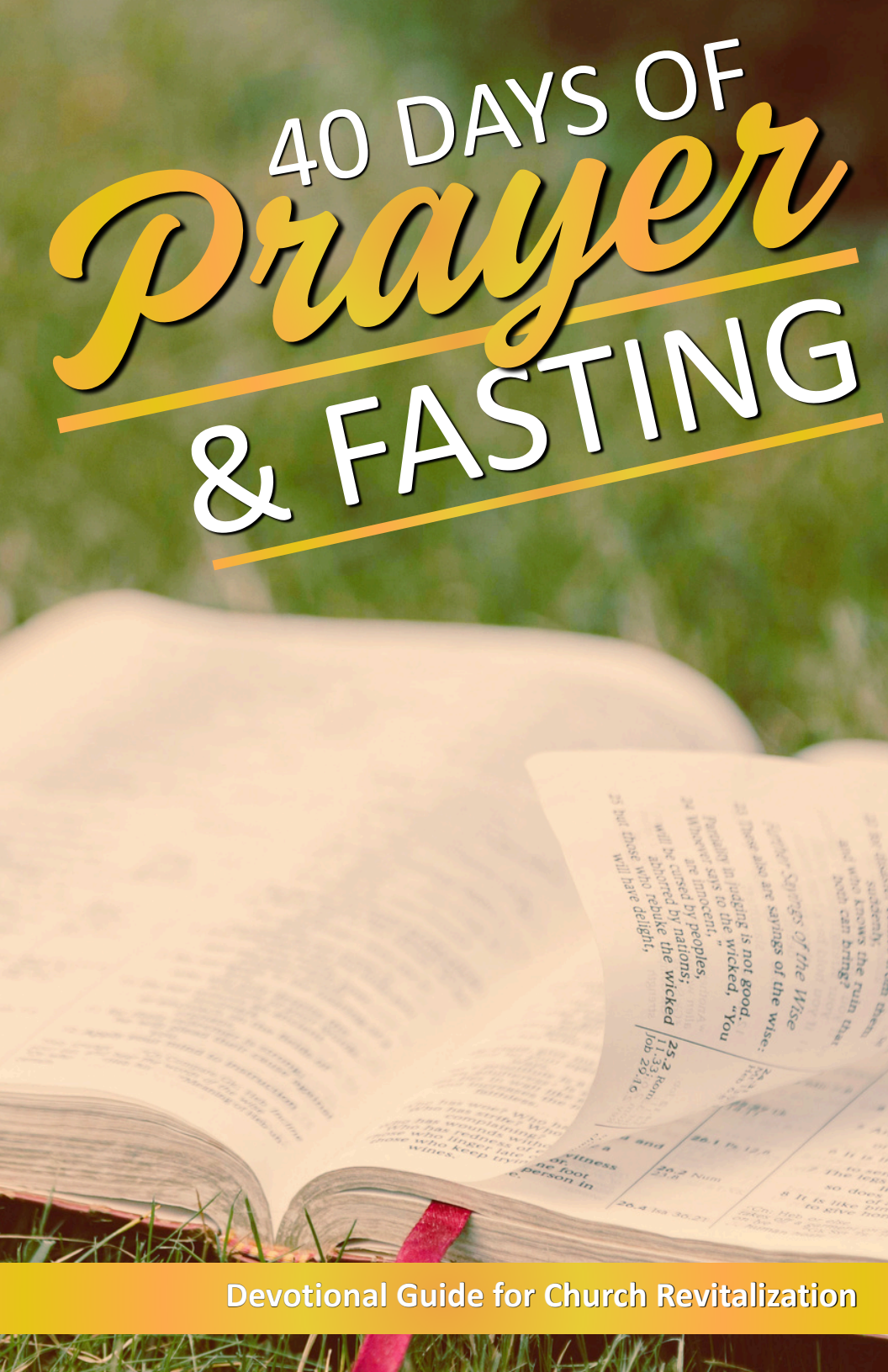
40 DAYS OF
Prayer
& FASTING
Devotional Guide for Church Revitalization

40 Days of Prayer at FBC: Introduction and Fasting Guide

A six-week journey with one day of fasting each week

Welcome to the Journey

Forty days is a number Scripture returns to again and again when God is doing something significant. Moses was on the mountain with God for forty days. Elijah traveled forty days to meet God at Horeb. Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness before beginning his public ministry. The people of Nineveh were given forty days, and they responded with repentance and fasting. In each case, forty days marked a season of seeking, waiting, and preparation.

We are entering our own forty days. For this season, we are asking God to move among us, to shape us, and to show us what he wants to do through us. This booklet will serve as a daily prayer guide, and we are inviting every person to add one simple practice: choose one day each week to fast.

That gives us 40 days of prayer and six fasts across six weeks. Below is an introduction to both.

40 Days of Prayer

In this guide you'll find a devotional, reflection questions, and prayer prompt for each day of the journey. Take 10-15 mins daily to walk read the devotional, journal your answers to the reflection questions, and then pray. There are also additional articles to reflect on on days 7,14,28, and 35. Take this journey seriously. Set aside a time each day preferably at the same time daily and make this part of your routine!

What Is Fasting, and Why Do It?

Fasting is going without food (or something else we normally depend on) for a time, so that our hunger becomes a reminder to turn toward God. It is not a way to twist God's arm, earn his favor, or prove how serious we are. It is a way of saying with our bodies what we say with our words: *I need you more than I need anything else.*

Jesus assumed his followers would fast. He did not say "if you fast" but "when you fast" (Matthew 6:16-18). He also warned that fasting done for show is empty. The same warning runs through Isaiah 58, Zechariah 7, and Joel 2:13: God looks past the fast to the heart. So the goal of every fast in this guide is the same: to draw nearer to God, and to let him change us.

How the Journey Works

- **Choose your day**. Pick one day each week that you will fast. It can be the same day every week or it can change. Choose a day that is realistic for your schedule and health.
- **Fast with a theme.** Each week has a focus, a Scripture passage, reflection questions, and prayer prompts in this guide.
- **Replace meals with prayer.** When hunger comes, let it be a cue to pray. If you normally eat lunch, use that time to read the passage and pray.
- **Keep it quiet.** Jesus told us to fast without announcing it (Matthew 6:16-18). You do not need to tell anyone which day you chose.
- **Break the fast gently.** End with a simple meal and a prayer of thanks.

Choosing How to Fast

There is no single right way to fast. Choose the approach that fits your body and your season of life.

- **Full fast:** No food for the day, drinking plenty of water. (Many people fast from the evening meal the night before to the evening meal of the fast day.)
- **Partial fast:** Skip one or two meals, or eat only simple foods, similar to Daniel's partial fast in Daniel 10:2-3.
- **Non-food fast:** If you cannot fast from food, fast from something else you lean on: social media, television, streaming, or entertainment. Give that time to prayer.

Please be wise about your health. If you are pregnant or nursing, have diabetes, take medications that require food, have a history of an eating disorder, or have any medical condition, talk with your doctor before fasting from food. A non-food fast is a faithful alternative. God is honored by obedience and a sincere heart, not by physical hardship.

A Simple Pattern for Each Fast Day

1. **Morning:** Read the week's Scripture passage slowly. Pray, asking God to meet you.
2. **Mealtimes:** Use the time you would have spent eating to pray through the week's prayer prompts.
3. **Through the day:** When hunger comes, pause and pray a short sentence: Lord, I need you.
4. **Evening:** Write down what God showed you. Break the fast with thanks.

Week 1: Repentance

Passage: Joel 2:12-17 (also Nehemiah 9:1-3)

Why God's people fasted this way: When Israel recognized their sin, they fasted as an outward sign of an inward turning. Joel called the people to "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning," and then added, "rend your heart and not your garments." The fast was never the point. A changed heart was.

Reflection

- Where have I drifted from God, in large ways or small ones?
- What am I hiding, excusing, or minimizing?
- What does Joel 2:13 tell me about the character of the God I am returning to?

Prayer prompts

- Ask God to search your heart (Psalm 139:23-24) and confess what he shows you.
- Confess not only individual sins but our shared sins as a church: apathy, division, prayerlessness, pride.
- Thank God that he is "gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."

One step to take: Is there anyone you need to ask forgiveness from, or forgive? Take one step this week.

Week 2: Dependence in Crisis

Passage: 2 Chronicles 20:1-17

Why God's people fasted this way: When a vast army marched against Judah, King Jehoshaphat did not first strategize. He proclaimed a fast and gathered the people to seek the Lord. His prayer ended with words worth memorizing: "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you." Esther and the Jews of Susa fasted in the same way when facing a threat they could not solve on their own (Esther 4:16).

Reflection

- What situation in my life, family, or church feels bigger than I can handle?
- Where have I been relying on my own strength, plans, or resources?
- What does it mean to keep my eyes on God rather than on the problem?

Prayer prompts

- Name your "vast armies" before God: the fears, burdens, and problems you cannot solve.
- Pray Jehoshaphat's prayer in your own words, ending with "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."
- Pray for those in our church and community who are in crisis right now.

One step to take: Write down one burden you are handing over to God, and keep the note somewhere you will see it.

Week 3: Guidance and Sending

Passage: Acts 13:1-3 (also Acts 14:23)

Why God's people fasted this way: The church at Antioch was worshiping and fasting when the Holy Spirit set apart Barnabas and Saul for the mission. They fasted and prayed again before sending them out. Paul and Barnabas also fasted and prayed when they appointed elders in the new churches. Fasting is a way of listening before acting.

Reflection

- Where do I need direction right now?
- Am I truly willing to do whatever God shows me, or am I only asking for his approval of my plans?
- What might God be setting me apart to do, in my family, workplace, neighborhood, or church?

Prayer prompts

- Ask God for wisdom and clear direction for our church in the year ahead.
- Pray for our pastors, leaders, and volunteers.
- Pray for missionaries and those we support, and ask God to raise up workers from among us.

One step to take: Ask God, "What is one way you want me to serve or go?" and write down whatever comes to mind.

Week 4: Justice and Mercy

Passage: Isaiah 58:3-10

Why God's people fasted this way: In Isaiah 58, the people were fasting faithfully but living unjustly, and God confronted them. The fast he desires is "to loose the bonds of wickedness... to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house." Here, hunger turns us outward. Our empty stomachs remind us of people who are hungry every day, not by choice.

Reflection

- Has my faith been mostly private and personal, with little overflow toward others?
- Who is hungry, lonely, overlooked, or oppressed in our community?
- What would it look like for my fast to become generosity?

Prayer prompts

- Pray for those in our community facing poverty, hunger, addiction, or loneliness.
- Ask God to soften your heart and open your eyes to specific people you can help.
- Pray that our church would be known for mercy.

One step to take: Take the money you would have spent on food today and give it to a ministry that feeds the hungry, or share a meal with someone in need.

Week 5: Hunger for God's Word

Passage: Matthew 4:1-4 (also Deuteronomy 8:3)

Why God's people fasted this way: Jesus fasted for forty days in the wilderness, and when tempted to turn stones into bread, he answered, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Moses fasted when he received the covenant words on Sinai (Exodus 34:28). In a fast, physical hunger points us to a deeper hunger.

Reflection

- How hungry am I for God's Word, compared to how hungry I am for food, comfort, or entertainment?
- What lies or temptations do I most often believe or give in to?
- Which Scripture do I need to carry with me?

Prayer prompts

- Ask God to give you a growing appetite for his Word.
- Pray through a passage slowly, turning each phrase into a prayer.
- Ask God to help our church be people who are shaped by Scripture.

One step to take: Choose one verse to memorize this week and recite it every time you feel hungry.

Week 6: Longing for Christ's Presence

Passage: Matthew 9:14-15; Luke 2:36-38 (also Zechariah 8:18-19)

Why God's people fasted this way: Jesus said his disciples would fast after the bridegroom was taken from them. Fasting expresses a holy longing for Christ himself. Anna, a widow in the temple, worshiped with fasting and prayer night and day, waiting for the redemption of Israel, and she recognized Jesus when he arrived. Zechariah promised that God would one day turn Israel's fasts into "joyful and glad feasts." Our fasting looks ahead to the feast.

Reflection

- Do I long for Jesus, or have I settled for his gifts?
- What would it mean to wait on him the way Anna did?
- What has God been doing in me over these weeks?

Prayer prompts

- Worship. Spend extra time simply praising Jesus for who he is.
- Ask God to deepen your love for Christ.
- Pray for the return of Christ and the day when fasting will turn to feasting.

One step to take: Plan a meal with others to celebrate what God has done during these forty days.

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WEEK ONE

Read Matthew 13:53-58

“And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.” Matthew 13:58 (HCSB)

This is one of the saddest verses in the Bible. It is the account of Jesus going to His hometown to teach. When people heard Him, they were astonished. However, their astonishment did not lead them to respond to His teaching in obedience and faith. Their lives could have been radically changed for the better. Their community could have been radically changed. However, no positive changes occurred in the people or the town of Nazareth. Why? Scripture gives the reason, “Because of their unbelief.”

Unbelief shuts the door on the transformational power of Jesus. Faith opens the floodgates to that same power. In contrast to this passage are countless others where Jesus worked miracles in response to the faith present in the lives of people. (Read Matthew 9:2; 9:22; 15:28; Mark 10:52; Luke 8:48)

Reflection Questions:
When Jesus looks at your life what does He find? A robust faith or unbelief? Do you believe Jesus can work renewal and revitalization in your church? Do you believe He will? Are praying for Jesus to bring renewal to your church?

PRAYER

If your unbelief is a roadblock to Jesus working in your church, confess the sin of unbelief. Ask God to strengthen your faith in Him. (Mark 9:24)

Read Jeremiah 32:17-44

"Ah, Lord God! You Yourself made the heavens and earth by Your great power and with Your outstretched arm. Nothing is too difficult for You!" Jeremiah 32:17 (HCSB)

Sometimes we forget how powerful God is. We forget the great things He has done in the past. We often allow the immensity of our own problems and challenges to overshadow His greatness. Our view of God diminishes Him to an anemic, powerless God.

In order to build a case for the greatness and power of God, Jeremiah reminds us of what God has done in the past. He reminds us that God "made the heavens and the earth." What a display of power! God spoke and the world came into existence. Only God could do that. Creation itself is a testimony to the truth that God can do anything.

Creation was just the beginning of God's mighty display of power. Jeremiah reminds us that this same God led His people out of Egypt with signs and wonders (verse 21). Scripture reminds us that this same God sent Jesus to be born of a virgin, live a sinless life, die on a cross for our sins, and be raised to life on the third day. Only God could do that! The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus is a reminder that God's power is limitless.

Reflection Questions:
Have you forgotten God's ability to do anything? Recall the many great things God has done as recorded in Scripture. Remember the great things He has done in your life. Remember the great things He has done in your church.

PRAYER

Ask God to do a work of revitalization in your church that only He can get credit for.

Read Luke 18:9-14

“I tell you, this one went down to his house justified rather than the other; because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke 18:14 (HCSB)

Pride is a subtle sin. It is not always easy to detect in our own lives. Jesus understood this, so He gave us a picture of what pride and humility look like through the two characters in this parable. The Pharisee is an example of how pride behaves. The tax collector is an example of how humility behaves.

Pride refuses to admit it has a need. Not once did the Pharisee admit he had a need. Humility, on the other hand, readily admits it has a need. The tax collector pounded his chest and admitted he needed forgiveness as a sinner.

Pride has an eagle eye for other people’s sins. The Pharisee said, “I thank you that I am not like those other people who are greedy, unrighteous adulterers.” Humility sees its own sin. The tax collector declared, “God turn your wrath from me, a sinner.”

Reflection Questions:
The main concern for pride is “what do other people think of me?” The Pharisee prayed about himself stating, “I fast twice a week, I give a tenth of everything I get.” Humility’s main concern is “what does God think about me?”

PRAYER

Pray that God will reveal any areas of unhealthy pride in your life and show you His way to true humility.

Read Matthew 5:8

“The pure in heart are blessed, for they will see God.” Matthew 5:8 (HCSB)

I love to watch the snow fall and accumulate on the ground. However, once the snow has fallen it begins to lose that pure white color because of dirt. After that beautiful snow falls on the roads and vehicles begin to move about, the snow changes to an ugly brown.

Jesus teaches that the pure in heart are blessed. To see God is an awesome promise.

When was the last time you saw God? We can never see the wonder of God’s presence until we have a pure heart. Satan doesn’t mind if we have a little pureness as long as we have a lot of the world’s dirt. As a result, our spiritually pure heart looks more like day-old snow. I see in this part of God’s Word that pureness of heart has a great promise, which is that we will see God. To see God in the midst of our evil world causes our heart to be purer. As you read this verse today, is your heart pure? Are you focused on seeing the God of a pure heart? Has your pureness of God been mixing with some of this world’s color?

Reflection Questions:

Your church needs people with a pure heart to see God working in your church. Pray for the members of your church that have shown you how to have a pure heart.

PRAYER

God show me today areas in my heart that are not pure, giving me the strength to turn those parts over to you for cleanup. Give me the passion to keep my heart pure.

Read Psalm 139:23-24

"Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns." Psalm 139:23 (HCSB)

It's one thing to pray for a larger house, a newer car, a different ministry assignment, or a salary increase. It's another thing to ask the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to search our hearts and test our thoughts. The Bible reveals God as omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. He knows us better than we know ourselves. Nothing catches our Father off guard.

Health experts tell us that annual physical exams are wise and necessary. Early detection is key to physical health and personal longevity. Spiritual health requires periodic exams, too. Therefore, we make a decision and set a date to get away from the obligations and responsibilities of ministry. We desire solitude with the One who can reveal the most intimate things about us. During the moments of solitude, especially as we are prayerfully reading His Word, we ask the Lord to search our hearts and attitudes. Is Jesus still our first love? Are we guilty of simply going through the motions of ministry? Do we love the people we shepherd? Are we flirting with temptation? Do we lead with an attitude of humility or pride? Our solitude and transparency with God may lead to personal revitalization. It's documented that a revitalized leader is often what God uses to revitalize a church.

Reflection Questions:

How long has it been since your last spiritual examination?

PRAYER

Consider making a decision, setting a date, securing a place, and practicing a time of solitude with God. With an open Bible and blank pieces of paper, ask God to search your heart and attitude.

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Reflection Questions:

How long has it been since your last spiritual examination?

PRAYER

If Jesus is increasing, praise the Father. If you're increasing, repent and experience a new beginning.

Read Matthew 13:1-9

“Still others fell on good ground and produced a crop: some 100, some 60, and some 30 times what was sown.” Matthew 13:8 (HCSB)

Jesus addressed a large crowd of people, telling a parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning) to talk about a person’s heart. As the farmer scattered seed, it fell along the path, on rocky ground, among thorns, and on good soil. Jesus desires for His followers to have hearts (soil) that yield a harvest.

What is the present condition of your heart? In Jesus’ parable, He talks about four kinds of soil (hearts):

A calloused heart. This person lacks spiritual and ministerial expectations, goes through the motions, and relates to God with a selfish agenda.

A shallow heart. This person is immature in the faith and busy in ministry. It’s possible to be a mile wide and an inch deep.

A distracted heart. This person battles the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth.

A productive heart. This person lives his or her life to fulfill God’s mission. In order to plant a garden, the ground (soil), must first be broken. If you desire to yield a spiritual harvest, brokenness is often what God uses.

Reflection Questions:
Are you willing to be broken for God's glory? What is currentlybreaking your heart and spirit? What kind of soil are you?

PRAYER

Ask the Lord today to show you the real condition of your heart. If you have a calloused, shallow, or distracted heart, allow the Lord to change you. He wants you to have a productive heart, meaning a heart that loves Him, builds His church, and expands His kingdom.

Christians must see their sinfulness the way God sees it.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Thy presence and do not take Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit.” Psalm 51:10-12

Preparation:

• Praise God for who He is
• Confess your sinfulness and need for cleansing
• Allow His Spirit to draw you near Ask God to:
• Search your heart and reveal any sin
• Help you be honest with Him about your sin
• Fill you with a deep desire for holiness
• Help you hate the sin in your life
• Help you surrender sinful thoughts and practices
• Help you live more faithfully
• Restore lost joy in your walk with Him

Thanksgiving:
• Thank God for hearing you
• Trust that God is at work to accomplish His will

WEEK TWO

Read Matthew 7:7-12

“Keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep searching, and you will find. Keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you.” Matthew 7:7 (HCSB)

The Bible is clear that God answers the fervent prayers of His people according to His will, and we know it is His will for His church to be revitalized and healthy. Perhaps revival tarries because we give up on prayer too soon.

A small girl watched as her mother smeared cold cream on her face. She asked, “Mommy, why are you doing that?” “To make myself beautiful,” the mother replied. In a few moments, as the mother started wiping off the cream, the child asked, “Are you giving up already?”

We should never give up in prayer as we ask God to revitalize our churches. We should pray regularly and intensely until the answer comes. The verbs “ask, seek, and knock” are expressed in a form that denotes continuous action. Jesus is literally saying, “Ask, and keep on asking. Seek, and keep on seeking. Knock, and keep on knocking.”

Reflection Questions:

Do you regularly pray with intensity for the revitalization of your church? If your church needs to be revitalized, whatever you do, do not quit praying until the answer comes. Ask, seek, and knock!

PRAYER

Begin your journey of ongoing, fervent prayer for your church's revitalization today. God will answer in His time.

Read 1 Samuel 12:20-22

“Samuel replied, “Don’t be afraid. Even though you have committed all this evil, don’t turn away from following the LORD. Instead, worship the LORD with all your heart. Don’t turn away to follow worthless things that can’t profit or deliver you; they are worthless. The LORD will not abandon His people, because of His great name and because He has determined to make you His own people.” 1 Samuel 12:20 22 (HCSB)

The year 2008 changed the value of many things: houses, retirement accounts, salaries, etc. There will be long lasting effects on the companies and individuals impacted. Value changes. What would it be like if something of great value never changed? The value of something that is priceless remains priceless throughout all eternity. We have a priceless Savior!

These verses in 1 Samuel remind us that even during times when we have sinned against the Lord, we must not turn from Him. The name of the Lord has great value for us. One of the ways we see the value of the Lord is He won’t forsake His people. Not that we have that much value; but because His name and reputation are that valuable.

Reflection Questions:
Do you see the value of the name of the Lord? Does your life reflect how much value you see in the Lord?

PRAYER

Pray today that the value of God's name would be seen in your life so that a world may see Him. Pray that your church will reflect the value of the name of the Lord.

Read Galatians 5:22-26

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” Galatians 5:22-23 (KJV)

As followers of Jesus we must daily yield to the control of the Holy Spirit. Verse 25 encourages us to “live by the Spirit” and “follow the Spirit.” Tangible evidence that the Holy Spirit is in control of our life is spiritual fruit.

Just as an apple is the outward evidence of the inner reality of an apple tree, so the fruit of the Holy Spirit is the outward evidence that the Holy Spirit is controlling our lives.

When the Holy Spirit is in control, our lives will be characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faith, gentleness and self control. God’s plan is to produce all of these qualities in us as we yield to Him. When the Holy Spirit is not in control of our lives we are unloving, joyless, restless, impatient, unkind, and out of control.

Reflection Questions:
If the person who knows you best used the qualities in verses 22 and 23 as a checklist, what words would they choose to describe you? Would they describe you as a loving person? A person characterized by joy? Would they refer to you as a patient person? A kind person?

PRAYER

Yield today to the work of the Holy Spirit in you. Ask God to produce in you the fruit of His Spirit.

Read Luke 22:39-46

“Father, if You are willing, take this cup away from Me — nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.” Luke 22:42 (HCSB)

Jesus was fully God and fully man. In this passage we see the humanity of Jesus as He struggles with the will of the Father in light of His imminent suffering and death. Jesus realized that in a few short hours He would bear the weight of the world’s sin in His body. God’s Word puts it this way: “He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).”

As Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, He prayed with such intensity that His “sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luke 22:44). On the one hand He wanted the Father to remove the cup of suffering. On the other hand He realized that suffering and death were necessary for the salvation of precious souls and the fulfillment of the Father’s plan. Therefore, He prayed, “Not my will but Yours be done.”

Reflection Questions:
Above all Jesus wanted the will of the Father to be done.

PRAYER

Pray today that you would be willing to lay down your own plans, preferences and your own agenda for your church in order that the plan of God might be carried out. Pray as Jesus did, "Not my will but Yours be done."

Read Romans 8:5

“For those who live according to the flesh think about the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, about the things of the Spirit.” Romans 8:5 (HCSB)

I love to sit on the couch with my remote control flipping television channels. There are several buttons on my remote, one for the cable box, some for the TV, and a few for an audio system. Sometimes while I am watching cable I will accidentally hit the audio system buttons and the remote won’t control the cable box. It takes me a moment to understand that I’ve touched the wrong button.

The text in Romans 8:5 reminds me that by nature we are controlled by sinful desires. It also tells us that those controlled by the Spirit respond in a spiritual way. In a normal day as things happen around us, how we respond shows what controls us — our sinful nature or our spiritual nature.

We must choose which will control us. In churches today we often speak before we think and then we make the wrong choice.

Reflection Questions:
How would your life be different if you sought to be controlled by your spiritual nature? What about your church? Over these next weeks, ask God to speak to you and guide you to revitalization of your spiritual life and your church.

PRAYER

Pray God will show where you need to submit to Him.
Pray that He will guide your church leaders.

Read Ephesians 4:25-32

"And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ." Ephesians 4:32 (HCSB)

One thing we all have in common is that we have all been hurt by other people. Others have said or done things that have hurt us. Sometimes we've been hurt by what someone failed to say or do. The issue in life is not "will we be hurt" but "how will we respond when others hurt us?"

The Scripture passage for today cites several responses that often accompany the hurts we encounter: anger (verse 26), bitterness, wrath, malice (verse 31). When we identify these things in our hearts we are challenged to remove or put away these things. In place of these responses we're called to forgive.

Forgiveness is the way God relates to us. Forgiveness is the way God encourages us to relate to each other. Forgiveness means we treat the people in the future as if they haven't hurt us in the past. Forgiveness involves refusing to relate to people out of anger and bitterness. Forgiveness means extend grace to the people who hurt us.

Reflection Questions:
How would your life be different if you sought to be controlled by your spiritual nature? What about your church? Over these next weeks, ask God to speak to you and guide you to revitalization of your spiritual life and your church.

PRAYER

Ask God to identify the presence of unforgiveness in your heart. Confess the sin of unforgiveness. Ask God to produce in your life a humility that honors Him.

Read 2 Timothy 2:1-2

“And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” 2 Timothy 2:2 (HCSB)

One of the common needs pastors and church members voice is the need for more leaders. These concerned people say we need people to lead children’s programs, to work with youth, to do outreach, to give financially and on and on. But where will these leaders come from unless they move into your area or transfer to your church from another congregation?

Paul gives Timothy the answer: Raise them up. Christian leaders are made, not born, and 2 Timothy 2:2 tells how to make one. Mature Christian leaders are to teach and train faithful people who can become leaders who then teach and train others.

Reflection Questions:
Are you willing to personally train another person in your church to become a leader or would you be willing to be trained to eventually lead in some way in your church?

PRAYER

Please pray today that God will give your congregation a vision and a plan for developing new leaders from within the church family.

Christian speaker and author Ed Stetzer says spiritual maturity comes through “intentionality ... in a disciple’s life.”

Investing regularly in Sunday School or a small group is an important piece of an intentional spiritual renewal plan for a disciple. Just as an ember pulled out of the fire goes out, so also is spiritual progress extinguished when a disciple separates from other believers.

But spiritual renewal and progress demands more from the Sunday School or small group experience than regular attendance. Consider the following ten actions you can take to raise the level of your investment through your group in your spiritual renewal and progress.

Support your spiritual growth and group by:
- Seeking God in Bible study classes and during daily quiet time.
- Praying for and inviting guests to class/group sessions.
- Communicating regularly with group members.
- Fellowshipping with group members and guests.
- Helping group members in need.
- Reading and preparing for class/group sessions.
- Participating honestly and openly in class/group sessions.
- Living out the truth learned in class/group sessions.
- Serving in some way to strengthen the group and church.
- Supporting efforts to launch new leaders and start new groups.

Rate yourself from 1 to 10 (1 is weak and 10 is strong) in each of these areas. In which of these could you be more intentional to support your spiritual growth and your group? Ask God to help you and ask a group member to encourage you to take steps in the month ahead. If you are not currently in a group, take an intentional step of spiritual renewal and growth by joining a group this week.

WEEK THREE

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

“About brotherly love: You don’t need me to write you because you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.” 1 Thessalonians 4:9 (HCSB)

Many problems in a church can be overcome by love. Love often causes dissensions to be settled. Love prompts a church to serve the poor. Love moves us to do missions and evangelism. Love even leads us to give more financially, work with children, paint the nursery walls, or build a new building for the youth. Love is the greatest motivator to church service of all types. But what if we just don’t have that much love?

First Thessalonians 4:9 gives hope to those of us who come up a little short in the love department. It reveals that God can teach us to love. Love is not so much an emotion to be experienced, but an action to be taken. The greatest act of love in history was Christ on the cross. The good news for us is that the One who called Jesus to the cross can teach us to love people in our own congregation. Love really does change everything and is a real key to church revitalization.

Reflection Questions:

Ask God today to increase your love for a person, or group of people in your church, for which you do not feel much love.

PRAYER

Consider praying a prayer like this: Dear God, I do not feel much love for _____ (fill in the blank). I'm asking, and counting on, You to teach me to love _____ the way You love him or her. Thank You for hearing my prayer prayed in Jesus' name. Amen.

Read Matthew 5:9

“The peacemakers are blessed, for they will be called sons of God.” Matthew 5:9 (HCSB)

We see so much unrest in our world even to the point of conflict. When conflict erupts, hate wins. Sides are drawn and people are placed into two or more groups. When conflict permeates a society, trust is broken and lives are affected for years.

In the church today we see the same thing; people chose sides and conflict impacts the church. When conflict happens inside the church, Satan is the only winner. Most church conflict has little to do with biblical issues and more to do with individual choices.

Jesus teaches us that peacemakers are needed. Those with the gift of peacemaking find ways to squish conflict and help the church find peace. The actions of a few can cause the church to lose its witness in the community. Conflict in churches divides family, friends, and neighborhoods. Conflict brings bondage, but peace gives freedom.

Reflection Questions:

For a church to find revitalization there must be peace in the body. We must find ways to broker peace in the body.

PRAYER

Is there conflict in your church? Ask God to help you identify ways for you to become a peacemaker in your church.

Read Mark 10:42-45

“And whoever wants to be first among you must be a slave to all.” Mark 10:44 (HCSB)

In one of the churches I’ve been a member of there was a lady named Ruth who was a remarkable servant. Not many people knew her name and simply called her the “tea lady.” She served drinks at every church social. Ruth’s smile was remarkable and her heart to serve others was equally remarkable.

In churches today, there are many who are labeled people of influence. There are also folks that talk a lot without any real direction. The church is made up of many different types of individuals with varying characteristics, but few like Ruth who love to serve others.

Jesus tells us that many want to control others, but He has called us to be “ministers” or “servants.” For church revitalization to take root, servants are needed — servants that will give their time to impact people with their hands. The value of servanthood is critical as we seek church turn around. Let us never confuse leading with serving the needs of others. Ruth’s smile and her work just to pour a drink made a huge impact on the lives she encountered.

PRAYER

What ways do you serve others in your church? Pray asking God to show you ways you can serve the body of Christ through your church. Ask God to give you the best understanding of where to serve in the church. Also pray that your church understands their best place to serve as the hands and feet of Christ in your community.

Read Nehemiah 1:1-11

"When I heard these words, I sat down and wept. I mourned for a number of days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven." Nehemiah 1:4 (HCSB)

Brokenness is often what God uses to reveal vision. Nehemiah serves as an example of a leader who was broken over a city and its people. Enemies destroyed the wall around Jerusalem, leaving the city in a vulnerable position. The people were in great trouble and disgrace. Nehemiah sought God's heart and followed His leadership. He was available for God to use.

Church revitalization requires bold, courageous leadership. Nehemiah painted a clear picture of what revitalization leadership looks like in our day. (1) Nehemiah asked questions. He wanted to know about the city and its people. What questions do you need to ask? Is your church in need of revitalization? Are the people committed to sharing Jesus and developing believers in the faith? When was the last time you baptized a new believer? (2) Nehemiah accepted reality. He heard the news that the wall was broken down, and the people were in trouble. Do you need to accept reality? Your church is declining. Church members lack passion and enthusiasm. Maybe you need to be revitalized as a leader. (3) Nehemiah acted. He cried, prayed, fasted, and surrendered. What do you need to do now that will lead to revitalization in your church? Do you need to cry, pray, fast, and surrender?

Reflection Questions:
Are you broken over the current reality of the church God has called you to lead?

PRAYER

I challenge you to ask questions, accept reality, and act now. God desires to use you as a revitalization leader.

Read Matthew 5:13-14

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It’s no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled on by men.” Matthew 5:13 (HCSB)

As followers of Jesus we have potential to influence. We have potential to influence others for good. When lived for Christ, our lives can encourage others to glorify God (Matthew 5:16). We have potential to influence others in a negative way (Luke 17:1-3). To influence others for Christ is to be “salt.” To influence others in negative ways is to be “salt that has lost its taste.”

When we face the extremes of warm summers and cold winters, we understand the importance of a thermostat. When a room is hot we adjust the thermostat and it works in connection with the air conditioner to adjust temperature. We could say that the thermostat influences the room.

We can place a thermometer in that same room and the thermometer would be influenced by the room’s temperature. If the room was warm, the thermometer would adjust to the surrounding temperature. As the salt of the earth we are called to influence for Christ not to be influenced by our surroundings.

PRAYER

Is your daily life and witness more like a thermometer or a thermostat? Pray that God will give you strength and wisdom to be a good influence for Him.

Read 1 Corinthians 4:16-20

"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power." 1 Corinthians 4:20 (HCSB)

What is powering your church? This question triggers different answers. Some may say prayer, some great preaching; others a loving church family, one or two might even say electricity. Yet some churches have plugged into sources that will never power a church.

The Word of God tells us that the Kingdom of God is not powered by words. We can use words to motivate people, but words without action are of no lasting value. Talk is cheap.

One of God's greatest attributes is His omnipotence—He is all powerful. For our church to be revitalized we must plug into the power that comes from God!

Reflection Questions:
Throughout His Word we find God using supernatural power to sustain His people, and He still does! Are we trusting His power to change people and churches? How much God power is your church currently using? God is the power source of your church. God wants His children to plug into the power of His Word. Are you spending time in His Word daily? God wants His children to spend time in prayer. Are you spending time daily talking with Him and listening to Him?

PRAYER

As for you, make a commitment to be in His Word and pray daily. Encourage others in your church to do the same then, see how your church responds. You will see a great power from God envelop your church toward revitalization.

Read Ezekiel 37:1-14

“This is what the Lord God says to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you will live.” Ezekiel 37:5 (HCSB)

Parched and bleached by the sun, the brittle bones scattered across the valley presented a vision that summoned two words to the prophet’s mind—death and discouragement. The only thing more discouraging than the vision itself was the fact that God’s own people were represented by these abandoned bones. They had died, and their revitalization required significant intervention by God.

This vision challenged Ezekiel’s faith. God asked him an unthinkable question, “Son of man, can these bones live?” He replied, “Lord God, only You know.” Ezekiel’s response revealed his thought, “If these dried bones live again, it will require a miracle from You, God.”

In the vision, God did what only He can do. As Ezekiel preached, the bones came together, wrapped by muscle and skin, and those corpses rose to life. The dry bones lived! Likewise, Israel was revived and restored.

Reflection Questions:
There is a lesson there we need to learn. God delights Himself in revitalizing that which seems to be dry and lifeless. Do you believe by faith that what God did in Ezekiel's vision and for Israel, He can do for your church?

PRAYER

Ask God to increase your faith as you continue to pray for revitalization in your church.

WEEK FOUR

Read Matthew 6:9-15

"Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Matthew 6:10 (NASB)

In this passage Jesus teaches us how to pray. Each portion of His teaching gives us an important aspect of prayer. Verse 10 reminds us that God has a plan for our church. Our church is part of God's kingdom. His desire is that His kingdom penetrates neighborhoods, communities, cities, and ultimately the world with the gospel. When we pray, "Your kingdom come," we are praying for God to work in and through our church to extend His kingdom.

When God views our church, He sees its potential. In the mind of God, He envisions what it can and should become in the future. We call that "God's preferred future." He loves our church so much He doesn't want it to remain where it is today.

Reflection Questions:

When we pray, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” we are asking God to reveal to us what He envisions for us. Through prayer and biblical truth we discern next steps. When entering into a church revitalization process, the voice we need to hear above all others is the voice of God through His Word and prayer.

PRAYER

Ask God to reveal to you and to other church members what He desires for the future of your church. Prayerfully consider this question: How should we faithfully carry out the Great Commission in our context?

Read Joshua 5:13-15

“Neither,” He replied. “I have now come as commander of the Lord’s army.” Then Joshua bowed with his face to the ground in worship and asked Him, “What does my Lord want to say to His servant?” Joshua 5:14 (HCSB)

When Joshua, preparing for the heat of battle, saw a human figure with sword drawn, he went to the man and asked if he was for them or against them. Joshua soon discovered the man was an earthly appearance of Christ. The man answered that he was neither for them nor against them, but instead the Captain of the Lord’s army. Joshua bowed down and worshipped Him — appropriately.

During a revitalization effort, it’s possible for us to begin to sinfully choose sides in the church. We distinguish between those who are for our vision and those who are against it. A better route is to make sure we’re lined up with the Lord’s will. We know that we are with God when our desires for His church match His will in Scripture — when we are submissive to God-ordained leadership, and when our actions and attitudes reflect Christ-like character.

Reflection Questions:
Based on the above criteria, are you working for God's vision for the church?

PRAYER

Pray that God will help you align with His vision for your church. Pray that His godly desires for your congregation, in the community where He has placed you, would be reflected through your words, actions, and attitudes.

Read 2 Chronicles 7:12-14

“(If) My people who are called by My name humble themselves, pray and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land.” II Chronicles 7:14 (HCSB)

Excitement and optimism ruled the day. After seven years of construction, the Temple was built and dedicated. God’s presence was manifested in an unusual way. Fire fell from heaven to consume the sacrifice and God’s glory filled the Temple.

Later, God appeared to Solomon at night and told him that every day would not be like the day of dedication. There would be days when, in an effort to draw His errant people back to Himself, God would send drought and pestilence.

At such a time, God told Solomon His people were to pursue four things that would bring healing: humility, prayer, repentance, and seeking God’s face.

Reflection Questions:
Today God's people are His church. In many churches, there are indicators that revitalization is needed. If this true of your church, are you pursuing revival with the keys of humility, prayer, repentance, and seeking God?

PRAYER

Ask God to help you and others in your church to walk humbly with Him, prayerfully dependent on Him, diligently seeking His face, and honestly repenting of sin that hinders fellowship with Him.

Read Revelation 2:1-7

“... But I have this against you: you have abandoned the love you had at first.” Revelation 2:4 (HCSB)

The final line of the refrain from my favorite childhood hymn is, “Oh, how I love Jesus, because He first loved me.” When sung from a true heart, it is a beautiful offering of worship to our Lord. Our love for Jesus should not only be hailed in our worship, it should be the motivating factor for everything we claim to do for Him.

The church at Ephesus outwardly appeared to be a wonderful congregation. Jesus Himself pointed out their hard work, faithful endurance, worthy walk, and doctrinal integrity. The problem was that these works were performed out of duty, rather than out of love for the Savior. Though they did not know it, the Ephesian Christians needed revival. They were running the risk of losing their light for the Lord.

Many believers are wearing themselves out with a manic schedule of church programming while seeing few results. In their harried lifestyle of Christian activities they do not spend time cultivating their love for Jesus. They need a revival of the heart. They need to heed the words of Christ, “Remember then how far you have fallen; repent and do the works you did at first” (Rev. 2:5a).

Reflection Questions:
Is your love for Jesus the motivation for your work for Him?

PRAYER

Tell Jesus how much you love Him. If needed, repent for allowing your love for Him to grow cold.

Read Matthew 6:33

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.” Matthew 6:33 (HCSB)

A bank statement, a day planner, a church calendar, or a hospital stay often reveals our priorities. Misplaced priorities generally lead to hurt and confusion in our lives, marriages, families, and churches. Jesus gave His followers a simple and conditional promise. If believers would make the Father’s Kingdom a priority, then they would lack for nothing in life. That’s a priceless guarantee! Unmet needs may be an indication that our priorities are out of order.

Seeking God first says that we’re dependent on Him, that we’re desperate for Him, and that we’re dedicated to Him. It’s worth noting that this is a great way to live and serve in ministry. A call from a pastor search team, the daily responsibilities of life, the challenge to raise godly children in an ungodly world, a fresh vision for the church, and the ability to live on less than we make testify that we need to see our decisions from God’s perspective.

Reflection Questions:
As you consider your life, marriage, family, and church, are you seeking God first? What decisions are you facing at this moment?

PRAYER

Take Jesus' challenge and seek the Father's Kingdom first. Ask God to help you see your life, marriage, family, and ministry from His perspective.

Read Romans 15:1-3

“Each one of us must please his neighbor for his good, to build him up”. Romans 15:2 (HCSB)

A church is a family made up of people who belong to God through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. Each person in the church has an opinion about what he or she would like to see happening or not happening within the body. Trouble arises when those opinions clash and some get their way, while others do not.

Romans 15:2 tells us to make it our aim to please others in the church. Trouble decreases when the members seek to join together around a mission and vision rather than each one pursuing his or her own preferences. One way to consider the needs of others is to ask them what they’d like to see happen in the church and why they wish to see this particular ministry or program come about. Peace in the family is enhanced when we lovingly consider the needs and desires of other members.

Reflection Questions:
In what ways are you seeking to promote the interests of others in your church?

PRAYER

Consider praying today that God will give you opportunities to listen to the desires and wishes of someone in your church from an age category different from your own. Pray that God will enable you to hear what's really important to them.

R**ead Psalm 133:1-3**

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in harmony!” Psalm 133:1 (HCSB)

Few things are more discouraging or distasteful than a heated church business meeting over a trivial issue. In the moment when tensions are high and voices raised, no issue seems trivial. Later, when relationships have been severed and people have left the church over issues related to taste and not substance, those meetings leave unpleasant feelings for all involved.

Consider, on the other hand, the beauty and pleasing atmosphere created in the vision of Psalm 133. When a congregation is unified around knowing and serving God in the fulfillment of His purpose and vision for the church it’s a beautiful thing. Not only is God pleased with appropriate church unity, but the people of God are pleased and enabled to experience more of the Holy Spirit’s power in their work for the Lord.

Reflection Questions:
As you move into revitalization, in what ways are you seeking to promote unity in your church? And is there anyone in your church family with whom you need to seek biblical reconciliation?

PRAYER

Would you pray today that God will help you be a person of peace in your congregation? Consider praying that God will give you a peace-making, conciliatory spirit to aid your church as it moves toward revitalization.

Each night as you sit down to eat supper with your family give one person a special plate. This is the compliment plate. Whoever receives the compliment plate that night gets a compliment from everyone at the table. Rotate the plate so each night someone different will get the special compliment plate, including mom and dad. Guide your children in giving authentic words of affirmation not surface compliments. If used consistently, this simple exercise will teach your children to look beyond clothes and appearance, and look for what is helpful for building others up according to their needs — a skill that has seemingly been lost in today's harsh world.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. Ephesians 4:29 (NIV)

WEEK FIVE

Read 1 Corinthians 3:3-4

"For whenever someone says, 'I'm with Paul,' and another, 'I'm with Apollos,' are you not unspiritual people?" 1 Corinthians 3:4 (HCSB)

How many church pastors have been compared to their predecessor with the comment, "Brother so-and-so didn't do it that way"? These comparisons are seldom helpful and make life difficult for the new leader God has called to serve that congregation. While every church member should be encouraged to honor past ministers, it's a mistake to think their approach to ministry and church leadership is the only approach God can use.

The Corinthian church was divided because of different leadership personalities God had used in the past. Members picked sides to the exclusion of the people who preferred the other leaders. Paul pointed out their error and challenged them to put away carnal favoritism. We would do well to honor past leaders while also submitting to Christ-like leadership God has put in place now.

Reflection Questions:
What is one thing you can do this week to honor your pastor?

PRAYER

This would be a good day to pray for your pastor. Pray that God will fill him with the Holy Spirit, restoring the joy of his salvation, affirming him in his calling, and refocusing him on the mission at hand.

Read Hebrews 10:24-25

"And let us be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works, not staying away from our worship meetings, as some habitually do, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day drawing near." Hebrews 10:24-25 (HCSB)

The job of a cheerleader is to support the team and call the fans to action. Fans at a basketball game can really make a difference as they cheer their team to fight for victory. In church, while each of us has a part on the team, we also have a part like that of a fan. Sometimes we're in the game, other times we're in the stands cheering for those working hard for Christ's mission.

We cheer each other on when we affirm the way God is using one of our brothers or sisters in the work of ministry. We cheer our team when we "Amen!" the truth brought out by our pastor. We cheer the team when we participate joyfully in worship and greeting guests. We spur the team to greater service when we shout a hardy approval at the positive actions brought forth in our church business meetings. The positive attitude of one person can make a real difference as that individual vocalizes his or her support of the team in the hallways and gatherings.

Reflection Questions:
What's coming up or happening now in the life of your church for which you can offer your vocal support?

PRAYER

Pray today that God will show you ways you can support your church vocally with encouraging words as you move toward congregational revitalization.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-7

“A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person to produce what is beneficial.” 1 Corinthians 12:7 (HCSB)

There are two essential truths that should be magnified as a church desires to move into congregational revitalization: First, every person has a part. First Corinthians 12 teaches that God gives a spiritual gift to every member of His church. God indwells us through His Holy Spirit and empowers us to serve the body in some important way.

Second, one person really can make a difference. Many of us feel hopeless about church revitalization because we think the entire congregation will never get on board. While congregational buy in and unity matter, it is also true that one person can make a huge difference as he or she serves God whole-heartedly. One person who’ll witness, pray, give, serve, love, and live for Christ will inspire and impact others as well. Instead of waiting for others to join in, resolve to be one person who will make a difference.

Reflection Questions:
Will you surrender yourself afresh today to Jesus in hopes of being used to revitalize your congregation?

PRAYER

Consider praying today a prayer of re-surrender. Maybe you could offer yourself to God the way you did when you first came to Him. Maybe you could ask God for personal direction in how to live your Christian service to the fullest in the place where He has put you to serve and grow.

Read 1 Corinthians 14:6-12

“Since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, seek to excel in building up the church.” 1 Corinthians 14:12 (HCSB)

Paul is here speaking to young Christians in Corinth. There’s some desire to have certain spiritual gifts. Paul reminds the people that spiritual gifts are used to build up the church.

People don’t know their spiritual gifts in the church today. The Bible teaches that God gives all Christians spiritual gifts to be used for the building up of the entire body.
Have you determined your spiritual gift(s)?

The other problem related to spiritual gifts in the church is the lack of people using their gift(s). If you know your spiritual gifts, then how are you using them? If God gives these gifts, He expects us to use them!

Many pastors I speak with tell me about their need for workers in the church. If we are putting our gifts to work, then the church would have all the workers it needs, right?

A revitalized church is one that is using the spiritual gifts of the members to build up the body of the church and reach that community for Christ.

PRAYER

Pray today for God to show you your spiritual gifts and how He wants you to use them to build up His church!

Read John 13:34-35

“I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must also love one another.” John 13:34 (HCSB)

In the upper room, Jesus gave some final instructions to His apostles whom He would soon leave. He began that final lecture by challenging His disciples to love one another as He had loved them. That He addressed this issue first in the upper room speaks to the importance of it.

Love and unity in the church are critical to revitalization. Jesus stated that all people would know we are His disciples by our love for one another. Some of our churches are stagnate or in decline due to their lack of genuine love for one another and subsequent disunity. A watching world wonders if it can be loved by a group of people who do not seem to love one another.

Reflection Questions:
In The Mark of the Christian, Francis Schaffer states that the love of Christ in the lives of believers is what sets them apart from the world. He concludes that the world has a right to judge the authenticity of Christ's claims to be the Messiah, the Savior, the Son of God, by what they see in the lives of His followers. Is Jesus the One who can change lives? Are the lives of His followers different than those of the world? Do they truly love one another in difficult times? Do you live in unity and love with other Christians?

PRAYER

Ask God to help you love your brothers and sisters in Christ as He has loved you.

Read Acts 11:19-30

“The Lord’s hand was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.” Acts 11:21 (HCSB)

Are your life, marriage, family, career, and church healthy? The church in Antioch was healthy and strong. News about the church reached Jerusalem. It’s a fact that people talk about the church (good or bad). Barnabas reported that he saw the “grace of God” when he arrived in Antioch. What are people saying about the church you serve? As people attend your church, do they see the grace of God at work?

What signs distinguish a healthy church? A healthy church:

1. **Expects commitment.** Persecution couldn’t stop the witness of early believers.

2. **Shares Jesus.** Early believers didn’t talk about the economy, sports, or Hollywood. Jesus was the subject of their conversations.

3. **Welcomes change.** The church in Antioch saw the Lord change lives, marriages, and families. The church’s message must never change. However, methods need to change as the Lord leads.

4. **Serves together.** Barnabas needed Saul’s help to teach the believers in Antioch. Healthy churches embrace a “team” approach to ministry. The New Testament anticipates a plurality of leadership.

5. **Disciples believers.** Barnabas and Saul taught a great numberof believers for one year. Healthy churches never separate evangelism and discipleship.

6. **Practices generosity.** A worldwide famine convicted the early believers to give. Generosity is a must in a healthy church.

7. **Trusts leaders.** The Antioch church trusted Barnabas and Saul. Leadership trust is essential in healthy churches.

Reflection Questions:
Is the church you serve healthy or unhealthy?

PRAYER

Ask God to bless your church with health.

Read Acts 6:1-7 See the Power of Agreement “So the preaching about God flourished, the number of the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith”. Acts 6:7 (HCSB) Some churches avoid voting on issues of importance in the church because they believe votes divide people and give opportunities for problems to occur. These churches do have plenty of evidence to back up their practice. Many church splits have happened because half of the congregation wanted to go one direction while the other half wanted to go another. In Acts 6:1-7, there was a different mindset toward congregational decisions and outcomes. The church needed help with its ministry to the congregation’s widows. Leadership proposed a solution and the proposal found favor with the congregation (Acts 6:5). The result was a unified church that continued to reach out with the gospel and make more disciples.

Reflection Questions:
How can you aid in congregational agreement regarding upcoming decisions in your church?

PRAYER

Please pray that God will give wisdom to your church leaders regarding a plan for church revitalization and that their plan will find favor in the congregation.

Scripture emphasizes stewardship. Many of Jesus' parables deal either directly or indirectly with stewardship issues. Why is stewardship so important? Because it's an outward visible indicator of an inner spiritual condition. How someone handles his/her money and material possessions speaks volumes about his/her relationship with God. The same can be said for a couple and for a church. How a church deals with financial and material issues speaks loud and clear about that church's relationship with God.

In regards to a church dealing with money, many words could be used but let's focus on three key words: integrity, accountability, and witness.

1. **Integrity** — If finances are to be handled with integrity, it must be done with honesty, accurateness and truthfulness. Integrity can be described as the opposite of hypocrisy. When a church and its leaders handle finances with integrity, they do it based on the values, beliefs, and principles they claim to hold.

2. **Accountability** — This is critical. On a basic level this includes things like tracking how much comes in, who it comes from, and what it's used for. A church must have good internal controls and there must be a healthy transparency. On a higher level, it recognizes that all persons who handle money in the church recognize that it is God's money. It does not belong to any one individual or group of people in the church. Though it may be done with good intentions, whenever a person or group in the church approaches the money like they are the owners, problems will eventually develop.

3. **Witness** — The way a church handles its finances and material possessions will present either a positive or negative witness to the community. An individual's witness is made stronger or weaker by his/her reputation. The same is true of a church. Over time a church and its leadership gets a reputation for how they handle financial issues. That reputation impacts the church's collective witness to church members and to lost people in the community.

For some, these three words may communicate different concepts but they are, in reality, very connected. They are three ways of saying a very similar thing. In your church, do all you can to make sure anyone handling any part of the church finances is doing it in a way that helps facilitate, enhance, and strengthen the ministries of the church.

WEEK SIX

Read 1 Corinthians 14:24-25

Look for God Among You "... and as a result he will fall facedown and worship God, proclaiming, 'God is really among you.'" 1 Corinthians 14:25 (HCSB)

What would you say is the most important thing about your church?

For many people the answer would be, "This church meets my spiritual, emotional, or relational needs." As you think about your church, who are some of the people that have or are making a difference in your life? What are some of the ministries of your church that deepen your relationship with the Lord?

In my current role, I attend many different churches over the course of a month. I notice some churches are very friendly toward visitors while others have a harder time approaching strangers. In the text we read today, we find what I think is the best response to the question "What do you say is important to this church?" First, an unbeliever discovers the truth about a Savior, next accepts Jesus, and finally shouts, "God is really among you!" How great if this could be said about every church in our land.

In a healthy church it is easy to see that God is the center of that church.

PRAYER

Pray for God to show you how He is moving in your church. Ask God to help you reflect His presence to a lost world.

Read Matthew 28:16-20

Obey His Marching Orders "Then Jesus came near and said to them, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.'" Matthew 28:18 (HCSB)

In military circles, when a high-ranking officer speaks, people listen and follow directions. Our Commander-in-Chief, Jesus Christ, has spoken and called His church to action. The Great Commission is not optional or suggestive. Jesus expects His followers to obey His marching orders. Our marching orders begin at home and extend to the ends of the earth. The Great Commission is the mission mandate for every church, regardless of the church's structure, size, or style.

In the act of going, Jesus hasn't called His people to merely record decisions. He has commanded them to make disciples. A disciple is a learner and follower of Christ. Is the church you serve intentional about making disciples? What's your strategy for reaching the nations? Our Commander-in-Chief refuses to send His followers into the mission field alone. He promises to always be with us.

You and I have been called to attention and given an assignment that can change lives, marriages, families, churches, and nations. Let's not disobey our Commander-in-Chief's marching orders.

PRAYER

Reflect on how you've responded to the Great Commission. Have you and your church treated Jesus' command as optional or mandatory? May you allow the Lord to use you to impact the nations for His glory!

Read Revelation 3:14-22

Raise the Temperature "So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of My mouth." Revelation 3:16 (HCSB)

As a result of a bad meal, a curvy road, or a contagious virus, you feel sick at your stomach. Feeling nauseated is uncomfortable. Jesus challenged the Laodicean church on several points. The church's real condition left Him nauseated. A lukewarm church makes Jesus sick to His stomach. What led the Laodicean church to be lukewarm? God's people thought they were self-sufficient. Jesus wasn't really needed on a day-to-day basis.

Generally not in words, but at least in actions, many churches rely on their structures, staff, and strategies rather than on Jesus. There's hope for a lukewarm church. Jesus gives His people an opportunity to repent and change directions.

Reflection Questions:
Is the church you serve dependent on the presence and power of Jesus Christ?

PRAYER

Position yourself to discover what Jesus thinks about your church. If you and your faith family are not obeying Jesus, hear His knock, open the door, and invite Him in. He longs to fellowship with you!

Read Revelation 3:1-6

Strengthen What Remains "Be alert and strengthen what remains, which is about to die, for I have not found your works complete before My God." Revelation 3:2 (HCSB)

After Jesus had evaluated the church at Sardis and given his assessment, He then gave them a divine action plan. Christ said to strengthen the things which remain. It sounds as if there were some things in the church that were good and pleasing to God but needed attention before they lost their vitality.

Most churches have one or more areas of strength. Some congregations are great mission churches which go on mission trips and give money to missions. Others are really good at welcoming outsiders and making them feel loved and valued without feeling judged. Some are great worshipping congregations where folks are invited into the presence of God through singing and preaching.

Reflection Questions:
Are you able to identify one or more areas of strength for your congregation?

PRAYER

Would you pray today that God would reveal to you and others in your church those areas where your congregation is strong? Ask God to help you build on that area of strength for His glory and the good of the church and the community where God has placed you.

Read Revelation 3:1-6

“To the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The One who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars says: I know your Works; you have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead.’” Revelation 3:1 (HCSB)

Your church is evaluated every week. The first-time guests who visit have an opinion about your church. The senior adults who attend have convictions about the life and ministry of your congregation. The young families have some thoughts as well as the youth. The community in which your church is located also has something that comes to mind when they think of your church.

These opinions are varied and may have some merit. The opinion, or rather judgment, that matters most is the one offered by Jesus, the Head of the church. Jesus has some thoughts concerning your congregation, and the road to revitalization begins with seeking Jesus’ view of your church.

Reflection Questions:
How does your congregation's perception of your church's effectiveness differ from the perspective of Jesus?

PRAYER

Consider praying today that God will help your congregation understand how He views it and what He wishes to see happen for your church to move into new lfie and ministry and be an influence for Christ in your community.

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