This is a time of worship celebration, not just a what of God, but what God is doing around each person.

Josh Goepfrich: Obviously, (*inaudible*) are a huge thing. In the small things, again, it's not something I do well, but we try to do those things in our life groups outside of Sunday morning. Primarily because when I came, they were singing happy birthday weekly to people during Sunday morning service. Are we together on this? So I wanted to change the community celebrations to these are things that happened in community, not in our time to worship God. So my wife's really good at those things. I have a couple of guys who were really good at those things and so they take the time in their small groups and in their life groups to really, really focus on, on those good things. We try to have some sort of church community type of event. We are about to do our annual church picnic here in a month or so where you're having that community time. When you're celebrating like you would as a family, but you're not taking the

individual moments out of this weekend, Sunday morning time to do the celebrations. Unless it is specifically towards salvation, baptisms. Something like that.

Josh Goepfrich: Well, I mean, to encourage you this, this whole idea of Take 5, you're the first person I've heard that's using Sunday morning during the offering to share testimony. I mean, that's an intentional way of celebrating victories. So I know that you said you feel like there's a weakness there, but, I think you're forward thinking in making that a part of every weekend service. I think it's accomplishing just that. Like you, you mentioned that testimony of the dad who led his son to the Lord, that's exactly what every parent needs to hear. That it's their job to be laying the gospel foundation. It's not their job to save their kids, but they should be laying that foundation and longing to see their kids respond with repentance. And so, you are doing that and maybe even more than you would say or think you are even with that Take 5 time. Because that's very unique for your service. And I think a good thing.

Aaron Colyer: So, let me ask you this man. What oftentimes when God's on the move, a Satan's also on the move and we're sinners. We have to not just blame it on Satan, but we have a sin nature. We don't like getting out of our comfort zone or being challenged. So when that culture is shifting in your church and evangelism is becoming a part of the culture, I think you mentioned, about culture earlier and there can be roadblocks or there can be people that buck up against that. What stories would you share about roadblocks when people are experiencing that kind of change and that kind of priority shift?

Josh Goepfrich: I'm looking at a thing I saw that I put up on my computer right now it says, The road to a strong faith is never smooth. Early on we had some people who had agreed that they wanted the change by mouth, but in mind and spirit did not. That caused massive issues.

Josh Goepfrich: Honestly, I'm going to give a lot of credit to Dr Cecil Segal, who was our state director at the time, who helped mentor me and walk me through some of those times in the first year. It was not a honeymoon period, it was a battle the entire time. We had doubled in size the first year, there were 14 people when we came. Then we had a massive blessed de-membership. It's the only way I can really put that.

Josh Goepfrich: One of the major roadblocks we had early on was a lot of people who are willing to serve, but a vacuum of leadership. Which caused issues because those that were in leadership, it's one of the reasons they didn't want to do a restart. They wanted to hold onto their leadership role.

Josh Goepfrich: So that was a major issue we had to deal with. What does scripture say is the role of the church member and the role of the leaders and who is leading the church? One of the major issues that came up time and time again was, well, Jesus is the leader of our church. So, therefore, we don't have to listen or do anything that you say. To the point it even came up in a disciplinary meeting, that was private, that leaked and the whole church showed up for. It starts off with the idea of, well, who's leading this meeting? And I said, well, I am. the pastor. Well Jesus is the leader of this church. And it was, well, you're right, but since he's not physically

here and he put me as the under shepherd, I guess I need to because he's not going to. So those were some major roadblocks. At beginning, I said, when we leave this room we're either going to be together or we are going different directions. Paul and Barnabas had to come to the same conclusion. We're either together or we're going in different directions.

Aaron Colyer: So that was a question I had follow-up. So you said there was a mass de-membership and I would figure that most of those people have moved on. Did any of them stay or did you see heart change in any of them or did they all just need to be pruned out?

Josh Goepfrich: There was after that meeting the next evening, the ones who were leaving did not plan on leaving and they called a special meeting without me by phone. Some of the members said, well, we just discussed this last night, we're not coming. Of course it was under the guise of a prayer meeting. One of the gentlemen, who is still here today, who was really a big supporter of this crew, came and said, well, we all said last night that we're going to move forward and see what happens. And at that point, he experienced everything I had been telling them that this passive/aggressive crew was doing by the shouts and the angry things at me that nobody else saw behind closed doors. And they all did it straight on him to the point they were telling him he shouldn't teach, he doesn't know anything about the Bible. Those types of things too you're a liar. There's no reason we should trust you. And when the church members that were there that night saw that there was an immediate shift of, I hate to use the term loyalty, but that's what it was. it.

Josh Goepfrich: So out of the original 14 that were here when we came. There are five that remain and two that are active that there two that are ill. The two that are ill, they're actually charter members. One of them has been here all the 32 years that church has been here and one's been here all but two years of it. And so they're, they're older, they're ill. And the lady who's been here the longest, honestly, she's the reason I stayed. Because when I was sharing with her some of the things when I was just broken, she looked at me and said, we need you. We need somebody who's not going to fall again. I am the eighth pastor here in 32 years. Wow. And so if it wasn't for her, her prayers, and she's on oxygen now is homebound. I know she prays daily for every single member of this church. Even the new ones.

Aaron Colyer: Come on, man. What a gift. What a gift. So original 14, down to five, but now you guys are running in worship. What's your average worship attendance?

Josh Goepfrich: Right now we're averaging about 30. And out of those 30 we have 25 of them that are members.

Aaron Colyer: Okay. Okay.

Josh Goepfrich: And if everybody showed up, we'd probably have about 55 people here.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. Listen, I want you to know that your ministry is so valuable in the kingdom. You have to know that sticking in, persevering, getting the gospel out, churning your members, getting them to share the gospel.

Really, teaming up with ladies like this. I mean saints like that. I mean, that's a huge, huge, huge deal. Huge deal. So I just want you to hear me say that as a brother pastor.

Josh Goepfrich:

I appreciate that.

Aaron Colyer:

So then that leads me to the last question. What victories would you want to share? So what are the some of the greatest stories of success that you'd like to praise God for during this culture shift? Getting gospel to be a priority. What would you say, praise God for this. And of course that lady is one of them.

Josh Goepfrich:

Let me, let me give you a couple of others. Yeah. One is we now have a retired pastor and his wife who are attending our church. They're in their eighties. We were praying that we, my wife and I, needed people who would come along and encourage us. This retired pastor has the greatest gift of encouragement and that has been phenomenal. Our theology classes, that we teach in the fall and spring, have gone from a few people attending to I'm going to have 12 there starting this Sunday. And that's a huge, huge thing.

Josh Goepfrich:

Man, I got 80 percent of our guys going to our state conference this weekend. That's a big thing.

Josh Goepfrich:

I had two sisters get baptized the same day. One of them wanting to me to baptize her and the other one wanted dad. And so having the family in the baptismal tank together was a huge thing.

Aaron Colyer:

Yeah.

Josh Goepfrich:

And I'd say probably the other one is probably one that most people wouldn't count as a big victory, but I do. That same family, the dad is, we got a lot of millennials who are in leadership now and then we're training them how to preach. We're train them how to lead. We're training them for eldership or elders, I should say, becoming elders in time. But this young man, when he and his family started coming here, I told him to leave. I told him he couldn't come for six months and the reason for that is there is an extended family connection on my wife's side, and so they knew us. I didn't want them to come because they knew us. I wanted them to spend time looking for a church and if the father brought them here for the reason that he wanted them here than they were welcome. But if they were coming just for us, I told him it wouldn't work.

Josh Goepfrich:

And so six months later they start coming. They've been here about three years. He runs our discipleship teams. His wife is my volunteer secretary. She's running our children's team, revamping it. They have taken the youth ministry from our three kids to 12 kids last year in six months and they're starting up again tonight.

Josh Goepfrich:

He has a friend of his that has come to church probably four or five times, holidays when he's been preaching other things like that. And last Christmas we used O. S. Hawkins, *The Christmas Code*, as an invitation out to people to come in for our Christmas service. Through this young man talking with his friend, having him in his home. he has moved from

atheist to agnostic, which is huge. Absolutely huge blessing as you well know. And so he was visiting again this last Sunday and I heard on Monday, (the dad) told me, yeah, my friend said, you know, that whole service. It sounded like he was preaching just straight at me. And, I said, what'd you tell him? He goes, well, maybe it was for you, but he wasn't preaching at you.

Aaron Colyer: That's good. Yeah. So, no man, I think that's a huge victory. I think it's good to talk about that. Yeah. I want to read. I'm looking up Psalm 67 on my iPhone. I'm not a millennial, but I'm acting like one because I'm using my phone for my Bible, but I have been praying for these pastors. We're right on that 30 minute mark. Psalms 67 where David's just unashamedly praying for blessing. May God be gracious, may he bless us, make his face to shine upon us. But listen to the motive, that your way may be known in all the earth, your saving power among all the nations. And then over and over, let the peoples praise you. Verse three, let the nations praise you. Verse Four, Verse Five, let the peoples praise you and then again in verse seven. God shall bless us and let all the ends of the earth fear him. There's this connection to God's blessing being on us and it being for the purpose of the peoples and the nations and we're blessed to be a blessing. I'd love to pray for Warsaw Baptist and for God's blessing, specifically in that light, that God just pours his presence out on you guys as a family of believers that you all might be a blessing as you continue to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Josh Goepfrich: I appreciate that. Before you do, let me share this because this is vital to everything. After that.

Aaron Colyer: Come on, man.

Josh Goepfrich: We spend anywhere from five to 20 minutes individually and corporately on Sunday morning worship in prayer time.

Aaron Colyer: Good.

Josh Goepfrich: Because without. We moved from a people who said we prayed to becoming the people of prayer and my goal is that we become a house of prayer.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. That's really good. So how long is your service?

Josh Goepfrich: About an hour and a half.

Aaron Colyer: Okay. I was going to say with the testimony and a 15 minute period of time, I would think it's a little bit longer than average, but not, not too bad. I mean the average service is 75 minutes.

Josh Goepfrich: We start at 11. We get done at 12:30.

Aaron Colyer: Good. I'm writing that down.

Josh Goepfrich: We moved from people who said we pray to actually being a people of prayer.

Aaron Colyer: That's good man. Well, in that light, let me pray for you. Father God, I thank you for Pastor Josh. I'm just so encouraged to hear these stories and testimonies. I'm encouraged to see a discipleship happening in his church and even what he said about evangelism and discipleship going together. Lord, that you're bringing leaders around him and he's training guys, to be part of the pastor team and they have a plurality of elders. I'm very encouraged to see gospel fruit that people are responding in repentance and faith. I think of this dad that just celebrates, my child has coming to faith. And what a beautiful story where you take us out of darkness and put us into your marvelous light. I'm praying, God, that you would continue to equip his people to proclaim those things.

Aaron Colyer: I Peter wants us to proclaim the excellent deeds of him who called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light. I do pray for your blessing, Lord. Just pour your presence out on them and their services as they meet together for fellowship. That they would be encouraging one another and stirring one of them to love and good works. That this, this idea that every believer, not just leaders or pastors or evangelists, every believer has a story to share. Thank you for all the equipping that you've given him, through Dare2Share and having a friendships and brotherhood with guys like Greg Stier. Continue to use this local bride of Christ to see the kingdom march forward. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Josh Goepfrich: Amen. Amen. Hey, thanks again very, very much, for being a part of our study. And, just feel free to call me or email me if you have any other questions or if you want to see this as it comes out later, I'm happy to share it with you because you were a vital part of it. Alright brother.

Josh Goepfrich: Appreciate it. Where in Texas are you?

Aaron Colyer: So, I was in Texas and now I'm in New Mexico. So I'm in Roswell, New Mexico and I've been here for almost five years. Well, we'll celebrate five years next June. June one. And you're right, that five year mark is kind of a critical deal. Preach. Pray. Love. And Stay. That's what Mark Dever says. You keep it up. Keep it up, bro. Have a great day. God bless you

Phil Westenbarger

- Aaron Colyer: I am speaking with Phil Westenbarger from Gloucester Southern Baptist Church. And just for confirmation, you are okay with me recording this confirmation Phil. Listen, I am encouraged that you're willing to participate in our study. So thank you very, very much. Thank you for taking the survey and thank you for being willing to do this interview. Let me read you our ethics statement. It's changed just a little from the time that we did the survey and you'll see towards the end when it starts talking about interviews that we're asking for your permission to use some of the things that you say. But at any point, if you want something to be kept confidential, you just let me know and I'll do everything I can to make sure that that takes place.
- Aaron Colyer: **Agreement to Participate:** The research in which you are about to participate is designed to determine the critical elements of your church's recent revitalization. This research is being conducted by a six-man research team pursuing doctoral degrees at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for purposes of understanding and encouraging these elements among other churches. In this research, you will be asked to describe your church's experiences. During the interview portion of the research, notes will be kept for your specific church revitalization, which may appear in the publication of the research. If you desire any of the information given to remain confidential, please inform the interviewer. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this Interview, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.
- Aaron Colyer: Are you okay with those things, Pastor Phil?
- Phil Westenbarger: All right.
- Aaron Colyer: Well then, thanks again for participating. Let me just tell you that we are currently sitting at about a 120 pastors who responded to the survey. We're still encouraging those who are eligible to take that survey so we can get a greater confidence interval in our research, but our supervisor has cleared us to do the interview portion for those that are seeking to graduate by the end of this year.
- Aaron Colyer: So, I want to tell you why Gloucester Southern Baptist was identified because it was a church that experienced five years of plateau or decline and then in, in the last three years, it's been growing by at least 10 percent in average worship attendance. And then also there is a baptism to average worship attendance ratio of 20 to one. So because you guys met those parameters, that's why you got the survey.
- Aaron Colyer: And then of course, by your survey responses, you say evangelism is highly important. I'm looking at it right here. You also say in regards to the confidence that you have about individual church members sharing the gospel. All of those are scored very strongly, that you said you agree or slightly agree. Then when it came to training, you're using the 3 Circles evangelism and you do that training about once to twice a year.

Aaron Colyer: So I've got some primary questions for you. It's just five of them. But in the course of this interview, we may have some other conversation that arises for probing questions. I do want to let you know my goal is to keep this conversation at 30 minutes or less and so there may be times that we press forward. There may be times that we kind of sink back into the conversation, but I want to respect your time and I want to try to keep it at that 30 minute mark. Any questions so far from you?

Phil Westenbarger: I don't think so.

Aaron Colyer: Okay. Well, first of all, what has been done at Gloucester Southern Baptist to really change the culture of evangelism among the membership there?

Phil Westenbarger: Well, when I first got there, I noticed that, of the few members that were there, the understanding of the gospel was, I didn't feel like they had a full understanding of the gospel. You know the basics, yes. But then how that applied and the fact that we're the people that need to be taking it. Obviously they had been neglecting that. But then they had been without leadership for a long period of time. So really, I set out by trying to reteach the gospel. To make sure that everyone that was there understood the elements of the gospel. What it is. What it means. But not just there, but how that ought to impact what we do and how we live.

Aaron Colyer: So how long have you been there?

Phil Westenbarger: Six and a half years.

Aaron Colyer: So over the course of six and a half years, have you seen that culture trend where it's a priority now for the general membership? Not only to understand the gospel as you're saying like a full picture of the gospel, but also to obey the Great Commission in sharing the gospel regularly.

Phil Westenbarger: I've seen their understanding growth. I've seen that the more they have learned, the more they're willing to love the people, the community. But it's still a challenge. I still feel like a lot of them are, they don't feel confident in their ability to share the gospel.

Phil Westenbarger: But that's one of the things that we've been working on and trying to build into the evangelism training. We used a resource called Proclaim. I think it was helpful in showing that God's sovereign in the plan of salvation and that because of that we know that there's going to be people out there that are going to respond and it's God's responsibility to save. It's our responsibility to take the message. Trying to build confidence. I'd say, that's what's lacking. Still trying to get the momentum and build the confidence in the people that they can take the message of Christ to the community.

Aaron Colyer: So would you agree with this? It's God's responsibility to save. It's our responsibility to share.

Phil Westenbarger: Yes.

Aaron Colyer: That resource, Proclaim. Is there a publisher or someone that put together

those resources? How can I find that if I was looking for it on the Internet?

Phil Westenbarger: It's done by Sovereign Grace.

Aaron Colyer: Good, thanks.

Aaron Colyer: All right, perfect. Well that kind of leads us into the second question. What specific strategies were used? So other than using Proclaim talk more about 3 Circles. When you do a 3 Circles training, what does that look like? How many people attend that training? Do you do during a major time, like a Sunday or Wednesday. Or is it a different time like a Saturday night? Can you talk more about that?

Phil Westenbarger: Just the time that I had done 3 Circles and did it on a Wednesday night with five to seven people. I used a whiteboard to walk through that and try to teach them how to use it.

Phil Westenbarger: I haven't done it in a Sunday School setting, which I have more people there, but I did go through, in Sunday school, Alvin Reid's book, *Sharing Jesus Without Freaking Out*. And when I did that, I mean people were, they jumped all over it. And several people buy the book and go through it and that kind of created some momentum. I just did that earlier this year. So that's helped a lot of people.

Aaron Colyer: More because they were freaking out or more because they wanted to learn how to share Jesus?

Phil Westenbarger: Both, I think, it kind of showed our responsibility. But the way he talked about it in the book, it's not a, hey, we're just going to go up to random strangers and start this conversation. But rather we're going to use our relationships and our acquaintances and those things that we've already built with people to weave the gospel in and talk about Christ. So that was helpful.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, absolutely. So his emphasis is on relational evangelism.

Phil Westenbarger: Yeah.

Aaron Colyer: Good. So other than those things, would you say, other tools or resources, strategies?

Phil Westenbarger: Those are the three main ones: The Proclaim, the 3 Circles and *Sharing Jesus Without Freaking Out*. The only other thing I would say is in the beginning and here and there, I will in my preaching constantly pushing that idea of we've got to be the people that take this out. It's our mission that we've been given. I gear a lot of preaching toward that.

Aaron Colyer: That's something I'm hearing as I interviewed these pastors from around the country that, that idea that the pulpit emphasizes vision. What passages come to the top of your mind when you think about it's our responsibility to be sharing the gospel and it's being referenced a lot in your preaching. What comes to mind?

Phil Westenbarger: The Great Commission, obviously, I kind of have turned that into our mission statement: to go, teach and serve. Kind of derived that right from the Great Commission saying, hey, everything that we need to do needs to filter through this mission statement of go, teach and serve. It comes straight from the Great Commission. I think, the passage on the two great commandments to love God and love others, implicit in that is a telling the message of the cross. That's how we've come to love God. And that's how we come to love others is by sharing that. And then of course, just as we go through the Old Testament, the concentration of the prophets. I'm preaching through Isaiah right now. Isaiah is constantly talking about the good news even though that's before Christ, he's pointing to the good news of trusting in God and his promises.

Aaron Colyer: No, I appreciate that. Let me ask you another question. And this one's kind of loaded. It assumes that you prioritize celebrating victories. So, if that's not your priority, let me know. But how do you and others in the church lead in developing a system of celebrating victories when it comes to having evangelism as a priority?

Phil Westenbarger: Well, we don't have a baptismal in our church. But we do have a state park about five minutes away. It's a huge lake with a beach. And so one of the ways we prioritize people coming to Christ is through our baptismal services. Which right after our Sunday service, we will go out to Burr Oak Lake. Right on the beach in the midst of 100 and some people that are already there and just have our baptismal service.

Phil Westenbarger: And the people absolutely love that. We've got this big huddle of people around. It's amazing. The entire beach. Everybody swimming, everyone on the beach, it stops. Everything just stopped and everybody's watching.

Aaron Colyer: Now were they doing that before you came six and a half years ago or was that something that just started?

Phil Westenbarger: They would, but not in that scale. I think, you know, they maybe did it once or twice, but we really make a big deal about it.

Aaron Colyer: We do a lake day about baptism every summer. Our state park is about 20 minutes away from the church. So it's not as close. And we also have a baptistry in our building. We're just an old established church and it's a celebration, man. Just like you're saying. One thing we got to do this is just a personal note. But the first year we kind of prayed over the candidates and let them share their testimony and did the baptism. And then the last couple of years we've added some music. I don't know if that's something that y'all do, but it's been a blessing. If there's someone in your church that can play a guitar or even setup a keyboard, if that's what you would need to do, just to sing through two or three songs that helps in showing the public what we're doing too. I mean, obviously we're praising God through the testimony of baptism and that's a picture of the gospel. But then we're also literally singing praise to God and, that's just been fun for us. So an encouragement to you, my friend.

Phil Westenbarger: All right. On that. when we do a baptismal, we'll usually do it right around August. We also have our Connect Our Church picnic with that. So, we had the baptism, and everybody doesn't just leave, but then we

go, and we set up and we eat together and (*inaudible*) out. But also those that have come to Christ and were baptized we've established a process for church membership. We try to lead those people through profession, to baptism and right into church membership. And so I really make a big deal about church membership and really make a big deal about it when somebody joins the church. Really celebrate that. And I think that adds too.

Aaron Colyer: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. Let me ask you this. In over six and a half years, what roadblocks were there, if any, when the congregation is experiencing this change of priority for evangelism and the Great Commission? Any pushback? Any frustration that you experienced? Some hurdles that you all had to get over and God gave you victory through?

Phil Westenbarger: Yeah, I've been extremely blessed with the people. They have not pushed back on any kind of ministry opportunities. Anything that, you know, I've kind of laid out saying, hey look, here's an opportunity for us to go here and set up a booth. We have some activities and events that happen in the community and we like to the set up right there. We'll have some things for kids, have literature just to be able to talk to people in the community. I have never had any pushback on anything like that. They've been, let's do it.

Phil Westenbarger: If we try and make changes inside the building, then that's where the pushback is. It has come in the past. We've got a really small budget so we don't get a lot of money to spend on building changes. We're working toward that right now. But that's been really the only place that I've experienced pushback. They're all about going out and serving and loving the community.

Aaron Colyer: That's very interesting to hear. And I'm curious if that theme is going to come up in other research. But very little push-back about outreach and going out and serving and being the hands and feet of Jesus, but you try to change something in the church and that's when the pushback starts. I, that's interesting. I would not have thought that I would have found that.

Aaron Colyer: One of the things in our church, and maybe this will spark a memory for you, is when gospel conversations began to be a much, much, much greater priority we just had a family that left and I called them and I said, hey, what's going on? And the husband clearly said, we're just tired of hearing several times a month that we're supposed to be going out and sharing the gospel. My wife and I are very shy and we just feel a sense of shame that we will never share the gospel in that way. We will never talk to someone about Jesus. And so we want to go to a church where people aren't talking about sharing their faith all the time.

Aaron Colyer: And I was shocked. I was shocked. And it's one thing to shepherd them through that and say, okay, well, let's talk about how you can pray for the gospel to go out. Let's talk about, how maybe God can bring some conversations right to your door and you don't need to go knock on doors. But what about people you work with the people in your own family who's like, nope, no, we're done. We're done because this is the priority of the church now. And it's not a priority for us. And so we're

going somewhere else. And it was, it was almost this sense of, and I don't want to overemphasize, but spiritual warfare. We're trying to see the kingdom march forward.

Aaron Colyer: It was a minority. So our average worship is about 300. And so one family, you know, that's really a small minority, but it still kind of broke my heart because I thought you need to go to . . . any healthy church is going to be talking about fulfilling the Great Commission. No matter where you go, this is going to happen. Maybe it's going to be less often, maybe it's not going to be several times a month, but it still is going to happen. And what are you going to say then? And so I just tried to encourage them, look, this is a part of our spiritual growth. God understands. He's patient with you and I want to be patient with you too, but this is what the Lord is expecting and this is what I'm going to push you towards. But he wasn't having it, man, which was so interesting that that was a major roadblock for us, but it was isolated. So I praise God for that, that it was isolated.

Aaron Colyer: A last question, man. What are some of the greatest stories of success and things you want to praise God for it? If you think about individuals, maybe you don't want to share their names because this is audio recorded. You think about stories that you just say, I praise God for this. I mean, six and a half years, this is starting to happen. What would you say to that?

Phil Westenbarger: One of the things that I heard often from the church was in their heyday when they would have 50 or 60 people there, a large portion of that was children. So it's never been a problem to get children. We had a bus and we went out and picked up children. I mean, we could raise our numbers like crazy. But they would always say, we could always minister to the children, but we never saw parents and families come in. So I can say, I'm thankful that we've seen that change in some ways. You still have the same people you've seen that their kids come to VBS every year, you're trying to outreach and minister to them and talk with them and they just don't want anything to do with the church. Their kids are coming. But we have seen families come and join up and get involved and that's been awesome to see that that has really changed and is helpful for our church. Let me think here.

Aaron Colyer: You're fine. Take your time. We're doing great on time.

Phil Westenbarger: Several conversations that I've had with people about, like I said earlier, we emphasize church membership and are big on church membership. I have had multiple people say, you know, I just don't understand this whole church membership thing. (*Inaudible*) attenders, but I just don't understand why I would need to join the church. I've always kind of had those conversations throughout the years and several of those people that I've talked with recently joined the church. And just through our conversations and I'll share articles with them. I try to be active on social media, not just with my comments but trying to share good articles and good things to read. So filter in some church membership there. But they, in those conversations I've had, say, you know, I finally come to realize the importance of connecting to a church, a place where we can, you know, dig in and kind of serve the community. That's been awesome to

see where people kind of overcome that. Well, why can't I just attend attitude, really bonded to commit and, and be a part of the church.

Aaron Colyer: Well, let me ask you, because that's the second time you mentioned church membership. So, really think about the (*inaudible*). It'd be easy to come up with an answer on the fly, but in your view and your experience, especially there in Ohio, what is the connection between church membership and understanding the priority of the Great Commission or actively sharing the gospel? Is there a connection? Could you argue, based off of the experience of these people that have seen the importance of being connected and serving, that there's a sense of maybe not causation, but at least a sense of correlation?

Phil Westenbarger: I mean somewhat because when you're committing yourself to a church, then you come in to accountability. You're not just an attender who can say, oh, well, you know, I can come for the services, I can come to the teaching, but don't really want to get involved in that. But when you commit to, of course our statement of faith, we just use the Baptist Faith and Message and we have a covenant that lays out all those things. The expectations of people. We lay out those expectations in our membership class.

Aaron Colyer: Is there an expectation to share the gospel in your church covenant?

Phil Westenbarger: Yeah. yeah.

Aaron Colyer: Okay. Would you send that to me? We've got one, too, and we just call it 10 expectations of a church member that we they expect it from us and then we expect it from them. But I'd be really curious to know how that reads the expectation to share your faith if you're a member in covenant with this Church family.

Phil Westenbarger: I will go ahead and say that this isn't something that I came up with on my own. I borrowed this covenant from Capitol Hill Baptist Church.

Aaron Colyer: Perfect man. Nine Marks has been incredibly influential, with a lot of churches. I mean outside of Baptist churches. So praise God for that. And praise God for a leader like Mark Dever. I almost said Mark Driscoll and that would have been a different conversation. But praise God for leaders like him and how God's using him in the kingdom.

Aaron Colyer: So, listen man, unless you have other questions, I want to spend some time praying for you. And that concludes our research. Again, I'm just very, very grateful that you would take time to do this. We're, we've literally called, I don't know, three, four. There's 500 pastors that we could interview or survey, but some of them, even more than a hundred, probably have bad information, bad phone numbers and stuff like that. So I think our research team of six guys have called almost 400 pastors to take the survey. And you took it. So thank you. And then you went the extra mile to take this interview. So I just really appreciate you for your time, man.

Aaron Colyer: Let me, let me pray for you pastor Phil. Did you have a question or another comment to end with?

Phil Westenbarger: I don't think so.

Aaron Colyer: Okay.

Phil Westenbarger: Is there any kind of new stuff and new research that can come out and help revitalization and replanting?

Aaron Colyer: Yeah. Our goal really is, we'll have to wait a year for the team behind us to finish what they're doing. But I would suspect that our supervisor, his name's Michael Wilder, he's on staff at Southern. He runs the doctoral work. He's the VP of all doctoral work and so, he teaches some.

Phil Westenbarger: I had him for, oh shoot, I can't remember now. Michael Wilder. I would say he, I had him my last semester for Applied Ministry. He is the reason that I went to a small church.

Aaron Colyer: Come on man.

Phil Westenbarger: Yeah, my plant. I mean, he was a big part of that. In that class, because he said very bluntly, there's a lot of you in here, you think you're going to go to some megachurch. What makes you think that you shouldn't go to a small town and give your time there. It struck me.

Aaron Colyer: That's awesome. I think he will be very encouraged to hear that. I think ultimately he's the one that's going to publish. That's typically how doctoral research works is guys have supervisors that they're doing grunt work for. I'm going to publish a thesis. He will likely publish a book. Now, it'll be up to him to decide what kind of involvement he wants us to be. It could just be a mention, hey, thank you. Aaron, this doctoral candidate wrote on evangelism. Or maybe he'll let me write a chapter. That's to be determined, but I'm happy to share my findings. If you'll just, when you email me that covenant and say, hey, I'd love to see a copy when you get published as a thesis. I want to share that with anyone that I interview because that's one of the things that I can give to you for the time that you've put into this.

Aaron Colyer: So let me pray for you. Father, I thank you for Pastor Phil and I thank you. just for his passion to see the kingdom grow. I know, what it says in Psalm 67 to be very true in my life is David prays bless us, oh God, bless us, make your face shine upon us. That he's praying that so that the nations might know you, so that the people's might praise you. And so I just pray that I pray blessings over pastor Phil and Glouster Southern Baptist Church. I pray, God, that you would give him patience and endurance to continue to shepherd people through all kinds of things. The importance of the Great Commission and the mission of the church and church membership. And what that accountability looks like. Father, I just ask that you would use him in big ways. Help them to see every celebration, every baptism, every repentant new believer, every sense of somebody starting to obey you and really fulfill John 15 that your disciples prove to be disciples by bearing much fruit. Those would be the kind of celebrations that continue to give him the endurance to pour out and to preach your Word and to cast a vision for your namesake and for your glory and for the kingdom growing. We just pray again your blessing over those things and we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Aaron Colyer: Well, thanks again man. Listen, God's blessings on you in Ohio and I'll text you my email if you'll shoot me the covenant and anything else I can do in the future, man, you just let me know.

Phil Westenbarger: Okay.

Aaron Colyer: All right. Talk to you later. Adios.

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ABSTRACT

CHURCH REVITALIZATION AND EVANGELISTIC EMPHASIS: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018
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The numbers are alarming. Seventy-four percent of churches within the SBC are in a state of decline or plateau. The church at large has a responsibility to reverse these trends and refuse to watch the evangelical church in America lose ground as it demonstrates more severe symptoms of mortality. Now more than ever is the time to ask the hard questions, seek God's face, and press into the command to fulfill the Great Commission. What is it going to take to reverse the problem of church decline and death?

While revitalization is certainly a topic of interest among evangelical church leaders, some of the most pertinent literature is already dated. Acknowledging that there is a great deal of new information from this past decade and the fact that there is scant research with the specific focus on evangelistic emphasis for church revitalization were the leading motivators for this study.

This study used a three-phase, sequential mixed-methods research design to identify successful church revitalizations and determine what influence a focus of evangelistic fervor had on those successes. In the quantitative portion of the research 716, or 3.44% of SBC churches who had experienced decline or plateau from 2006-2016 were found to have experienced revitalization. These churches were surveyed, and 129 pastors responded by completed the survey instrument. Of the pastors surveyed, 82.50 percent indicated evangelism as "Important" or "Highly Important" in the revitalization process. Selection criteria were applied to identify churches to participate in the qualitative phase.

In the qualitative phase 12 in-depth interviews were conducted to identify best practices among pastors who have led their churches through the revitalization. The top ten include the pastor doing the following: used church member testimonies to celebrate key wins, planned evangelism training, preached emphasis on gospel conversations, communicated clear mission and vision of the church, prioritized setting the example for evangelism, maintained slow culture shift with awareness of on-going revitalization progress, motivated by biblical truths, focused upon prayer, emphasized relational evangelism, displayed an awareness of the Holy Spirit. Discerning these “best practices” not only has application for dying and plateaued churches, but also for growing churches to maintain church health.

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