



Praying with Jesus

40 DAYS FOR CHURCH RENEWAL



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STRONGER CHURCHES NETWORK

Welcome to the church renewal journey! This is not a fixer-upper project. Joining God's activity to move churches toward greater health is holy ground and steward of trust. Jesus loves the church and gave His lifeblood for her. When we step into this work, we step in with His presence, promise, and power to restore a gospel witness to every neighbor and to the nations.

This resource is vital to this work because the greatest barrier to church renewal is spiritual in nature. Whether apathy, unresolved conflict, traditionalism, or distractions and busyness, the challenges to churches moving toward health and vitality are issues of the heart.

The Stronger Churches Network of the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board exists to invite every church into a fresh encounter with Jesus and to move toward greater health so that every person in Tennessee can have more opportunities to hear and respond to the gospel.

After much prayer and collaboration with local pastors, church members, and associational leaders, the Strengthening Healthy Churches Team clarified the definition of a healthy church, also known as a "stronger church."

WHAT IS A STRONGER CHURCH?

A Stronger Church surrenders to the will of God and walks in the ways of God to reveal the glory of God.

AN INVITATION

The Strengthening Healthy Churches Team invites every church into a local cohort connected to a statewide network, called the Stronger Churches Network, designed to help churches move toward spiritual, relational, practical, and missional renewal resulting in more effective Gospel ministry.

SEVEN AXIOMS

Based on the prayer and collaboration mentioned earlier, we developed seven axioms that guide our work:

1. Every church needs a fresh encounter with Jesus.
2. Surrender precedes strategy.
3. Only the church bears the responsibility for a community's lostness and brokenness.
4. Churches renew churches.
5. Local context shapes the work of church renewal.
6. Church networks create capacity for sustained kingdom impact.
7. Jesus is victorious, so we are a people of hope.

THE STRATEGY

The spiritual and relational foundations built in local cohorts provide the opportunity and resources necessary for churches to help churches move toward practical and missional health. Guided by catalysts and encouraged by coaches, local pastors and churches deepen relationships and discover ways to help one another move toward greater health until every person in their community has every opportunity to hear and respond to the Gospel.

Please refer to the Appendix for helpful tools and resources.

For more information and to connect the Stronger Churches Network, please contact our team by completing the form here: bit.ly/strongerchurches.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Jamison (Jamie) L. Work has served as a pastor and international missionary for 42 years in five churches, three states, and in two foreign countries. While serving as a pastor in the U.S., Dr. Work sponsored three successful church plants, started two Christian schools, and initiated a Church Planting and Theological Training Institute. He and his wife served with the IMB for three years in the Middle East.

He has led a church revitalization project and led three of the five churches he pastored to sponsor church planting projects. In addition to writing this 40-Day Church Revitalization Prayer Guide that is broadly used across several state conventions, Dr. Work has served in various leadership roles within the local association, State Conventions, as well as the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).

The heartbeat of Work's ministry has been discipling, equipping, and mobilizing believers to embrace God's call to disciple the nations, with special emphasis on the least reached and unreached peoples in the 10/40 Window. Dr. Work serves as one of two International Mission Board (IMB) Associational Network Strategists. He works with Associational leaders in the Eastern half of the U.S. assisting them in everything from missions training events, resources, adopting unreached people groups, missionary connections, partnerships, Mission Conferences, preaching and speaking, leading Associational Mission Strategist/Director of Missions (AMS/ DOM) Cohorts for International Missions, Acts 1:8 organization, diaspora peoples, prayer partnerships, missions preaching, or anything else connected to our Global assignment from the Lord Jesus Christ.

A STORY OF CHURCH RENEWAL

Dr. Jamie Work pastored Candies Creek Baptist Church in Charleston, Tennessee for 18 years. In the final five years of that season of ministry, Pastor Work and the people of Candies Creek Church experienced the providential hand of God in remarkable ways. Every single miracle they experienced is directly attributable to decades of faithful praying by the Candies Creek family combined with the grace and mercy of God. The initiation of God's reshaping and renewal work began with a six-week long revival anointed with the manifest presence of God in April and May 2011. This "re-digging the wells" of faith, repentance, cleaning holiness, and devotion among the congregation led to Candies Creek trusting God to do things they only dreamed of before. The first was the launching of a satellite campus called Candies Creek City Church; a satellite campus intended to become their own church as God would allow.

WHAT DID GOD ACCOMPLISH THROUGH PRAYER IN THE WORK OF CHURCH RENEWAL?

- The people prayed for pastoral leadership. God provided four volunteer, bi-vocational pastoral staff, all under age 35.
- The people prayed for meeting space. God provided a beautiful, brand new high school auditorium for \$100 per month, and later a gift of 6 acres and 3 buildings in a prime location.
- The people prayed for the finances to renovate 1950's buildings when there was nothing in the budget for renovation. God provided finances from denominational agencies, individuals, foundations, the local association, and special offerings from the Candies Creek and City Church congregations. In all, more than \$270,000.
- The people prayed for souls. God allowed City Church, now Public Church, to baptize almost 100 people during that early season.
- The people prayed for impact on the next generation, those under the age of 30 years old. Public Church grew to over 600 people in worship with 80% attendees under the age of 30.

God is faithful to restore and renew!

In all of these efforts, beginning with the "fresh wind" of God's reviving Spirit in 2011, prayer has been the critical element, second only to the grace of God. Pastor Jamie wrote this resource convinced that "nothing happens apart from prayer," and that "what is birthed in prayer is sustained only by prayer." Candies Creek Church, and the ministries she has launched, is living proof that prayer moves the hand of God, and that "nothing is impossible for God" to do through those who trust Him for what seems ridiculous and unreasonable. God still does that which is "exceedingly more than we can ask of think."

INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of time prayer has been the vital link between God and man. Adam and Eve in initially enjoyed intimate, face-to-face fellowship, but after they disobeyed God, their fellowship with Him was broken. Still, human hearts longed for fellowship with their Creator. Adam's and Eve's son Seth established the precedent and priority of prayer for all those who believe in the One True God.

This pattern continued throughout the Old Testament among men and women of faith. Noah spoke with God and *"did according to all that the Lord had commanded him"* (Genesis 7:5). Abraham and Isaac were men of prayer (Genesis 20:17; 25:21), and Job was so thoroughly acquainted with God that even great personal loss did not cause him to doubt nor curse God (Job 2:10).

Hannah pleaded with God for a son, and prayed with heartfelt thanksgiving when He answered her prayer (1 Samuel 1:11; 2:1-10). Nehemiah was driven to give up a significant career because of his prayer relationship with God (Nehemiah 2:5), and Esther and Daniel put their very lives on the line because of prayer (Esther 4:16; Daniel 6:10). We cannot read about the saints of old without being struck by their prayerful communion with God!

This same lifestyle of prayer continued in the life of Christ (Mark 1:35; John 17; Matthew 26:36-46), the apostles (Acts 1:14), Stephen (Acts 7:60), Peter (Acts 9:40), Paul (Acts 9:11; 1 Timothy 2:1-4), James (James 5:16), John (Revelation 1:10-11), and many others.

Martin Luther once said, "To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing." For your church to remain healthy, alive, and vibrant for the Kingdom of God, prayer is non-negotiable. It is our prayer that this guide will help you and your church begin, or continue, the journey toward church renewal through whatever method God chooses as He enlightens you during this prayer journey.

The following pages of Scriptures, guiding thoughts, and suggested prayers are designed to help you move through seven critical dimensions of personal and congregational renewal that will strengthen and build the revitalization effort, as you bathe each one in prayer:

1. Searching My Own Heart (Days 1-5)
2. Rebuilding Trust in God's Word (Days 6-10)
3. Honoring Christ's Lordship (Days 11-15)
4. Resolving Our Differences (Days 16-19)
5. Following Kingdom Leaders (Days 20-26)
6. Re-Establishing Jesus' Priorities (Days 27-33)
7. Patiently Awaiting Transformation (Days 34-40)

As you read, reflect, and pray, please feel free to add other Spirit-breathed insights to your praying.

(All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard translation, unless otherwise noted)

DAY ONE

The Gospel of Mark carries the tone of **urgency** from his first words. *“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God... make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.”*
(Mark 1:1,3)

“...Kindle afresh the gift of god which is in you... for God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.”

(2 Tim. 1:6-7)

DO YOU FEEL THE URGENCY?

While many factors have contributed to your church's its current condition, you cannot treat the situation with “kid gloves,” as though your church's assignment is dispensable.

Your community needs a healthy, vibrant, growing church; the lost people around you need a compassionate, Spirit-led, Great Commission church; and your fellow church members need the warmth, love, hope, and nurture of a faithfully Christ-centered, sacrificial fellowship. It is time to make ready the way of the Lord; to make His paths straight!

Read Mark 1. Underline how many times the word “immediately” (NASB; ESV), or “at once” or “without delay” (NIV), or “straightway” (KJV), appears. Shouldn't this urgency compel you and your church to embrace the revitalization process sooner rather than later?

PRAY...

Father, I realize the complete revitalization of Your church depends on my willingness to “make ready Your way” now. Jesus, this is your church, I surrender it to you; and I invite you to change me in every way necessary to make Your church a healthy, vibrant, Kingdom-focused people fully living YOUR WAY! Jesus, I “repent and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Now is Your time, Jesus! Have Your way!! Use me as Your instrument. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

DAY TWO

Read Luke 10:38-42

IDEAS AND IDEALS

When you describe your ideal life in an ideal house in an ideal setting, the picture you describe will likely be different than someone else's. We all hold dear our ideas and ideals, and yet they are very often different than the plans God has for us.

HOW ABOUT YOU?

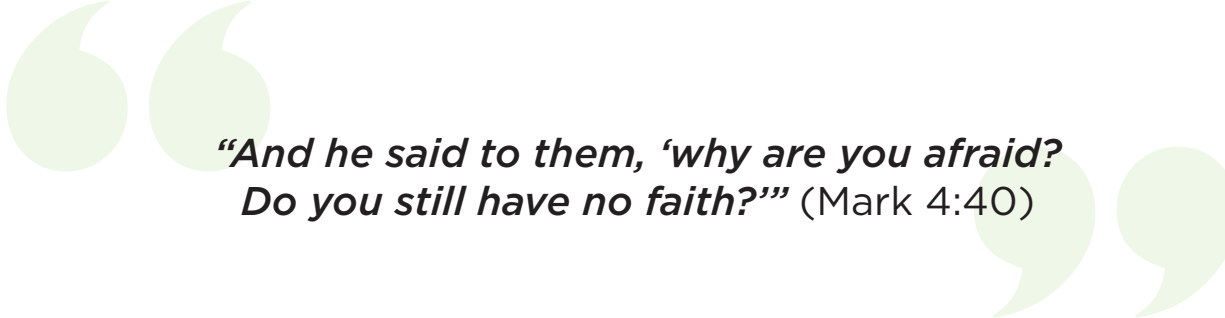
It seems each generation has their own ideas about what the church should do, how it should behave, what songs to sing, and what church buildings should look like, to name just a few areas of strong opinion. Are you willing to surrender your own ideas in order to see your church flourish once again in gospel growth, community impact, and Kingdom advance? Or are you worried and bothered about the potential that things as you have always known might change if you embrace revitalization?

Martha loved Jesus and eagerly welcomed Him into their home, but she was not too happy with her sister Mary. Mary was sitting at the Lord's feet while Martha was distracted with all the household responsibilities. She demanded that Jesus do something about it, but Jesus's response tells us a lot about the things that cause us to be **worried and bothered**. Unfortunately, those things are usually the wrong priority. Jesus is the priority; making much of Him is the objective of vibrant churches.

PRAY...

Lord Jesus, I confess that I am often worried and bothered about nonessential things instead of keeping my attention fixed on You. Build a new perspective in my heart and mind that longs for spiritual life in our church regardless of what songs we sing, the type of chairs we sit in, or the kind of building we have. Please do whatever it takes to breathe life into us again for the glory of Your Name alone. I ask it in Your strong Name, Amen.

DAY THREE



“And he said to them, ‘why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?’” (Mark 4:40)

FEAR OR FAITH?

Read Mark 4:35-41

Going on a journey with Jesus is *not* a guarantee for a trouble-free, uneventful adventure. Just ask His disciples. He invited them to cross the Sea of Galilee, and they gladly headed to the privacy of the other shore. Before long, however, Jesus’ kind invitation turned into a nightmare of a storm.

Where was Jesus? Asleep. He understood where they were going and how they would fare on the journey. The disciples did not, so they panicked. When their fear-filled pleas woke Him, Jesus stilled the sea and cautioned the men never to doubt what God is doing even in a storm.

The journey of church renewal will bring some stormy moments of fear. Will you gladly trust Jesus when things seem upside down or inside out? Will you choose fear or faith?

PRAY...

Sovereign God, I know in my head that you have created all things and in you all things hold together (Col. 1:16-17). Still there are so many things that I do not know or understand, so I am pleading with You, our Great, Magnificent, All-Powerful God, to calm my fears as we seek your restoring, revitalizing work in our fellowship. Keep my heart and mind at peace in Jesus, in whose Name I pray. Amen.

DAY FOUR

Of course, Mark’s gospel account is not the only place in the New Testament wherein a sense of urgency is portrayed. John’s gospel records words of urgency directly from Jesus’ mouth. “We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:4).

Read John 9:1-12. Jesus healed the man who had been born blind in order to display the works of God through the man’s life. List three things here that would display the works of God in your community if your church pursues—and experiences—revitalization:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

THE UNKNOWNNS

Did you notice the things that were unknown by the participants in John’s account of the blind man’s healing? His disciples did not know why the man had been born blind. No one knew how clay could bring sight to blind eyes. The blind man’s neighbors did not know how the blind man came to have sight. The blind man did not know where Jesus had gone after Jesus had healed him.

Every situation has unknown factors. Generally, we do not like having unknown factors because we like to have everything under **our** control. But in the work of church renewal you will encounter unexpected unknowns for which you could not plan. What will you do with them? Will you be willing, just like the participants in the blind man’s healing, to trust every detail to Jesus? Are you ready to entrust all the unknown factors in the renewal of your church to His sovereign rule?

PRAY...

Lord Jesus, I must admit that the whole business of renewing our church is somewhat frightening. There are many unknowns. Yet, it is also exciting to think about the lives that will be changed and the influence we can have once again in our community for the sake of the Gospel! Still, Lord, I am sure there will be things about this renewal effort that will be uncomfortable for me personally; things that will be out of my control. I want to say with all my heart today that—I trust You! You spoke everything into existence! You are the substance by which all things are held together! I believe You will gloriously manage all the unknowns that come into play in the complete renewal of our church. I trust You to do it! In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

DAY FIVE

Read Psalm 111

A PRAYER OF PRAISE...

Now, join the Psalmist in praising and thanking God for His goodness, His works, His righteousness, His gifts, His power, His redemption, and His covenant. Write words of praise below:

Lord, I praise you for your... _____

A PLACE FOR PRAISE

You can probably remember when, in an earlier day, there was a general sense of excitement among your fellow church members; a time when the place of worship was filled with the praises of God's people. That is God's intent for the gathering place of His people. That is what Jesus expected to find when He entered the Temple in the First Century. *"It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of **prayer**'... have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared **praise** for Yourself?'"* (Matthew 21:13, 16). Prayer. Praise. In His house. Among His people. Can it begin again with you?

PRAY...

Father, I can remember when we gathered with people on our church campus with excitement about You, Your goodness, grace, mercy, and love. I remember when we filled our gathering place with praise to Your Holy Name. O God, restore those days among us through Your miraculous revitalizing work in our church. I believe it is urgent that You act now to restore us to Your purpose. We are desperate for You; change us for the sake of Your eternal and glorious **PRAISE!** Let Your praise fill our hearts and our gathering place once again.

DAY SIX

“If you continue in my word, then you are truly disciples of mine and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”
(John 8:31-32)

CONTINUE IN MY WORD

Perhaps the most important dimension of church renewal is the restoration of God's people to a profound confidence in God's Word. Jesus' promises surrounding His Word are numerous. In John 8:31-32, He promises that faithfully giving heed to His Word on a continuing basis proves we are His followers. In John 15:7 He promises that abiding in His Word and allowing that Word to transformatively abide in us opens the doorway of prayer and allows us to bear much fruit for His glory. In John 14:23 He promises that those who keep His Word will be loved by His Heavenly Father and will eventually make their home with God. In John 8:51 He promises those who keep His word will never see death!

The beginning of a new week is an ideal time to recognize and confess any lack of confidence we have been demonstrating, real or otherwise, in God's Word. His Word is timeless and unchanging; it is fully dependable and trustworthy. Throughout the renewal process you will need to daily profess your confidence in, and dependence upon, His Word. *“Do not lean on your own understanding, [but] in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight”* (Proverbs 3:5b-6). *“Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”* (Psalm 119:105).

PRAY...

Father, I confess that I have not always delighted in, nor trusted in Your Word. I turn from my faltering faith and ask Your forgiveness for my lack of confidence in Your Word; forgive my failure to believe that Your Word is settled in heaven forever. Today I am asking You to restore my full confidence in Your Word and that You will use Your Word to guide me, and our church family, through every phase of the restoration and renewal process for Your eternal glory and praise. I ask this in the Name that is above every other name, Amen.

DAY SEVEN

There were plenty of accusations. “They want our property so they can sell it to fund their own ministries,” suggested one opponent to the renewal partnership being offered by a sister church.

Sometimes there are church leaders who have lost their faith perspective and have forgotten whose church it is after all – if it is a church, then it belongs to Jesus. And He has the right to change whatever He wants to change in the renewal process.

Another used scare tactics among the few remaining homebound members by overstating the value of the church’s property and how a partnering church would use this value to their own advantage. Still another accusation came from the chairman of the few remaining deacons, “Those offering us assistance only want to make a name for themselves, and they care nothing about us.” These, and many other misguided, yet painful, accusations may very well be a part of your church’s efforts toward renewal. Despite their opposition, stay the course because part of the process of renewal is the cleansing of hearts and motives among those who resist the process.

INSIDE OUT

Jesus challenged the Pharisees on more than one occasion to be careful about putting on a religious front when, in fact, their hearts were yet unclean in motive or attitude. *“Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness”* (Luke 11:39). *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like white-washed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness”* (Matthew 23:27). Not only must we make sure our attitudes and actions are pure before the Lord in this revitalization effort, but we must also pray for our brothers and sisters who are demonstrating something less than pure motives and attitudes in their reaction to God’s work of revitalization.

PRAY...

Jesus, thank you for giving our church the opportunity for renewal and greater health. I know the process will not be easy, but with You all things are possible, and we are trusting in Your ever-present help throughout the process. Please cleanse my heart, and the hearts of all our church members of any evil, conspiring, or uncooperative spirit in the revitalization process so that You alone can gain glory and Your church be reclaimed for Your great purpose. I pray in Jesus’ Name. Amen.

DAY EIGHT

Read John 17:13-21

Use whatever resources you have at your disposal (commentaries, Bible software, Bible dictionaries, etc.) to examine John 17:17, and particularly the word “sanctify” as it appears in that verse. Write what you discover here:

SANCTIFY

In your research on the word “sanctify” you should have come across information that says “sanctify” means to “set apart for special use.” The word comes from the Greek word from which we get the word for “holy” or “holiness.” It is an action initiated and conducted by God Himself in the lives of His people. And in the case of Jesus’ prayer request in John 17:17, it is a work God performs through His Word in the hearts and minds of His people. We are set apart unto God, out of this world, and beyond the reason and logic that drives humanity, through the work God does in us as we give ourselves to His Word. He “sanctifies” us in the truth, which is His Word. No tool in your renewal process will be more valuable than God’s Word. Keep it close. Read, study, meditate on, and memorize it daily.

PRAY...

Father, in keeping with Jesus’ own prayer on behalf of His disciples present with Him, as well as for all those who would believe in Jesus because of the testimony of those first disciples, I plead with You for Your sanctifying work in my own heart and life as I give myself daily to Your Word. Let Your Word dwell richly within me, and within our church family, that we will be sanctified in Your truth, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in our hearts for all that You are doing among us. I ask this in Jesus Name. Amen.

DAY NINE

Jesus is both the essence of life and the Giver of life. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men”* (John 1:1-4).

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly.”

(John 10:10)

This life that Jesus gives is not just fire insurance against an eternity in hell, but it is the very substance of life in the present. He knows better than anyone else exactly what your church needs in order to be a life-giving force in your community.

FROM WORD TO LIFE

Read John 5:24. Fill in the blanks below:

“...he who hears My word, and _____ Him who sent Me, has _____ life...”

“...[he] does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into _____ .”

When we believe God’s Word, we avoid judgment, pass out of death’s claws, and receive LIFE!! This is true for eternity and for today! You and your church, as you believe God’s Word, His promises, and assurances, will begin to experience NEW LIFE in Christ!

PRAY...

Lord Jesus, help me to cling to Your Word as the very substance of life for me today and throughout eternity. Thank you for giving us Your Word; I want to thirst for it like the Psalmist, as the deer pants for the water brook, so let me soul thirst for You and Your Word. Use Your Word in me to build my faith and to help re-shape our church into an effective instrument for the Gospel in our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, I ask in Jesus’ Name. Amen.

DAY TEN

Read Luke 6:46-49

Which person in Luke 6:46-49 are you most like right now, today?

___ The person building a house on a rock-solid foundation because you do whatever Jesus says.

___ The person building a house with no foundation because you are ignoring Jesus' instructions.

RETURNING TO THE WORD

Church renewal is about a group of Christ-followers surrendering all their own pre-conceived ideas about what their church should look like and how it should behave, and returning to the Author of their faith, upon whom the church is founded.

*‘Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’
and not do what I say?’*
(Luke 6:46)

We started this section of prayers by renewing our confidence in God's Word. Not just for the sake of our church's renewal, but ultimately for God's own glory and for our personal and corporate good. Let us close out this section by asking God to transform our minds according to His Word so that we might prove what is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God concerning our church.

PRAY...

Lord, I love Your Word; I praise You for providing such a wonderful road map for life and living. You are my hiding place and my shield; from now on I will wait for Your Word. I place my own thoughts and ideas in submission to Your Word. Sustain me according to Your Word, that I may live the life You designed for me, and in so doing be a part of a renewed church family set upon the very same purpose. Uphold me by Your Word; strengthen my resolve to seek Your Word before the counsel of others, and then compel all of us together to obey whatever You say. We love you and Your Word. In your Son's Name, Amen.

DAY ELEVEN

“Every church needing revitalization can assume at some point in the ups and downs of their existence that they lost sight of the Biblical model and structure of authority and must begin to recover it if any other patters of dysfunction can be addressed to ensure a healthy direction for the future. Authority matters. Who is in charge in your church? Jesus is the bridegroom of His bride. He is in charge. He is the one to whom the church must submit if it is to have life and experience the unity that only He can bring, for it came at the cost of His own life (Eph. 2:11-15).”

—Brian Croft, “Biblical Church Revitalization”

WHO’S IN CHARGE?

When Peter correctly answered Jesus’ probing question about His identity, Jesus not only affirmed Peter’s answer, but went further to explain what it meant for Him to be “*the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Matthew 16:16). Jesus went on to say that “*...I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it*” (Matthew 16:18)

As Brian Croft wrote in his book quoted above, Jesus is in charge. “He is the one to whom the church must submit if it is to have life and experience the unity that only He can bring...”

As a friend of mine often says when pressing someone for an honest answer, “If someone held a gun to your head demanding to know who was in charge of your church, what would you answer?” If it is anyone other than Jesus Christ then some serious repentance, prayer, and reorientation needs to happen.

PRAY...

Read Matthew 16:13-20

Jesus, I acknowledge and submit to Your authority, and Your authority alone, over Your church. I am not the authority in our church, nor is any other person the authority. Please forgive me for any time that I have attempted to exercise my own authority in Your church, as though it belonged to me and not to You. Please restore a deep sense of humility among all the leaders in our church, and a glad desire to submit to Your authority alone. I agree with Peter, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!” and thereby You have full authority to reign in Your church. I surrender and submit myself to You, King of all kings, and Lord of all lords! Amen!

DAY TWELVE

Read John 9:35-41

On Day Four we read the earlier part of John 9 in which we learn about Jesus healing the man born blind. In today's passage Jesus is having a conversation with some religious leaders about the blind man and his healing, not willing themselves to believe that Jesus had sufficient power to do such a miracle. Because of their stubborn hearts and unwillingness to believe, Jesus referred to the religious leaders as "blind" themselves.

List here the two greatest barriers you can identify that will need to be overcome in order for your church to be renewed:

1. _____

2. _____

BELIEVE

The Pharisees in John 9 were insistent that Jesus could not have the power to heal blind eyes. Only God could do such a miracle. So, they questioned the formerly blind man twice; they questioned his parents. Yet they could not disprove that Jesus had done something unexplainable to them.

Don't you want Jesus to do something unexplainable in your church? Don't you long to see Him restore Gospel fervency and evangelistic effectiveness in your church family? Jesus is the One who can do it! Not a committee; not the remaining members of your congregation. Only Jesus. Do you believe? Do you think He can solve, demolish, and overwhelm the barriers you listed above? Do you believe?

PRAY...

Lord Jesus, we have evaluated our situation many times, even prayed over it; honestly, our prayers have often been without true faith that You could actually do anything about our plight. But today, I renounce my own "blindness;" I turn away from my "blindness;" I embrace Your mighty power. You can do anything! I believe! You can walk on water; bring water from a rock; part a river and even the sea! You can raise the dead, and You can breathe life into dry bones! Jesus, I cry out to You, with the rest of my church family, pleading for Your miraculous intervention in our church. You are able! I believe You can overcome every barrier that stands against us, and I surrender my own defeatist perspective to your conquering grace! Jesus, come and do what only You can do in our church. In Jesus' Name. Amen!

DAY THIRTEEN

Luke 6:1-11 contains two specific instances wherein Jesus did something which did not fit the traditional understanding or interpretation of one of the Ten Commandments - *“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy”* (Exodus 20:8).

Read carefully through Luke 6:1-11 and write here how the Pharisees had misinterpreted and misapplied Exodus 20:8 in their approach to Scripture:

TRADITIONS THAT GO BEYOND SCRIPTURE

If Jesus were to visit your church this week, what are some of the things your church “traditionally” does that are not mandated by Scripture, but might be currently “treasured” as unchangeable as though they were mandated by Scripture? (In other words, some people might be upset if you do not do these things anymore; or some people might be tenaciously insistent that these things never change.)

List just four things here:

- 1) _____ 2) _____
3) _____ 4) _____

Can you recognize that things we often cling to, that do not come directly from Scripture, are often some of the things that need to change in your church if you are going to experience revitalization? If not, ask Jesus to open your eyes to this reality, and then pray this prayer...

PRAY...

Heavenly Father, I believe the testimony of Your Word - that indeed You created the heavens and the earth and that Your creative work was performed through Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. I believe and affirm that through Christ all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, both visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities; that all things have been created through Jesus and for Jesus. He knows best about all the rules that should be associated with His creation and His church, which He bought with His own shed blood. Therefore, Father, today I surrender all the preconceived ideas which me and my church have added to Your design or to Your specifications in Scripture by way of our “sacred traditions.” I submit myself once again to the full authority of Christ and His Word. In Jesus’ Name I pray, Amen.

DAY FOURTEEN

“They were amazed at his teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes”

(Mark 1:22)

Read Mark 1:21-28. *In what two notable ways was Jesus’ authority realized by the people?*

- Authority in His _____ . (v 22)
- Authority over _____ spirits. (v 27)

After His death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus declared His authority over everything! Matthew 28:18-20 records His words to this effect. What is the extent of His authority to which He refers to Matthew 28:18? “_____ authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”

ALL AUTHORITY

Throughout His life, and particularly during His ministry, Jesus demonstrated His authority, until, through His death, burial, and resurrection, He unquestionably held *ALL* authority!

- Authority over creation (John 1:3; Col. 1:17).
- Authority over all tangible and intangible resources (Phil 4:19).
- Authority over disease and physical handicap (Mark 6:53-56; 7:31-37; 8:22-25; 10:46-52).
- Authority over the spirits (Mark 5:1-13).
- Authority over religion (Mark 11:15-18).
- Authority over man’s plans (Matthew 16:21-23).
- Authority over sin, the grave, and death (1 Corinthians 15:50-58; Revelation 1:17-18).

PRAY...

Jesus, You have demonstrated that You stand alone in creation and human history as the One with *ALL* authority. I bow in total submission to Your authority. You are our Sovereign God, Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, and victorious Savior vanquishing sin, the grave, and death! I praise You and worship You above all other things, for You alone are worthy to receive glory, honor, and praise. Please exercise Your great, majestic authority over our church and bring renewal to our fellowship, our effectiveness, our missional life, and our ministries, all for the glory of Your Name! Amen!!

DAY FIFTEEN

“Who is this man?” is a question that occurred on several different occasions during Jesus’ ministry. Some of Simon the Pharisee’s friends asked this question when Jesus forgave the sins of the woman who anointed his feet with expensive perfume (Luke 7:49). Herod the tetrarch asked this question upon hearing about Jesus’ ministry (Luke 9:9). His own disciples asked this question after seeing Jesus calm a storm with just His words (Matthew 8:27). On each occasion Jesus had done something unimaginable; He solved an impossible situation; He prevailed where no ordinary human could possibly prevail.

WHO IS THIS MAN?

Read Luke 2:15-20 and 2:41-51

The Bible says that even _____ treasured the events, people, and surprise occurrences surrounding Jesus’ birth and later His conversations with learned teachers in the Temple. In a similar way to those who asked, *“Who is this man?”* Mary pondered everything about this miraculous Son promised by an angel, and given to her by God!

He is God incarnate! (John 1:1-5). God in the flesh; Risen Savior; ever interceding at the right hand of God the Father on behalf of His children. That means His exaltation is for the glory of God and the good of His people. Yes, and even those who are a part of a church in need of renewal! He is your God! Powerful in every way to restore and renew all things for His glory!

PRAY...

Jesus, please forgive my doubts about our church ever being restored to Your purpose. It is so hard for me to see how you can bring renewal, but I am convinced again today, by Your Word, that You are Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth; the One who walks among the stars and calls each one by name. The God of salvation and mercy. Nothing is too hard for You!! Please restore my faith in Your strength, wisdom, and power. And grant me faith to believe that nothing is impossible for You! I ask this in the Name above all other names. Amen!

DAY SIXTEEN

The spectacular views of the Grand Canyon remind us not only of God's greatness and His sovereign rule over His creation, but also the deep chasms that can occur in a church family that often precipitate the need for the renewal your church family now seeks.

CONFLICT, DISAGREEMENT, RESOLVE

Bill Henard, in his book Can These Bones Live?, says that "One of the primary reasons that a church turns inward comes from present or past conflicts within the congregation," and that "problems and conflicts occur in all churches of all sizes," and that "unforgiveness represents the foremost internal conflict most often ignored in the church" (Chapter 8). Unforgiving hearts are usually one of the primary causes of spiritual decline both personally and within the church. That is why there are so many exhortations in the Bible like these:

- *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Ephesians 5:31-32).*
- *"So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you" (Colossians 3:12-13).*

PRAY...

Father God, I thank you that in Christ You have forgiven me all my sins and reckoned me as righteous through the atonement of Christ. I have gladly received Your forgiveness; make me equally glad to extend the same forgiveness to those who offend, disappoint, or hurt me. Transform my tendency to hold grudges into Christlike mercy toward others. Dissolve all my inner bitterness and unforgiveness in the shed blood of Jesus, and restore to me a clean heart out of which I gladly forgive others. I ask this in Your Son's Name, Amen.

DAY SEVENTEEN

“Therefore, if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.” (Matthew 5:23-24)

RECONCILIATION

I had not been their pastor very long. In an effort to become acquainted with the older members of the congregation, I invited one long-time member to be my visitation partner for a few months. The first time we went visiting together he surprised me at the end of the afternoon. Pulling into the church parking lot he reached into his shirt pocket to reveal a note card with the names of ten men written on it. “Pastor,” he began, “these ten men have deeply offended me, and I want them brought before the church to answer for what they have done.” As we talked, I learned that he had been carrying this list of names around for more than three years, but had never attempted reconciliation with any one of them. Biblical reconciliation was missing from his demand; he was only interested in revenge.

Perhaps you need to be reconciled to a brother or sister in Christ. Perhaps others in your church family are at distant odds over some issue or another. Regardless of what the offense, without forgiveness and reconciliation, your church will continue to struggle, and revitalization attempts will be stymied.

PRAY...

Lord Jesus, we are a broken people, and among us we have broken relationships that, apart from Your grace, will continue to hamper the fellowship and the effectiveness of our church. Please show Yourself strong by surfacing every previous offense that is strangling us, and compel us, by Your Holy Spirit, to speak the truth in love to one another and to offer to one another the same forgiveness which You have so generously given to us. Please break down every stronghold of bitterness and unforgiveness in our fellowship, and replace it with the fruit of Your Holy Spirit. I humbly ask in Your Name. Amen.

DAY EIGHTEEN

“God’s Word and Spirit are so powerful that they can not only build a healthy church, but even take a dying, broken, discouraged congregation and give it renewed life, causing it to flourish far beyond what its founders ever imagined.” These are words written by Pastor Brian Croft in his article “Five Unexpected Lessons in Church Revitalization,” and recorded in a 9Marks Journal entitled, *Revitalize: Why We Must Reclaim Dying Churches - and How*.

GOD’S WORD

Read John 15:1-11

Identify three things Jesus talks about in this passage that need to be either developed or initiated, or advanced among your church family. List them here as three specific prayer requests: “Father, shape us into a church that...”

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Include these three prayer requests in your prayer below...

PRAY...

Jesus, thank you for teaching us in John 15 about faithfully abiding in You and Your Word, bearing fruit, being pruned, staying connected to You as our life source, prayer, obedience to Your commandments, love, and joy. Our church family is desperate for You to do a new work among us in these areas (include your prayer requests here)...

In Jesus’ Name I pray, Amen.

DAY NINETEEN

Read Matthew 6:1-15

This passage of Scripture links prayer in a believer's life with at least three critical heart elements. These heart elements, when laid bare by the work of the Holy Spirit, reveal whether or not a believer is rightly aligned with God's heart:

- Theatrics = *"beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them"* (6:1,5)
- Verbosity = *"when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition"* (6:7)
- Forgiveness = *"forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors"* (6:12,14-15)

AUTHENTICITY

There is no place in Christ's church for hypocrisy. Jesus warned His followers not to make their faith activities a performance to impress others (Matthew 6:1,5,16). Neither should believers judge others because there is yet plenty in their own lives to be judged (Matthew 7:1-5). Instead Jesus both lived and taught authenticity in our relationship with Him and with one another. Are either of these statements true about you or about any one in your church family?

- *"This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me, but in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men"* (Matthew 15:8-9).
- *"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man..."* (Matthew 15:19-20a)

When we fail to be authentic with Jesus, we will undoubtedly be playing a masquerade with our fellow believers. Let us repent of our lack of authenticity and come clean with Jesus about our hypocrisy today.

PRAY...

Father God, I want to come clean about my hypocrisy. It is creating chaos in my walk with You and in my relationships with my brothers and sisters in Christ. Please forgive me for not living an authentic Christian life, and by Your grace empower me to live soberly and uprightly in my walk with You and in my relationships with fellow believers. I desire to walk in the Light as You Yourself are the Light, so that I can have Biblical fellowship with other believers and so I can walk in authenticity with You. Be honored today in all my relationships, as I cast off hypocrisy and embrace the life of Christ. I ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

DAY TWENTY

“But seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you” (Luke 12:31)

What does it mean to “seek His Kingdom?” (be as concise as possible)

A KINGDOM AGENDA

In the context of Luke 12 and Matthew 6, Jesus teaches that a Kingdom agenda means...

- A soul is more important than riches (Luke 12:16-21).
- Faith is more important than food, clothing, or life span (Luke 12:22-30).
- Eternity is more important than possessions (Luke 12:33-34).

Do your personal priorities line up with those that Jesus prescribes? In what ways does your life currently reflect this agenda?

Do your church’s priorities line up with those that Jesus prescribes? In what ways does your church currently reflect this agenda?

PRAY...

Jesus, at least part of the reason our church needs Your renewing grace, and restoration is because over time we have drifted away from Your Kingdom agenda. We have adopted our own agenda, and we have lost sight of what You value. Please forgive us; please forgive me. We do not want to pursue our own agenda any longer. We long to pursue You, even as the deer pants for the water brook, O Lord, our souls long for You above all else. Please fill our hearts with renewed vigor to passionately pursue You and Your Kingdom agenda for our church. Set us free from the bondage of selfish and self-centered pursuits to hunger and thirst after righteousness alone. In Your Name I pray, Amen.

DAY TWENTY-ONE

Jesus taught quite a bit about Kingdom leadership through both His instructions to His disciples, as well as through His rebukes to the scribes and Pharisees. Combined, we get a clear picture of Jesus' expectations for Kingdom leaders and the strategic importance of their influence upon those they lead.

Read Mark 9:33-37

What is the primary characteristic a follower of Jesus should display if they expect to be exalted, or known as a great person in Christ's Kingdom?

SERVING IN HUMILITY

Those who lead in any local church should first take on the same clothing as Christ in His incarnation. *"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross"* (Philippians 2:3-8). It is not stretching to suggest that this should be the first mark of anyone who leads in your church family. Do others identify you as a humble servant of others? Ask God to make you more like His Son in this area.

PRAY...

Holy Spirit, I plead with You to override my humanity and fill me with Your fruit - love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and gentleness and faithfulness and self-control - so that in all my conversations, and in all my relationships, and in all my patterns of behavior, I will be a humble and delightful servant of blessing to all the people around me. Within the context of our church family compel each of us by Your grace to be devoted to one another in brotherly love in the same pattern by which Jesus demonstrated His love toward us; and cause us to outdo one another in showing honor to each other day after day. Use our humble serving to restore our fellowship and our witness, and to revitalize our church for Your glorious praise. I ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

DAY TWENTY-TWO

Apart from Christ, serving others humbly, does not come naturally. It is the supernatural work of God in a believer's life. In yesterday's Scripture focus Jesus reprimanded His disciples for their unabashed, competitive clamoring for greatness among themselves. Today's Scripture reveals an even harsher rebuke from Christ about the scribes and Pharisees, the appointed leaders of the Jewish religion.

Read Matthew 23:1-12

FOLLOW WHO?

"The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds, for they say things and do not do them" (Matthew 23:2-3).

Those who are worthy of being followed lead others by their own example of humility. They do not strive for their own honor, but to honor others. Those who practice such a lifestyle have earned your confidence; follow their lead as they follow Christ in the process of church revitalization. Paul told the Corinthian church, *"Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ"* (1 Corinthians 11:1, NIV).

PRAY...

Heavenly Father, our church family often has differing opinions about how to address all the areas in our fellowship that need Your renewing touch. Please unify us around the cross of Jesus, and by Your sovereign grace, to follow those whom You have appointed to lead us through this challenging journey. Help us to walk in love, just as Christ also loved us and gave Himself up for us. Do not allow a single word of criticism or filthiness or silly talk or coarse jesting escape from our mouths, but only the giving of thanks and words of appreciation for those who are guiding us to follow You. In the mighty name of Jesus, I ask, Amen.

DAY TWENTY-THREE

Read Matthew 20:20-28

Jesus describes two kinds of leaders in this passage. In your own words below write out the defining characteristics each kind of leader demonstrates:

Rulers of the Gentiles

Followers of Jesus

Which do you intend to be?

WISE LEADERS

Alvin Reid writes these words in his 2013 book, Revitalize Your Church through Gospel Recovery, “The wise leaders know they will never be able to lead in their own power and wisdom. They need both the power and wisdom of God and the help of others” (p. 65). Faithful followers of Jesus know that the key to their ability to lead others in doing God’s work is daily abiding in Christ and His Word, and living in obedience to the teachings of God’s Word, fully dependent on God’s life-giving Spirit.

PRAY...

Lord Jesus, we need leaders who do not try to use human ingenuity and cleverness to bring Your strength back into our church family. We need leaders who depend on You and the counsel of Your Word. Please instruct our leaders daily with Your Word; inspire and motivate them by Your Spirit to obedience and faithfulness. And as we who follow them travel in their footsteps, grant them humility, and grant us grace. Restore our church to a Biblical model of servant leadership where Christ is exalted in every decision, and where Your people delight to follow those who follow You. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

DAY TWENTY-FOUR

“Those who believe God is able to bring about remarkable things lead revitalized churches. But make no mistake: God’s level of blessing typically rises to the level of our expectation. Look at pastors in history who led revitalizing churches, from McCheyne to Spurgeon, from Baxter to Criswell. These men all had a compelling vision to do something for which only God could be given credit... Sometimes we are so afraid of being presumptuous in our faith we end up believing God for little to nothing. What is happening in your life and ministry just now that can only be explained by the fact that Jesus rose from the dead?”

—Alvin Reid, in REVITALIZE Your Church Through Gospel Recovery (pp. 42, 44-45)

FAITH

Read Matthew 17:14-21

Jesus’ frustration in this passage is not about the “size” of the disciples’ faith, but the kind of faith they lacked – believing, vibrant, living faith! Jesus said, “*You unbelieving and perverted generation...*” (17:17), and, “*if you have faith the size of a mustard seed...*” (17:20), you will be able to see miracles occur! Again, it is not your size of faith that matters as you seek God’s renewing, restoring power in your church. It is a matter of heart-felt, vibrant, living faith in the God of the impossible, even as small as a mustard seed!

PRAY...

Father, I believe You alone are God; there is no other! You are the author of our salvation, and You are the means by which renewal will happen in my life and in our church. I join the cry of the convulsing boy’s father when he cried out, “*I do believe; help my unbelief*” (Mark 9:24). Strengthen my faith every single day to keep trusting You alone to do the miraculous in our church! I believe You are more than able to do more than I can even ask or imagine, so please do it as you build my faith every day. In Your Son’s Name I pray, Amen.

DAY TWENTY-FIVE

A mountain is a beautiful reminder of the power of God! Not only is He the maker of those mountains, but He is able to move them as He desires. Whatever we face as an impossibility is NEVER too big for Him!

RESOURCES

Jesus feeding five thousand men, plus women and children, with five loaves of bread and two fish, is a miracle recorded by all four Gospel writers (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:5-13). Additionally, both Matthew and Mark record Jesus' second miraculous feeding, this time for just four thousand men, plus women and children. Two incredible miracles with insufficient resources for hard-headed disciples who had difficulty believing God can do anything with nothing.

God is still looking for people who will infect those around them with confidence in Him and not in what they might hold in their hand. God has resources available that we do not even know about. Quit looking at your own skills, your bank account or material resources, and look to God who can give us more leftovers than we had initial resources, if we will trust Him!

PRAY...

Jesus, I am often hindered by what I see instead of helped by what I believe about You in my heart. Please forgive my failure to trust You to provide all the necessary resources for our renewal as a church. I believe You want to transform our church into a powerful Gospel influence in our area, and I am choosing today to begin to trust You as never before, to provide all that we will need for this work. Show Yourself mighty on behalf of our church! We trust Your providing grace! In Your name I pray, Amen.

DAY TWENTY-SIX

Stephen T. Um and Justin Buzzard, in their book Why Cities Matter to God, the Culture, and the Church, remind us about the staggering importance of renewing all churches, but particularly those in the ever-expanding urban areas of our country and world. They write, “The future of our world will be profoundly influenced by what happens in the city. The world is in the throes of a sweeping population shift from the countryside to the city. The global urban population is growing by 65 million annually, equivalent to adding seven new Chicago’s a year... [yet] in the second half of the twentieth century in America, many churches left [or died in] the city.”

The place where your church is located is part of God’s unique and masterful plan to impact the world with the Good News of Jesus Christ. It is of *HIGH STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE* that your church continues to impact your neighborhood, region, and world!!

FOLLOWERS OF JESUS

Read Matthew 10:1-23

Who is in charge of the disciples? _____

List at least five specific instructions He gives His followers:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Who is in charge of the renewing effort within your church family? _____

Are you willing to do whatever He asks? _____

PRAY...

Jesus, I am so grateful that it is not my responsibility to renew our church; thank You that You are more than able to handle this responsibility. I also know You will appoint others to lead various parts of the renewal work. Give me and our church family grace to follow their lead without grumbling or complaining; grant us eager hearts to obey Jesus and follow those He appoints to lead us, no matter how greatly we are challenged by the task. I look to You and Your provision of gracious patience and humility throughout the process. In Your Name, I ask this. Amen.

DAY TWENTY-SEVEN

I like what Bobby Jamieson says in his short article entitled, “The Bible’s Burden for Church Revitalization.” Using the church at Corinth as his example, he describes them as a church with “a potent mix of false teaching, immorality, division, infighting, and all-around worldliness... so when faced with these issues in Corinth, what did Paul do? He did not say, ‘Those people are hopeless.’ They are a mixture of false believers and proud, stubborn religious people. You do not want those people in your church anyway,’ – and then commission Timothy to go and plant a new church in Corinth. Instead, he pleaded with them. He came to see them again and again. He rebuked them and instructed them and bore with them. In short, he worked to reform the church of God which was at Corinth.”

That dear friend, is what God is doing at your church. He is renewing, reforming where necessary, restoring, and renewing your church to match up with His plan, purpose, and priorities!

PRIORITIES OF FAITHFULNESS

Read Matthew 3:4-12

John the Baptizer rebuked religious leaders who were coming to him for baptism, but who were not bearing “*fruit in keeping with repentance*” (3:8). In other words, perhaps Jesus’ chief expectation, in this passage is TRUE FAITH. Before we can demonstrate faithfulness, we must have faith in Christ alone. This is true for individuals as well as churches. If all God wants is church members, then just as God can raise up sons of Abraham from stones, so too can He raise up church members from stones. What He really wants though, is people of faith!

PRAY...

Heavenly Father, lay bare every heart in our church family and reveal any false professions of faith. Guide each of our church members to examine their heart, and by Your grace confirm our faith in Christ alone, and for those who have never truly believed, bring them in total surrender to Jesus. Deliver us from religiosity and false professions and set us all free through faith in Your Son alone. In His Name, Amen.

DAY TWENTY-SEVEN

Read Luke 9:49-50

If we had to make a list of things Jesus highlighted as important for His Body, the church, unity would have to be near the top of the list. In today's passage, John expressed concern to Jesus that the disciples had recently met someone who was casting out demons in Jesus' name, and they tried to stop him from doing that because he was not part of the disciples' group. Jesus' response was clear, *"Don't hinder him; he who is not against you is for you!"*

UNITY IN THE BODY

The Bible is full of expectation for the people of God to be unified through their faith. We are not unified because we are alike; we are all very different from one another. Each of us is uniquely shaped and fashioned by God in our mothers' wombs. But Jesus unites us; our faith in Him is the strength of our unity.

Paul said we have *"one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all"* (Ephesians 4:5-6), and that we are one body born of one Spirit, with one hope in Jesus Christ! In short, we are already united in Christ, so we should live that way every day in our speech, conduct, attitudes, and behavior. In fact, Paul said we should be *"diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (Ephesians 4:3).

PRAY...

Father, thank you for uniting all of us who have put our faith in Jesus with one another as individual parts of the collective Body of Christ. It is an amazing thing! However, I am often guilty of acting as though I am not connected to my brothers and sisters at all. Sometimes I criticize, gossip about, and generally act unkind toward some of my faith family. Today, Lord, I repent and ask for your cleansing forgiveness and grace to wash me clean. Please return joy to our fellowship and revive our love for one another again according to Your Word so that despite our differences, we can be united in Christ and in His important work of revitalization. I ask this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY TWENTY-EIGHT

“And in the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there.”

(Mark 1:35)

“You would think if Jesus was the Son of God, He would not need to pray. Or at least he would not need a *specific* prayer time because He’d be in such a constant state of prayer. You would expect Him to have a direct line to His Heavenly Father, like broadband to heaven. At the least, you would think Jesus could do a better job of tuning out the noise of the world. But surprisingly, Jesus seemed to need time with God just as much as we do.”

—Paul E. Miller in *A Praying Life*, (p. 31)

THE PRIORITY OF PRAYER

Jesus needed regular, daily, direct communication with His Heavenly Father. So do we! He demonstrated and taught this Kingdom priority throughout His ministry. Your church needs prayer like never before! Part of the reason you are in the renewal process is because somewhere along the journey individual and congregational prayer became a low priority and/or overlooked practice. I am suggesting that prayer became your “emergency evacuation procedure” instead of your “daily strength and sustenance.” What steps can you begin taking today in order to re-establish the priority of prayer in your own life, in your church’s weekly schedule of activities, and in your church’s gatherings?

Here is what my best friend says, “Pray like everything depends on God (because it does), and then get to work as though everything depends on you.” The last part most of us have mastered; you are not afraid of hard work. The problem is the praying; it is infrequent, powerless, and unfocused. Ask God to help you make a plan for how you are going to continue to pray faithfully after these 40 days are finished.

PRAY...

Dear God, I have neglected the moment-by-moment practice of prayer far too long in my own life. Please forgive me, and by Your grace move me towards You every day by causing My heart to long for fellowship and communication with You all through the day. And sadly, Lord, our church family has lost our devotion to prayer, and our prayers too often focus on the sick and dying, and not often enough on your Kingdom agenda in our community. Please forgive us and stir our hearts to seek You as though we are completely helpless apart from You (which we are – John 15:5). I ask this humbly in Jesus Name. Amen.

DAY TWENTY-NINE

What is the one significant word that is used in each of the following verses:

(Look up and read each one)

John 6:29

Mark 5:36

Matthew 27:42

Luke 1:20

The common word is _____

BELIEVE IN HIM

“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent” (John 6:29). This, of course, is a call to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and having believed, to receive eternal life. It is a call, first to saving faith. However, it is secondarily a reminder that every moment and every situation of every believer’s life calls for the same faith – not to be saved all over again – but to “have complete confidence in; trust and faith in; reliance upon Jesus” for every moment and every situation!

Jesus founded your church; He planted it in your community. He saved each of you who have believed in Him; HE WILL NOT FAIL YOU TODAY! Believe in Him! This is a critical Kingdom priority for all those who long to see Christ exalted and His Kingdom advanced. Believe.

PRAY...

Lord Jesus, I am beginning to understand that the greatest work I can ever do is simply to *believe in You!* In fact, I recognize that there are no works for me to do to gain salvation. Neither are there any works I can do as Your child to please you more than to *believe in You!* Help me today to trust You. Focus my thoughts on Your mighty power, not my own limited abilities. Keep my eyes fixed on You, Lord, when I am tempted to look at the overwhelming odds against me. Move my feet forward in faith when I am frozen in place by unanswered questions and unknown destinations. I have believed in You Jesus! Thank you for saving me. Now give me grace to keep believing in You in every moment of my life and in every situation, especially this renewal work You are doing now in our church. In Your strong Name I pray, Amen.

DAY THIRTY

Perhaps it is most accurate to say that of all Jesus' Kingdom priorities, the final standing order He gave to His followers is the one that should supersede all other priorities. Unity among believers validates our witness. Prayer empowers our hearts and minds to engage in the disciple-making task among the nations, prayer accomplishes the miraculous. Believing faith keeps us moving forward despite difficulty, disappointment, and hardship. These all, as well as all other Kingdom priorities, undergird the primary task of the church - discipling the nations!

“All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. As you are going, disciple all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you, and I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
(Matthew 28:18-20)

THE IMPERATIVE

The one word in Matthew's "Great Commission" verses that is the *IMPERATIVE*, (the command), is ***“Disciple... all the nations.”*** This is our assignment! Jesus used three *PARTICIPLES* to describe the disciple-making process - “going” (as you are going), “baptizing” (those who profess faith in Christ), and “teaching” (obedience to Jesus).

PRAY...

Jesus, You have made our assignment quite clear. Forgive me, and forgive our church, for so often being all wrapped up in lesser priorities that yield almost no fruit and do not contribute to the accomplishment of the Great Commission. We are choosing to turn away from such foolishness and to embrace once again the *DISCIPLE-MAKING MANDATE* You gave us just before Your ascension to heaven. Please empower us with Your Holy Spirit to be Your witnesses in our Jerusalem, and Judea, Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth. We long to see Your Kingdom come as You reign over the hearts and lives of those who have placed their faith in You alone, have followed You in believer's baptism and are seeking to obey everything You have commanded. Make us into a disciple-making church, in Your Majestic Name I pray. Amen.

DAY THIRTY-ONE

Read Mark 11:11-18

Bible scholar, pastor, and author Warren Wiersbe says of this text: *“This ‘religious market’ was set up in the court of the Gentiles, the one place where the Jews should have been busy doing serious missionary work. If a Gentile visited the temple and saw what the Jews were doing in the name of the true God, he would never want to believe what they taught. The Jews might not have permitted idols of wood and stone in their temple, but there were idols there just the same. The court of the Gentiles should have been a place for praying, but it was instead a place for preying and paying.”* (The Bible Exposition Commentary, Vol. 1, pp. 150-151).

PRAYING, PREYING, OR PAYING?

What about your church? What would Jesus think of your gatherings if He visited your fellowship next week? Would He find you to be a praying people... or a preying people... or just a paying people. When a spirit of prayer marks a church family it welcomes people from the nations of the world, from the poorest to the wealthiest; from the youngest to the oldest; red, black, yellow, brown, white - all races and nationalities. When prayer is absent, there is too much sin and self on display, and the welcome banners are missing. Do the people of your community feel welcome when they visit your church family? If you do not know, ask them. Better yet, bring prayer back into every aspect of your gatherings, from small groups to large groups, and you will find the nations being drawn to know our God.

PRAY...

Jesus, would You please bring a new spirit and aroma of prayer to the gatherings of our fellowship. We do not want to push You away from of our gatherings in favor of those things that satisfy our sinful natures. We want You to the center of attention every time our church family is together in any way. Please develop us into a “house of prayer for all the nations.” Send forth Your Welcoming Spirit to all the people in our community and all those across our region, so that they feel welcome in our fellowship as we pray, worship, and praise Your Almighty and Wonderful Name. We do not want a single person, visiting among us, to be turned away from You because of our attitudes or behavior. In Jesus Name, Amen.

DAY THIRTY-TWO

Church leaders of declining churches everywhere are looking for that magic bullet, a new program that can be employed, a pre-packaged activity that they can plug and play...

But a church desiring church renewal must begin developing disciples one-on-one and challenging those who are discipled to commit to discipling others. (Tom Cheyney in *Thirty-Eight Church Revitalization Models for the Twenty-First Century Church*, p. 26)

WITNESSES

Read Acts 1:1-11

The word “witnesses” in Acts 1:8 is from the Greek word *Martus*, the root from which we get our English word martyr. We usually associate a martyr with someone who has had their life taken by enemies of the Gospel because of their faithful witness to Jesus. The centuries are littered with the deaths of believers who have been drowned, burned at the stake, beheaded, crucified, shot, stabbed, run over, starved, fed to various animals, or any other number of cruel death sentences.

Paul describes well the kind of witnesses Jesus intended His First Century and Twenty-First Century disciples to be: *“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain”* (Philippians 1:21). Whether we live or die is up to the Lord. What is up to us is, “Will I be a faithful witness today for Jesus?” It is an irreplaceable Kingdom priority for you and for each member of your church.

PRAY...

Lord Jesus, make me a faithful witness of Your grace in every and any situation. Open my mouth to declare boldly the truth of the Gospel, and give me the words that need to be spoken in every conversation. Ignite our church family with Your Holy Spirit to be Your witnesses everywhere we go and in every we relationship we have. In Jesus Name, Amen.

DAY THIRTY-THREE

Peter needed God's renewing power in his life. Once he had declared boastfully, *"Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away"* (Matthew 26:33). Yet when things got crazy, Peter denied he even knew Jesus: *"Then he began to curse and swear, 'I do not know the man!' And immediately a rooster crowed"* (Matthew 26:74).

When the resurrected Jesus took a walk on the beach with Peter, He was asking Peter the same question He is asking each of you today, *"Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?"* (John 21:15). Do you love Jesus more than you love anything or anyone else in your life? This is critical for the renewal and well-being of your church.

"Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" (John 21:15)

LOVING JESUS

Loving Jesus is described in several different ways in the Bible. Here are a few examples...

- *"O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; my soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water"* (Psalm 63:1).
- *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments"* (John 14:15).
- *"Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love"* (Ephesians 6:24).
- *"and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory"* (1 Peter 1:8).
- *"If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen"* (1 John 4:20).

PRAY...

O God, our Father, give me and every member of our church family an all-consuming love for Your Son Jesus! You have faithfully demonstrated Your great love toward us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. Fill our hearts with deep devoted love for His saving grace, His presence with us through His Spirit, and His faithful intercession in heaven right now on our behalf. Make us radiant lovers of Your Son, I ask in Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY THIRTY-FOUR

In his book Biblical Church Revitalization, Pastor Brian Croft tells the story of his own experience leading a church through the revitalization process. In his conclusion, he says: “Church revitalization is a good and noble work. It is fraught with challenges, dangers, trials, and difficulties, and only men who are called and gifted for the task will be able to remain steadfast in them. However, for those who lean into this calling and put their hands to the plow, there are unique joys and rewards that come with this important gospel work.”

“But Jesus said to him, ‘no one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God’” (Luke 9:62)

PLOWING WITH JESUS

One thing I learned while farming for Mr. Bartee back in the 1980’s was that plowing and planting demands straight rows. In order to do this, he taught me to pick a spot at the other end of the field, point the tractor in that direction, and with your eye fixed on it do not get distracted. The same is true for the pastor, or church member, setting out on the journey of church renewal – fix your eyes on Jesus and do not look back! It may be a long way to the other end of the field. Such a journey demands persevering faith, determination, and patience. Do not lose heart. Keep your eyes on Jesus!

PRAY...

Jesus, I am so grateful that You endured the cross, despising the shame, and now You have sat down at the right hand of the throne of God, Your work of redemption finished! Thank you for finishing!! Please infuse me and our church family with grace, faith, hope, love, and joy in our own journey. Guide us through every obstacle, setback, difficulty, and challenge; make us overcomers; finishers! Perfect Your finishing ways in each of us so we will see the victory You have in store for us as a result of this renewal journey. In Your Name. Amen.

DAY THIRTY-FIVE

Read Luke 9:1-6

Luke describes Jesus sending out His twelve apostles to preach the Kingdom of God and perform healings in this passage. His instructions to the apostles carry a warning that not everyone will receive them or their message. What are the apostles instructed to do when they encounter this kind of response?

They should _____

SHAKE OFF THE DUST

Shaking the dust-off one's feet was a Jewish tradition symbolizing the proper disposal of heathen dust collected on someone's feet or clothing from traveling through Gentile regions. The symbolic act described by Jesus indicated that the apostles should regard those who would not receive the Gospel as unclean and as entirely responsible for their uncleanness.

Acts 18:6 describes a time when Paul did this in Corinth: *"But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean, From now on I will go to the Gentiles.'"*

Paul did not quit, give up, and take his marbles and go home. He simply left the synagogue in Corinth, but he stayed in the city an additional *"year and six months, teaching the Word of God among them"* (Acts 18:11). He patiently persevered in the work God had assigned to him. And so must you.

PRAY...

Gracious Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, Perfector, Sustainer, Friend, please grant to me and to our church family such a deep, abiding confidence in what You are doing among us that we will not lose heart. I believe that in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. Undergird us with Your divine strength; use Your Word each day to keep us strong against the tide of our flesh pushing us toward the beach of indifference. Cause us to persevere in faith, believing that You desire to see our church renewed and restored for the glory of Christ! In His Name. Amen.

DAY THIRTY-SIX

“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore, be zealous and repent. Behold I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” (Revelation 3:19-21)

OVERCOMING

Jesus describes Himself in the passage above as an overcomer. He challenges the members of the church in Laodicea to be overcomers themselves. How will they do that? Obviously by the power of the Holy Spirit and the conviction in their own hearts to return fully to Christ in acts of zealous (glad, eager, quickly responsive) repentance.

Bill Henard, in partnership with the North American Mission Board, has written a tremendously helpful book for churches and pastors who are committed to the revitalization journey. In his book [Can These Bones Live?](#) Bill writes: “...do not ever give up on the church or on a church... Even Jesus, though He strongly chided the church in Laodicea, offered [a] very important invitation... if any church has ever existed that needed revitalization, the church in Laodicea was it, and yet Jesus did not give up on them.” Nor should you, my friend, give up on your church. In His sovereignty, God will bring restoration to those whose hearts are fully His (see 2 Chronicles 16:9).

PRAY...

Lord Jesus, Your grace is amazing! I praise You for Your goodness, Your steadfast love, and Your lovingkindness which endures from generation to generation! Thank You for not giving up on the church at Laodicea, and thank You for not giving up on our church either. We cannot accomplish church renewal without You, so we rejoice that You are with us in this journey, and that You will guide us through every decision and situation. Please make Your presence known to us in every step of our renewal, and provide wisdom and counsel from Your Word and Your Spirit. I humbly ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

DAY THIRTY-SEVEN

Read John 16:1-15

Who is Jesus encouraging the disciples to trust once He is gone from their physical presence? _____

Will His disciples face challenges in their Gospel work? _____

The Holy Spirit is our Comforter and Friend because He:

- Convicts people of sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:8).
- Guides God's people in the truth (16:13).
- Discloses wisdom for decision-making regarding the future (16:13).
- Glorifies Jesus (16:14).

LEANING ON JESUS

Pastor Jeremie Rinne, previously serving in Massachusetts and now pastoring the Evangelical Church in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, describes leaning on Jesus, or trusting the ministry of the Holy Spirit, like this in his 9Marks article entitled "Be a Tortoise, Not a Hare:" "The [patient revitalizing church] strives for renewal through a steady rhythm of weekly expository preaching, letting the Word do its transformative work. [They] commit significant time to prayer, calling on God to revitalize. [They] go slowly enough to know and listen to church members, understanding that you cannot truly reform what you do not love. [They] have an overarching confidence in God's sovereignty to bring about needed change, so that setbacks roll off like rain off a shell... then when people ask how we turned our church around, we will not be flexing our muscles. Instead we will be able to say with all sincerity, 'The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.'"

PRAY...

Jesus, I am realizing increasingly that You are the main player in the renewing effort our church so desperately needs. We are merely Your servants, and we like it that way. Keep empowering us to faithfully love You with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength while we pursue knowing You and obeying You. Please provide clear directions in our journey of renewal. We are in this for the long haul, Jesus; willing to wait for You to put all the pieces together for Your glory. Make Your Name great we pleadingly request, in Your Great Name! Amen!

DAY THIRTY-EIGHT

Way back on Day Three we examined the disciples' fear induced by a surging storm all around them - a picture of drastically changing circumstances. Today we are thinking about fear caused by a different scenario - fierce opposition to righteousness. It is a common occurrence for those walking with the Lord, to endure push-back or resistance from others. Sometimes this resistance is harsh and generates fearfulness.

If you are being maligned, or ridiculed for your embrace of the revitalization effort in your church, remember what Jesus said in Matthew 10:28, *"Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."*

ENDURANCE

John Folmar, pastor of Dubai Evangelical Church, in the United Arab Emirates, suggests taking "the long view when it comes to church reform. It helps to have a ten-to-twenty-year time horizon. With a long-term perspective, we can more patiently prioritize the areas of church life that need to change. We can more contentedly operate in an imperfect ministry environment even as we ask people to forbear with our personal weaknesses as well."

—"What Makes a Church Reform Possible?" in 9Marks Journal, Nov-Dec 2011, [Revitalize: Why We Must Reclaim Dying Churches](#)

PRAY...

Father, the renewal journey we are taking is not without its difficulties. I am confident that You know about them better than I do. However, I am often discouraged and tempted to give up because of the resistance I sometimes feel from others. Help me by Your Spirit to disregard the temptation to fear man and instead to trust You. Help me to walk in grace with those who do not yet favor the revitalization effort. Use our resolve to inspire others to surrender to Your plan for our church's future. I ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

DAY THIRTY-NINE

Read Revelation 5:1-14

The ultimate goal for every church renewal effort is so that we might all contribute to the ultimate reality Jesus revealed to the Apostle John in The Revelation. In eternity future, there will be people from every _____, _____, _____, and _____ gathered for the specific purpose of worshiping Jesus forever! (see Revelation 5:9 and 7:9).

This has been God's objective since before the creation of the earth - that all peoples, nations, tongues, and tribes would love, honor, adore, and worship Him. The renewal of your church is for this express purpose above all else.

WORSHIP AND MISSIONS

Perhaps the most famous quote in this generation regarding the relationship between worship and missions comes from John Piper's classic book, Let the Nations Be Glad, in which he said, "Missions exist because worship doesn't."

It should be our strong, compelling desire that all churches be faithful contributors to this ultimate agenda - people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation worshipping Jesus. Until that day arrives, we press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, doing missions for the sake of future worship.

PRAY...

Jesus, we long for our church to be a faithful partner and contributor to the work of seeing Your Kingdom come so that in eternity every tribe and tongue, people and nation will be represented! Please renew our church and make us an active, fruitful part of Your eternal agenda. Renew us; restore Your glory in us and among us; transform every aspect of our church to make us Christ-centered, Biblically grounded, and Gospel-driven. I ask this for Your glory alone! Amen.

DAY FORTY

We began this 40-day journey talking about Mark's words of urgency at the beginning of His Gospel account, "*The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God... **make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.***" (Mark 1:1,3). We turn to Jesus, make His paths straight, and obey His commands because time is short for us to get the message to those who have not yet believed the Gospel message. Your willingness to pursue God's renewal for your church is not really for you; it is for those you are strategically placed to reach for Christ!

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone... therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming" (Matthew 24:36, 42)

STILL MUCH TO DO

"The need for revitalization has never been greater in North America! An estimated 340,000 Protestant churches in America have an average attendance of less than one hundred. Research data tells us that in the United States more than 80% of the churches have plateaued or are declining. Each and every week we are currently seeing somewhere between fifty and seventy-five local churches closing their doors and not opening them again."

—Tom Cheyney in [Thirty-Eight Church Revitalization Models for the Twenty-First Century](#).

While the active, churchgoing, Christian population, by most measures, seems to be declining, and the U.S. population is definitely increasing, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ still has much to do in Kingdom advance and Gospel proclamation. Is your church going to be a full-fledged participant in this exciting assignment? As a friend often says, "We put our 'yes' on the table, and let the Lord tell us the 'what.'"

PRAY...

Dear Jesus, I will never ever get over the fact that You took my place on the cross and paid for my sins in full with Your own precious blood! Thank you! I renew my surrender to You today, this moment! I am Yours to be used in whatever way You desire in order to bring about a complete transformation in our church family. Please stir in us the passionate zeal of the young David when he overheard Goliath's taunting challenges to the armies of Israel; transform us through broken-hearted prayer and fasting like that of Nehemiah and Hannah; shape us into bold, fearless messengers of truth like Esther, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; and give us a heart for the untouched, unreached, unsaved world like the Apostle Paul. Jesus, if You do not come through, we are finished; but today I believe that with You all things are possible! So, please, work Your miraculous work of renewal in me and in my church, I ask in Your Everlasting Name, and for Your Eternal glory, Amen.

YOUR NEXT STEP

STRONGER CHURCHES NETWORK Appendix 1—Cohorts and Network Guide



The Stronger Churches Network engages with pastors and churches in two ways:

1. Local Cohorts
2. State-Wide Network

Cohort Engagement

What is a Stronger Churches Cohort?

A cohort is a local group of diverse pastors and leaders who meet for a specific purpose and duration to move them and their churches toward spiritual, relational, practical, and missional health.

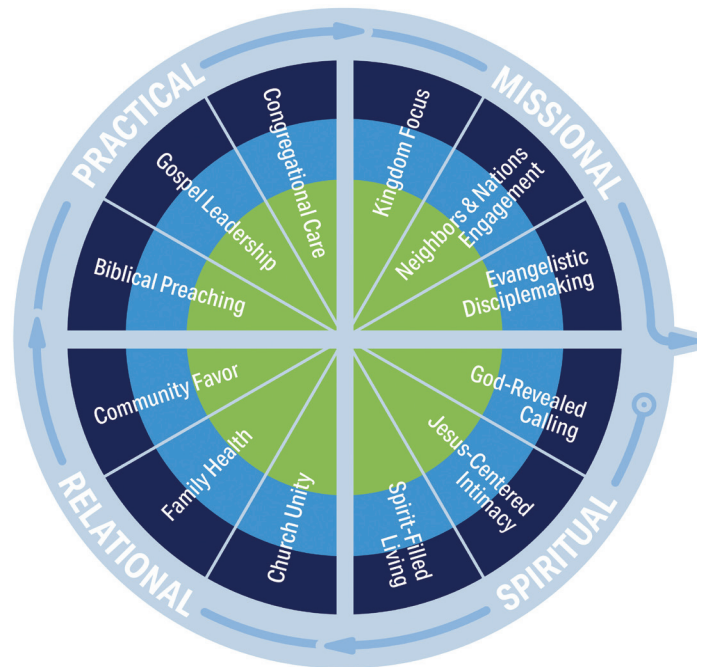
What Cohorts are Available?

There are three cohort options:

1. **Cohort One:** This is a group of 6-10 local pastors who lead churches of diverse stages and seasons who agree to meet regularly for a specified duration for the purpose of deepening relationships and discovering ways to work together toward greater church health and community impact.

Cohort One is the required first phase cohort that focuses on spiritual and relational health. The book, *Developing a Christ-Centered Church*, by Henry and Richard Blackaby is the core content. The Stronger Church Wheel and other Stronger Churches Network resources will be introduced and used as well.

2. **Cohort Two:** Based on discoveries in Cohort One, a smaller group of pastors forms to focus on a specific aspect of spiritual, relational, practical, or missional health as illustrated on the Stronger Church Wheel. It is led by a catalyst or coach for a specific duration with a specific goal based on the context and participants.



3. Cohort Three: Based on relationships that formed during Cohort One, this cohort develops into a working relationship between pastors and churches to renew a local church. Completing Cohort Two is not required for participants in Cohort Three.

This cohort involves the pastor and leadership of both the stronger church or churches and the struggling church. It may be led by a catalyst or coach, but it can also be led by a member of the Stronger Churches Network Core Team or by an outside organization.

Cohort Three becomes a local church renewal partnership.

Four Goals of a Stronger Churches Cohorts

1. Build relationships, deepen trust, and grow spiritually.
2. Renew a biblical vision for a Christ-Centered church.
3. Develop a shared vision for the community.
4. Cultivate opportunities for church renewal partnerships.

Who Leads the Cohort?

Cohort One is led by a trained catalyst who secures the location, convenes the cohort, prepares and guides the discussion around selected content, and creates an environment for collaborative partnerships to emerge.

Catalysts who lead Cohort One will complete Spiritual Leadership Coaching Training by Blackaby Ministries, International as well as specific Stronger Churches Network orientation.

Cohorts often include coaches who personally encourage and mentor cohort participants as they move toward personal and church health.

Cohorts Two and Three may be led by a catalyst, coach, or another qualified leader.

When and Where Do Cohorts Meet?

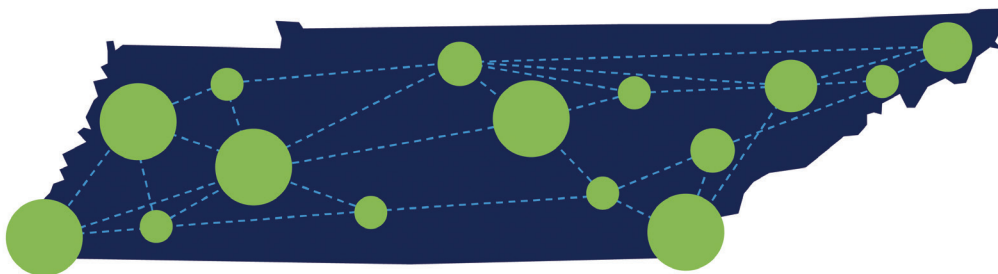
Cohorts meet at a local Convening Hub, which may be a church or associational office. The frequency and duration of the cohort meetings will vary, but Cohort One meets bi-monthly for four to five months to build spiritual and relational foundations.

Network Engagement

Local cohorts are the foundation of the Stronger Churches Network. These cohorts invest in pastors and build up churches with a vision for their specific communities.

Our task includes reaching every Tennessean with the Gospel, and that requires a network. Networks that are rooted in shared vision and values create greater capacity to advance the kingdom.

The Stronger Churches Network includes a family of cohorts located across Tennessee connected through a communication platform called Mighty Pro.



What are the benefits of the Stronger Churches Network?

- **Prayer and support:** Cohort leaders and participants pray for one another across the state and build relational support that strengthens the work.
- **Wisdom and skill:** Cohort leaders and participants share learnings and best practices of the cohort that help move pastors and churches toward greater health.
- **Resources and partnerships:** Cohorts share resources, develop a common language, and build strategic partnerships that strengthen and multiply gospel leaders, evangelistic disciples, and healthy churches.

What does the Stronger Churches Network Do?

- **Champion:** We boldly advocate for a Christ-centered vision of the church.
- **Pray:** We invite pastors, leaders, and congregations to seek the Lord with renewed energy and expectancy.
- **Resource:** We create and curate the best resources available to help pastors and churches move toward health.
- **Collaborate:** We create the structure and opportunities for cohort participants to work together locally and state-wide.
- **Gather:** We convene in local, regional, and state-wide events to inspire, connect, and equip pastors, leaders, and congregations to move toward greater health.

How do I participate in the Stronger Churches Network?

- Serve as a network leader or cohort participant.
- Join the monthly virtual gathering.
- Join the online community through Mighty Pro.
- Attend local, regional, and state-wide events.
- Engage in local church renewal partnerships.

Can Bi-Vocational Pastors Participate in the Stronger Churches Network?

Almost 65% of Tennessee Baptist churches are led by bi-vocational pastors. Investing in bi-vocational pastors and church ministry is an essential and strategic priority.

The Stronger Churches Network, including local cohorts, is available to bi-vocational pastors and church leaders.

Creativity, flexibility, and sacrifice will be important for every participant, but cohort meetings can be scheduled at times and locations that make participation more feasible. And the Mighty Pro communication platform makes staying connected and engaged possible.

What if I am Already Involved in a Church Renewal Network?

The Lord is already working in Tennessee and around the county through wonderful networks and organizations who care about church renewal, revitalization, and replanting. The TBMB and the Stronger Churches Network encourage pastors and churches to pursue the opportunities that help them fulfill the mission of God.

The Stronger Churches Network builds mutually collaborative relationships with existing networks in order to give every pastor, leader, and congregation every opportunity available to move toward health. So, we welcome existing networks into the Stronger Churches Network for the purpose of prayer, fellowship, resourcing, and church renewal partnerships.

Networks Make a Greater Impact

The Stronger Churches Network is a network of pastors, leaders, and churches devoted to Jesus, fully cooperative with the Tennessee Baptist Convention, and collaborating to fulfill the mission of the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board.

STRONGER CHURCHES NETWORK



Appendix 2 – How Churches Help Churches

A Ten-Point Guide from the Stronger Churches Network

“What is a stronger church?” *A Stronger Church is a church that surrenders to the will of God and walks in the ways of God to reveal the glory of God.*

“Surrender” highlights the calling for a church to be rightly aligned to God. This is spiritual renewal. To “walk in the ways of God” emphasizes the need for a church to do the right things in the right way in its context to advance the mission of making disciples of Jesus who live for His kingdom. This is strategic renewal. And the goal is always the glory of God.

THE INVITATION

The Strengthening Healthy Churches Team invites every church into a local cohort connected to a state-wide network, called the Stronger Churches Network, designed to help churches move toward spiritual, relational, practical, and missional renewal.

THE SEVEN AXIOMS

- Every church needs a fresh encounter with Jesus.
- Surrender precedes strategy.
- Only the church bears responsibility for a community’s lostness and brokenness.
- Churches renew churches.
- Local context shapes the work of church renewal.
- Church networks create capacity for sustained kingdom impact.
- Jesus is victorious, so there is hope for every church.

Based on these axioms, we developed this **Ten-Point Guide** for local churches to begin considering how churches help churches within a Sunday morning drive move toward greater health.

1. A vision for the community.

Churches help churches when the main goal is to get the Gospel to every person in every corner of the community.

2. A posture of humility.

Churches help churches when they return to Jesus, prefer one another over themselves, and willingly sacrifice for the advancement of the kingdom.

3. A motive for God’s glory.

Churches help churches as they do whatever it takes to glorify God in their churches and in their communities together.

4. A deepening of trust.

Churches help churches when pastors and leaders engage in structured local cohorts that build spiritual and relational foundations that lead to practical and missional initiatives.

5. A readiness to listen and learn.

Churches help churches when there is a shared awareness that fundamental change is needed, and when new approaches to ministry are welcomed.

6. A commitment to endure.

Churches help churches when there is a shared commitment to the long-term process of church renewal.

7. An attention to expectations.

Churches help churches in an environment of clear expectations and goals.

8. A shared plan to implement.

Churches help churches by building a strategic plan that describes the goals for renewal as well as the role and responsibilities for each partner church.

9. A capacity to work.

Churches help churches by getting involved in one another's ministries in practical ways in order to create the best opportunity for success.

10. An eagerness to celebrate.

Churches help churches by regularly celebrating God's faithfulness throughout the process.

The Strengthening Healthy Churches Team has created and curated resources for you and your church to engage with the Stronger Churches Network and church renewal initiatives in your community.

STRONGER CHURCHES NETWORK



Appendix 3 – Five Church Renewal Options

A Resource of the Stronger Churches Network

Approximately 85% of churches are plateaued or declining. That does not mean God is not working in those churches. He most certainly is. Whatever the situation, every church needs a fresh encounter with Jesus and a humble, teachable, and surrendered posture.

Our neighbors and the nations are waiting for the Gospel, and the church is God’s Plan A to get it to them. The **Strengthening Healthy Churches Team** has developed the **Stronger Churches Network** to encourage and equip pastors, leaders, and congregations to work together toward greater health.

Church health is less like an “on and off switch,” and more like a spectrum. No physical body is perfectly healthy, but some are healthier than others—and those that are healthier live more active and effective lives.

Church Renewal is a Work of the Holy Spirit

Church renewal is a work of the Holy Spirit that turns hearts back to God and results in the transformation of a congregation. There are biblical principles and proven practices, but there is no “plug and play” method that turns churches around. Every situation is unique and contextual.

A Stronger Church Defined: *A church that surrenders to the will of God and walks in the ways of God to reveal the glory of God.*

The Spectrum of Five Church Renewal Options

1. Prompted Renewal

Focus: Fresh work of the Holy Spirit through existing leadership.

Renewal led by a fresh prompting of the Holy Spirit through the pastor and core leaders. It is marked by repentance, returning to Jesus as the “first love,” abandonment of unhelpful practices, reconciliation of relationships, and embracing new passion and priorities for ministry.

Every church, regardless of stage or season of ministry, needs a Prompted Renewal that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and realized in the lived experience of the church.

2. Coached Renewal

Focus: Internal transformation with external guidance.

Renewal happens with the help of outside coaches, consultants, and/or mentors. The pastor and core leadership partner with a denominational consultant, church renewal organization specialist, or cohort leader who guides a process moving the church

toward greater health. The coach and congregation draft and sign a covenant including specific benchmarks and decision points. This usually involves moderately high strategic engagement and a financial commitment to the coaching organization.

3.Partnered Renewal

Focus: Collaborative support while maintaining independence.

A local helping church partners with a receiving church in need of renewal. The receiving church's pastor and core leadership remain in the lead but voluntarily accept prayer, guidance, and support from the helping church. The churches sign a covenant articulating how they will work together with specific benchmarks and decision points.

4.Fostered Renewal

Focus: Temporary mentorship and support.

A declining church partners with a stronger congregation for a defined period. The receiving church suspends its governing authority and yields to helping the church's oversight during the renewal process. The receiving church remains autonomous and maintains existing financial systems. The intent is for the helping church to return governance responsibilities back to the receiving church upon completion of the renewal process.

5.Adopted Renewal/Replant

Focus: Integration into a larger family or replanting.

The receiving church permanently transfers all operational governance and ownership to the helping church. The helping church assumes all governing, oversight, proprietary, legal, and financial responsibilities. The receiving church becomes a new church or campus of the helping church, with pastoral and core leadership changes under the helping church's direction. This is often known as a "replant" and is necessary when the receiving church lacks leadership, volunteer, and financial capacity to accomplish the mission of the church.

Comparing the Models

Model	Autonomy	Leadership Source	Primary Outcome
Prompted	High	Internal	Renewed existing church
Coached	High	Internal + Consultant	Renewed existing church
Partnered	Moderate	Partner Church (Temporary)	Restored independence
Fostered	Moderate	Partner Church (Temporary)	Restored health & autonomy
Adopted/ Replant	Low	Partner Church (Permanent)	New campus or congregation

When to Pursue Renewal

Renewal works best when a church:

- Maintains enough congregational energy and finances for multi-year change
- Resists in ceding outside control but welcomes guidance
- Retains a meaningful connection to its surrounding community

However, renewal often fails when:

- Leadership resists difficult internal reforms or lacks strategic skills
- Conflict, complacency, or entrenched habits block transformation
- The church delays too long, losing time and resources to reverse decline

When to Pursue Replanting (Adopted Renewal)

Replanting is often necessary when:

- The congregation is elderly, very small, and financially unsustainable
- The community context still has spiritual opportunity
- The church is willing to surrender control and embrace major transformation
- Incremental changes will not reverse decline

Core commitments include dissolving the existing structure, installing new leadership, and launching under a new name and mission.

Partnership Models and Core Steps

Many renewal and replanting efforts involve collaborative partnerships customized to balance legacy preservation with missional momentum:

- **Merger/Marriage** — Two churches unite legally and relationally, often with the stronger assuming leadership
- **Adoption/Campus** — A declining church becomes a campus of a healthier congregation
- **Fostering** — A short-term support relationship aimed at renewal without permanent dependency

Key Action Steps:

- 1. Discern Reality:** Conduct comprehensive spiritual and organizational assessments
- 2. Build Alignment:** Identify and empower leaders supportive of change
- 3. Clarify Mission:** Simplify ministries and refocus on community engagement and disciple-making
- 4. Implement Change:** Pursue steady shifts in leadership development, preaching, and outreach
- 5. Evaluate and Adjust:** Maintain transparency and consistent communication

Conclusion

Every church facing decline must discern between renewal and replanting through prayer, humility, and honest evaluation. Partnership with healthy churches and associations provides vital strength for either pathway. Whether through renewed vitality or a fresh restart, the goal remains the same: restored gospel witness and Kingdom impact in the community.

Every church needs renewal, and there is hope for every church who seeks it. Realizing that hope and experiencing renewal requires vision, humility, wisdom, and trust. As pastors, leaders, and congregations commit to fulfilling the mission of God in their generation, they will surrender to the will of God and walk in the ways of God in order to reveal the glory of God.

CONTACT THE STRONGER CHURCHES NETWORK TEAM



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