

An aerial photograph of a city street scene. In the top left, there's a parking lot with several cars. A group of people is walking across the street in the top center. A car is driving in the top right. In the middle, a car is parked on the right side of the road. Below that, a group of people is walking on the sidewalk. At the bottom, there's a crosswalk with a car stopped. To the left of the crosswalk, there's a red brick building. To the right, there's a parking lot with several cars. The overall scene is a busy urban environment.

# GREAT COMMISSION *Revitalization*

God's Strategy for Reaching  
Your Community, Making Disciples,  
and Infusing Your Congregation  
with New Life

MARK HALLOCK

# **GREAT COMMISSION REVITALIZATION**



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*Revitalization*

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ACOMA PRESS

*Great Commission Revitalization: God's Strategy for Reaching Your Community, Making Disciples, and Infusing Your Congregation with New Life*

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To those who not only believe in the Great Commission, but are willing to do whatever it takes to see their churches make disciples across the street and around the world... no matter the cost.

The Lord is honored in you.



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# FORWARD

There is an unspoken epidemic happening in America today. It is not medical or economic in nature. What I am speaking of is much more serious than that. The surface level plagues of our day, though very serious, only exist in the realm of the temporal. The epidemic I speak of has for its core an impending spiritual crisis that carries eternal implications. I am speaking of the decline and death of thousands of churches across our nation each year. This rapid trend is something that must be addressed. Today, there are more people in America than ever before. There is a greater need for the gospel to be proclaimed and lived out through the local church than at any time in American history. Since we are living in this generation – the one boasting the highest American population in history – will we not be held more accountable

for reaching our nation than any other generation before us? This problem is real and Mark Hallock courageously and prophetically addresses the problem in this book.

As we think about the task of reclaiming churches through Great Commission Revitalization, we should reflect on the vision of the valley of dry bones found in the 37<sup>th</sup> chapter of Ezekiel. This great vision that God gave to the prophet drives us to answer the same question Ezekiel answered in the midst of the death and desolation of his day: “Can these bones live?” The question that the Lord poses to the prophet can’t escape our attention. This was not a question of intellect or logic. It was not a question of ability or strategy. It was not a question of resources or structure. It was much greater than all of these. The question the Lord asks is simply question of faith!

In a day in which churches are closing faster than we can replace them, this book gives incredible insight on how to revive dying and desolate churches with a renewed faith and passion. We know that throughout time, our God has been in the business of resurrection. We have hope because of a resurrected Savior. The same God that resurrected Jesus has a heart to resurrect declining and dying churches. The greatest need to turn these trends around are pastors and church leaders who are desperate for a move of God and are fully surrendered to him in this calling.

Mark Hallock does not write this book simply as an idealistic approach. He has faithfully hammered out these principles on the anvil of his own heart and ministry. As one who has stepped into the reality of a dead, dry, and desolate church, Mark answered the Lord's question "Can the bones live?" with a

resounding “Yes!” His leadership has led to one of the most dynamic stories of revitalization in all of America. Through his leadership, his once dead church is now a vast army of Jesus-followers, who are impacting their city, state and nation through the gospel of Jesus Christ, to the glory of God!

As you read through the pages of this book, I encourage you to ask God to bring you to a place of renewed faith and passion for your church. This book lays out the necessary principles for you to begin to see a spiritual shift in your church. However, you must be willing to sacrifice your dreams for God’s dreams and be diligent to lead your heart to a place of doing whatever it takes! As this book drills deep into your heart, I challenge you to say “Yes, Lord, is my answer; now what’s the question.” If you arrive at this point, the question is not as much about task as it is obedience. I believe God is up

to something in you and your church. I believe that through this book and a desire to see God move, the greatest days for you and your church are ahead.

I am praying for you as you run hard after God and allow the pages of this book to radically launch you into a new day! I can't wait to hear how the Lord uses this book to give you a fresh vision for revitalization in your church, how he brought life from death in your valley of dry bones, and how God's glory is being multiplied in our generation because of your faithfulness to his church.

**Nathan Lorick**

*Executive Director*

*Colorado Baptist General Convention*



## CHAPTER ONE

# GOD'S REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

It seems like yesterday that I was hanging out with my buddy staring out the front wind shield of my car. We were sitting in the parking lot of Calvary Baptist Church in Englewood, Colorado staring at this old church building. Beat up, old red brick. A parking lot with more than a few cracks in it. A steeple with chipped white paint, yet still holding strong since the church first started in 1952. And surrounding this old building was a community in great need of the gospel of Jesus Christ.



It was July of 2009, and at that time, Calvary was a congregation of thirty folks who loved Jesus but were tired as can be. Thirty men and women, boys and girls, who loved their church and were doing all that they could to keep it going. Of course, this is the state of so many of our churches in North America today; they love Jesus, they love the Bible, they want to grow, but they are worn out. Like so many other struggling congregations, the remaining members of Calvary were simply trying to figure out how they could keep the doors open a little bit longer.

You see, Calvary had once been a healthy, vibrant congregation that multiplied and sent members out to plant other churches. Several churches in the Denver metro area exist today because at one time Calvary had the vision, passion, and faith to plant new congregations. However, like so many other churches over the

years, Calvary slowly began to decline. The community around the church began to change. Families began to move away. Older members were passing away. A few pastors came in who were more focused on their own agenda than on God's. And sadly, over time, Calvary began to die.

As you can imagine, the faithful folks who were left in 2009 began to ask and wrestle with some honest, yet difficult questions. Was God done with their church? Was it time to close the doors once and for all? What did God want to do?

It was around this same time that my wife and I began to hear about this struggling little church and their need for a pastor. It didn't take long before we sensed a clear call to go serve this flock, if they would have us (or should I say, if they would have me!). I was convinced that God was not done with this church. In

fact, I truly believe God is not done with so many struggling churches like Calvary all over North America and beyond. Churches that many of us have given up on.

You see, Calvary didn't need some cool new program. They didn't need a rock band. They didn't need bells and whistles and flash. They didn't need a hip young youth pastor to reach families with kids. What Calvary needed was a move of the Spirit of God. They needed fresh passion. They needed loving leadership. They needed to be cared for and encouraged and fed the Word of God. They needed to be equipped and mobilized to begin living life on mission in their community for the sake of Christ and his gospel. They needed God to do what only God can do: bring true revitalization to their dying church.

Along with the remaining church members, my wife and I had one desire: To see God move

in power through this little congregation for his glory, for the edification of his people, and for the salvation of the lost in the surrounding community. This was our desire. This was our prayer. This was our hope.

#### **GOD IS NOT DONE WITH DYING CHURCHES**

So, back to my buddy and me sitting in the car...

As we stared at Calvary's old church building, I shared with my friend that our family was "all in" to serve this church if they called me to be their pastor. I just knew, as crazy as it seemed, that the Lord wanted us to go to this dying church and by God's grace, see it come back to life for his glory. As though it were yesterday, I remember my friend looking at me in that parking lot and saying, "Are you sure you know what you're doing?" I remember looking back at him and saying, "No. I don't

know what I'm doing. In fact, I have no real idea as to what I'm doing. But one thing I can't deny is this. I can't deny that God is calling me to lead and love this congregation. And I can't deny that I believe the Lord can bring this church back to life. There is no way that God is done with this church!" With a little smirk and a laugh, my buddy looked at me and replied, "You are nuts."

This wasn't the last time someone called me "nuts" for going to Calvary to help revitalize this dying congregation. I've heard it from a number of people on numerous occasions. Many of these folks didn't mean to put me down in any way, they simply looked at the obstacles ahead for this little church and believed leading Calvary back to health was next to impossible. To be honest, I have come to embrace being called "nuts." The truth is, I am! I would say that everyone of us who is

passionate about church revitalization is a little nuts. We're nuts because we are crazy enough to believe that God is not done with dying churches. We're nuts enough to believe that God has not given up on most churches that many of us would have given up on a long time ago. We're nuts because, just like in the Bible, we believe that God would take a seemingly impossible situation and use it for his glory. We're nuts because we believe that he loves dying churches and receives much glory when dying churches come back to life and vibrancy...and that he invites us to be part of it!

NOT EVERYONE WANTS TO BE PART OF THIS

But, here's what I can tell you. Not everyone wants to be part of this. In fact, I have met many who believe helping to revitalize declining churches is a waste of time. That it is attempting to fight a battle that cannot be won.

Often times, these individuals are quick to share their opinion that it is better to just plant brand new churches than fight the losing battle of replanting and revitalizing congregations that don't really want to change.

Now, don't get me wrong. There is no question that we need to be planting more and more churches throughout the world. We need to raise up and send out more and more faithful, Jesus-loving, people-shepherding, Bible-preaching, disciple-making church planters throughout North America and to the ends of the earth. However, at the same time, we must be revitalizing and replanting dying churches as well. This is not an either/or, but rather, a both/and. We need to both plant and revitalize churches. If we are going to push the darkness back in our communities, we must not only begin new churches, but we must also passionately pursue the redemption and

revitalization of dying churches. It is not a win for the community if one church is planted, while two other churches die. Yet that's what is happening in many parts of our country and world.

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REMEMBER WHO OUR GOD IS

Now, you can hear all of the stats of declining and dying churches and get incredibly discouraged fast. That is until you remember who our God is! Until you remember that our all-powerful, almighty, sovereign God loves to redeem broken things! Our God loves to do the impossible when everybody else has given up hope. That is our God. He brings dead things back to life. He brings resurrection when resurrection seems foolish.



Our God is a God of revitalization. This is true for our individual lives, and it is also true for our churches. What we desperately need in our day is for God to do what only he can do, and that is to bring new life, real hope, and fresh passion to struggling churches all across our country and world. All for his glory! The question is: *Do you believe that he can do it, and do you want to be part of it?*

#### CHURCH REVITALIZATION?

What exactly do we mean by church revitalization? What are we even talking about here? Let me share a definition we will work with throughout this book:

*Church revitalization is a supernatural work of God in which he works to bring renewed health to a plateaued or declining church, resulting in that congregation becoming a*

*unified, vibrant, disciple-making body of believers on mission to reach their surrounding community with the gospel.*

This definition captures what I believe to be biblically faithful, Spirit-led, God-honoring church revitalization. And I can assure you, God is right now doing this kind of revitalization work in churches all across our nation and world for his glory.

There are two key components to this type of revitalization that I want to highlight from the above definition:

#1: BIBLICAL CHURCH REVITALIZATION IS A SUPERNATURAL WORK OF GOD

True revitalization does not happen in a church as a result of man's work alone. While of course we have a role to play in leading and carrying out strategies that will aid in the health and

growth of a church that is declining, ultimately, revitalization is a work of God through his Spirit. For this reason, the #1 job of a leader in a declining church is to help the remaining congregation become increasingly dependent on the Lord, returning in humility to their first love, Jesus. This involves a unified commitment to consistent, faith-filled prayer and repentance as a congregation. As John Murray writes,

The church in all generations is dependent utterly upon the favor of God and the light of his countenance. This is so in the case of the individual Christian. When we backslide and turn away from the Lord we are visited with his Fatherly chastisement and the hiding of his face. The way of return to God is always by way of confession, humility and repentance (James 4:6-10). What is true of the individual is also true of the corporate body.<sup>1</sup>

A posture of repentance and radical dependence on the Lord and his Spirit is

absolutely essential in all of this. Not some program. Not some new paint on the walls of the kid's wing. Not some new "contemporary" praise music. No, the key is for this congregation to humble themselves, repent, and pray. Over and over again. They need God. Pure and simple. They need the power of God, for only the power of God can bring a dying church back to life!

#2: BIBLICAL CHURCH REVITALIZATION IS  
MOTIVATED BY THE GREAT COMMISSION

Once a congregation humbly recognizes that God alone supernaturally brings about revitalization, this humble dependence on the Lord then results in that congregation becoming a unified, vibrant, disciple-making body of believers on mission to reach their surrounding community with the gospel. *In other words, at the heart of biblical revitalization*

*is the Great Commission!* The Lord has given every declining church clear instructions on what it must be about if it is to experience renewed life, health and growth. Its call is to go into its community as missionaries of the gospel, doing whatever it takes to pursue the lost with the Good news of the cross.

#### GREAT COMMISSION REVITALIZATION

What we are talking about here is what I simply call *Great Commission Revitalization*. It isn't anything new. In fact, it originated with Jesus 2,000 years ago. How grateful we should be that we don't have to guess as to how God wants to use us in his plan to revitalize churches. He has made it crystal clear in his Word, specifically in Matthew 28:18-20.

Now, if you have spent any time at all in the church, you are probably at least somewhat familiar with this passage of Scripture

commonly referred to as the Great Commission. However, as with many familiar passages in the Bible, I'm afraid most of us don't know this passage as well as we might think we do. There is much truth in these three short verses that directly applies to church revitalization. My hope is that as we work through this passage, you would pray with humility:

*God, give me fresh eyes to see this text. Help me see these verses as if for the first time. Help me see how this great passage applies directly to the revitalization of struggling churches all over the world. Give me the courage and power to put the truth of these words from Jesus into action, both in my life and in my church. Not my will, but Yours be done, oh Lord. Amen*



## CHAPTER TWO

# SEVEN ESSENTIALS

As we come to Matthew 28:18-20, we find here Jesus' last words to his followers, his disciples, before he ascends to heaven. If you've ever been with someone on his/her death bed, or very near death, you know this; you want to listen carefully to his/her last words. A person's last words are important. They mean something. They want to communicate the most important things on their heart before they are gone. These are some of Jesus' very last words. With a sense of awe and reverence, our ears should be open, our mouths should be shut, and our



minds ought to be attentive. The Lord of the universe is ready to give his final instructions.

Verse 18 begins,

And Jesus came and said to them 'All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you and behold I'm with you always to the end of the age.

In these three short verses, Jesus lays out for us what I am simply calling “*Seven Essentials to Great Commission Revitalization*.” We see here seven things that are critical if we're going to get serious about pursuing church revitalization in our churches, God's way and in God's power. In this passage, we observe God's timeless truth. These seven things have been applied by the power of the Holy Spirit in dying churches that have experienced

revitalization for centuries. The same is true today. These words are as relevant to us today as they were the day Jesus spoke them. Let's consider God's strategy for revitalization.

ESSENTIAL #1: WE MUST SUBMIT TO KING JESUS AND HIS WORD.

Many times, when this text on the Great Commission is taught, preachers begin with verse 19. However, to fully understand the weight of verses 19 and 20, verse 18 is critical. Especially as this passage is applied to church revitalization. The first thing we see in verse 18 is that as his disciples, we must submit to King Jesus and his Word. This kind of humble submission is absolutely essential to revitalization. Verse 18 says, "Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me.'"

The number one challenge in most declining and dying churches deals with the issue of authority. It is that simple. I can tell you as one who's been blessed now to work with declining churches all around the country, authority is almost always the number one issue. Authority relates to the question: *Who's in charge?* Simply put, for good or bad, whoever is in charge has authority in a congregation.

Here's what I can tell you; either King Jesus and his Word will have authority, or somebody or something else will. It could be a particular elder or deacon. It could be the wife of an elder

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or deacon. It could be some committee that really has no relevance to the health and growth of the church anymore. It could be one or two

particular families who have been attending for

many, many years. It could be a set of outdated by-laws that no longer empower the mission of the church but rather handcuff the church from fulfilling the mission Jesus has given it.

Whoever or whatever it might be, ultimate authority is not supposed to lie in these people or things. According to Jesus, authority in the church is not supposed to work that way.

Our Lord says here in verse 18, "*All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me.*" To me. The Church is his; we are his; he alone purchased the Church by his own blood; he alone has authority. If we miss this, we will mess things up fast. When we start thinking that we are in charge, and that people need to submit to us, we are in big trouble. Moreover, if we believe we are a big deal and have power that only God should have, we have drifted way off track. In fact, we are in a very dangerous spot according to Christ.

God has set things up in his Church to function a certain way. When it comes to authority in the Church, all authority belongs to Christ and his Word. Not us. Where we belong is on our faces in humility before him, because the authority is his, not ours. His job is to tell us what to do. Our job is to joyfully do it. This is what disciples of Jesus do. And here's what we should know as Christians: there's no better place to be than in joyful submission to King Jesus and his Word. Freedom is found in submission. Joy is found in submission. Hope is found in submission. These things are not found when you and I have authority, but when we place ourselves under the authority of Christ, which has already been established by the God of the universe.

Joyfully submitting to the authority of Christ is absolutely essential for Great Commission Revitalization. Let me share a

story to illustrate this point. It seems like yesterday that our church received a phone call from a sweet but tired congregation that was nearing the end – First Baptist Church in La Junta, Colorado, a community of about 8,000 people. La Junta is a great little town in the southeast corner of Colorado. If you can picture it, First Baptist is over 100 years old and its building stands right on main street as the most beautiful building in La Junta. No exaggeration.

One of the faithful deacons who had served this church for decades called to see if our church could help them. *"We are tired,"* Dave shared with a bit of desperation in his voice.

We are down to about 14 of us and we don't know what to do. We really can't keep this church going any longer without some serious help. It seems our only option is to sell this building...but we really don't want to do that. Is there any way your church can help us? We just don't believe God is done with our church.

The truth of the matter is that God wasn't done with this church! Just as he is not done with so many dying churches. Soon after this conversation, a few leaders from our congregation set up a meeting and got together with Dave and the few remaining members of First Baptist. After enjoying a good old-fashioned potluck meal, we spent time hearing the hearts of these faithful but worn out and discouraged men and women who had been holding this church together for many years. They shared their desire to reach young families again, as they had years ago. They talked about their hope to care for the poor and the broken in the community. They spoke of wanting to reach the lost with the good news of the gospel. They shared many things during this meeting, but what stood out to myself and our leaders the most was their humility and longing to honor God. What we saw was a body of

believers who understood that the sole authority of First Baptist is, and always has been, King Jesus and his Word. This was clear to us. We were in the presence of brothers and sisters who had put any agenda they may have had, any preferences they may have held, to the side, that Jesus would have his way in this church moving forward. Jesus was the authority in this church.

As a result, after a few more conversations, our church was eager to move forward with First Baptist, helping them enter into an intentional revitalization and replanting process. Because of the hearts of these faithful individuals, we have seen the Lord, by his grace and power, breathe new life into this congregation. Not long ago, I had the privilege of visiting this revitalized congregation, preaching there on a Sunday morning. What I observed was truly incredible. This church, which was months away from closing its doors



for good not that long ago, is now a vibrant and growing church in the heart of La Junta. The young families and children the church had prayed to reach for so many years were now filling the pews. Folks who were new to the community and looking for a church had found a home here. The broken and disenfranchised were being welcomed and loved and served within the walls of this church. Little kids running around everywhere, screaming and crying. In fact, one of the long-haul members pulled me aside and said to me, “What a beautiful sound it is to hear children crying again!” Of course, I knew what she was saying. These cries were the sound of new life in this church! God was moving! True revitalization was happening right in front of our eyes.

God wasn't done with First Baptist, just like he isn't done with so many dying churches. The reason I share this story is because it's an

example of where things must begin in revitalization. If true revitalization is going to take place, a dying or declining church must first humble itself and recognize that King Jesus and his Word are the final authority. When this happens, you begin to see passionate worship again. You begin to see dependent prayer again. You begin to see joyful obedience again. You begin to see the lost saved again. You begin to see Great Commission Revitalization happening right in front of your eyes.

So, Essential #1, the foundation of Great Commission Revitalization, is *submission to King Jesus and His Word*. Every other aspect of revitalization builds upon this foundation. Without it, a dying congregation should not expect God to move in power to bring their church back to health and vibrancy.

### ESSENTIAL #2: WE MUST GO.

As you read this, take a moment and say the word 'GO' out loud. GO. Jesus says in verse 19, "*Go therefore and make disciples.*" Think on this word, GO, with me for a moment. GO is not a passive word. It is active. GO. For some of us, when we hear Jesus tell his disciples, both then and now, to GO, it makes us really uncomfortable. Yet "going" is not only a mandate for any true disciple of Jesus, it is essential for Great Commission Revitalization to happen in a dying church.

Jesus is saying to his disciples, "You've got to GO. As your authority, I am telling you, you've got to go and make disciples. This is what I want you to do with your lives." Of course, "going" means you can't stay. Staying may be easier. It may be more comfortable. But Jesus doesn't tell us to stay. He tells us to GO. To GO make disciples. As brothers and sisters

in Christ, we must help one another get “going.”

One of the major reasons declining churches continue to decline is simply this: *They have stopped going.* They may like the idea of going. They may even enjoy talking about going. Most likely they agree with Jesus that going is important. But in reality, they have stopped going. And as a result, the lost in the surrounding community remains unreached with the gospel.

Moreover, these churches fail to experience the excitement, joy, and new life that comes when those far from Jesus are saved and integrated into their congregation as a new believer.

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I have observed many members of struggling churches over the years who choose to adopt more of a “come and watch” approach to reaching the lost in their community than the “go and tell” approach Jesus commands. Many wonder: *“Why is it that lost people aren’t coming to our church? We have a nice building, we have nice people, we have plenty of parking spots, we have a clean nursery...I don’t get it.”* The primary reason the lost aren’t showing up to our declining churches is because Jesus told us to GO, not to stay. To GO to them and not expect them to come to us. To go as his disciples, living our lives on mission to make disciples of Jesus.

As we see thousands of churches close their doors every year in our country, perhaps more than ever before, the time has come to start equipping the people in our churches to live as missionaries. We live in a culture where the

large majority of people far from Christ will never “come” to church. In fact, the cultural norm in most parts of our country is to do anything else but go to church on a Sunday morning. This is sad, but it is true.

Understanding this state of affairs should lead every congregation, and in particular, every declining congregation, to get serious about “going.” To get serious about pursuing the hurting, the broken, and the spiritually bankrupt. As disciples of Jesus, we must GO penetrate our communities with the love of Christ in our hearts and the message of the gospel on our lips.

Imagine churches that are marked by these two things. Churches that pursue their neighbors and their communities with deep love and gospel truth. Going to people on their streets, in their schools, and in their places of work with deep love and gospel truth. Imagine

what the Spirit of God would do! I can tell you, there are many once dying churches that have begun to do just this. They have begun to place themselves once again under the authority of King Jesus and his Word and they have started to GO in obedience to Christ's call to make disciples. These congregations are seeing those far from God come to saving faith in Jesus Christ! They are experiencing renewed passion and zeal for the things of God. They are falling in love with the Word of God again. They are experiencing a fresh move of the Spirit as he brings them back to life.

Staying is comfortable. Going is uncomfortable. However, the key to Great Commission Revitalization is leaning into the uncomfortable and going. Every church that experiences Great Commission Revitalization is made up of individuals who experience Great Commission Revitalization in their own lives,

first. So, the question I want to pose to you is simply this: *Who has God put into your life right now that you need to GO to?* Think about it for a moment. Is it somebody on your street? Is it a parent at your kid's school? Is it someone you regularly see at Starbucks or some other coffee shop you frequent? Who is it that God wants you to GO to?

Let me ask this as a follow-up question: *What about your church? Who is God calling your church to reach in your community?* Who does he want your congregation to GO to with the love of Christ in your hearts and the message of the gospel on your lips? Are you willing to Go? Are you willing to walk in obedience to Christ and reach those that don't look like you? Those that make you uncomfortable? Those that annoy you or get on your nerves? Those you disagree with? Those who have different skin color and speak a different language? Those who sin



differently than you do? Are you willing to go to these individuals created in the image of God? Are you willing to go to these men and women, boys and girls, who Jesus died to save?

Christ has called us to GO make disciples. The question is, will we choose to stay, or will we walk in obedience to Jesus and GO? For churches to experience true revitalization, they must humble themselves, trust the Lord, and begin to walk in obedience to the Great

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Commission. Until our hearts break for the lost, and until we are willing to do whatever it takes to reach those far from God, we should not expect the Lord to breathe new life into our churches. It is that simple. Reaching the lost

with the good news of Jesus. This is what God wants. What about us? The time is now to be the disciples Jesus died for us to be. It's time to GO.

### ESSENTIAL #3: WE MUST MAKE DISCIPLES.

We have spent time talking about what it means to GO. Jesus clearly commands us to GO to the lost and the broken with his love and grace. This is absolutely crucial to Great Commission Revitalization. But what exactly does he want us to do once we go? The second part of verse 19 tells us. Jesus says, "*Go therefore and make disciples.*" Make disciples. That's what we're supposed to do.

What exactly is a disciple? What does Jesus have in mind when he tells us to "make disciples?" Biblically speaking, a disciple of Jesus is someone who loves and obeys Jesus and is

learning to apply the gospel to absolutely every part of their life. You see, our mission is not to simply get people to show up to church or give lip service to following Jesus. Our mission is to make joyful, passionate disciples of Christ Jesus! Disciples that are salty and light up the darkness of our world. This is our calling. This is what Christ wants us to be and do.

Jesus wants us to be disciples and to make disciples who do two things. First of all, he wants disciples who will celebrate him as Savior. To celebrate him as the one who died in our place as the substitutionary atonement for our sins that we might be forgiven, justified, and reconciled to a holy God. Praise Jesus for being our Savior! But there is a second thing Jesus wants. Jesus wants disciples who also follow him as Lord. As Lord, a true disciple understands that Christ is our leader; he's the one we submit to eagerly and joyfully. He is the

one who rules and reigns over every part of our life. See, the call of a true disciples of Jesus is to die that we might live. And we're called to tell others that they're called to die so that they might live as well. Becoming a disciple is not about joining some kind of club; becoming a disciple who embraces Jesus as both Savior and Lord means joining something far better than a club. It means joining the family of God as a child of the King! This is what it means to be a disciple.

Now of course, making disciples of Jesus first begins with living as a disciple of Jesus. And so, if a dying church desires to begin “going” and making disciples, it means the remaining leaders and members of that congregation must first pursue the life of discipleship themselves. Here is the truth: We cannot give to others what we do not have ourselves. This is especially true when it comes

to living as a disciple of Jesus. Of course, there are some who can fake it for a while. There are those who can talk a good game about being a disciple for a while. But over time, you see the fruit or lack thereof, in their life. Over time you see a spirit of love, humility, and sacrifice, or you see a spirit of judgment, pride, and selfishness. You see in a person's life the fruit of the Spirit, or you see the fruit of the flesh. You see an increasing desire for the things of God, or you see a lack of desire for those things that are Christ-like, biblical, and honoring to the Lord. I mention all of this because Great Commission Revitalization begins for us as individuals, and for us as churches, when we each humble ourselves and cry out,

Lord Jesus, make me Your disciple. Before I set out to make other disciples, make me your disciple, first. Lord Jesus, I know that I cannot give what I do not have. Make me a joyful,

passionate, obedient disciple that I might, by Your Spirit, go make more disciples who love You, live for You, and seek to spread Your fame to the ends of the earth. Lord Jesus, make me Your disciple.

This is the first step toward Great Commission Revitalization in our lives and in our churches: becoming a sold-out disciple of Jesus ourselves. Perhaps we have been attending church our whole lives but have never truly surrendered to Christ as his disciple. This isn't anything to be ashamed of. Jesus wants us to walk in the truth. To walk in the light. To be real. To be honest. Revitalization in our souls, as in our churches, begins with this kind of honesty, naming reality as it is.

This might mean the time has come to humble yourself and repent of the ways you have sinned against God, seeking to be the authority over your life and your church instead

of him. It might mean that you've come to a place of brokenness and the Lord is calling you to fully trust in him and his Word in a way you never have before.

This kind of brokenness, of desperation, of surrender, is so pleasing to the Lord. In fact, this should be the posture of every single one of us who claim to love and follow Christ as his disciple. The question is this: Will you surrender in this way today as you read this? Whether for the first time or the hundredth time, the Lord Jesus calls us to submit to him as his disciple that we might then be used by him to GO make more disciples for the glory of God. It all starts right here. Churches that experience Great Commission Revitalization are churches made up of humble, hungry disciples of Christ. Will you be one of them?

## ESSENTIAL #4: WE MUST PURSUE ALL NATIONS.

So far, we have seen that Great Commission Revitalization involves submitting to the authority of King Jesus and his Word, obeying his command to GO make disciples of Christ, whatever the cost. Jesus doesn't stop there, however. Notice what he says next in verse 19, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations*" – not some nations, not those nations I personally like – Jesus says, "*Go therefore and make disciples of ALL nations.*" When we talk about making disciples of all nations, we're talking about intentionally pursuing those who are far from Christ with the gospel on both a local and global level. Disciples of Jesus are passionate about reaching those both across the street and around the world.

A passage of Scripture that is helpful for us as we think about making disciples of ALL



nations both locally and globally is Acts 1:8, which reads,

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Along with the Great Commission, there is perhaps no clearer passage in Scripture that speaks to Jesus’ call on our lives as his disciples to go make disciples to the ends of the earth.

The first thing we must notice at the beginning of Acts 1:8 is that Jesus says we will receive power from the Holy Spirit and will be his witnesses. These are very definitive statements – they are promises, and Jesus always keeps his promises! The word that is translated “power” here is the Greek word, *dunamis*, which is where we get our English word, “dynamite.” The dynamite, explosive-power of the Holy Spirit is the only power that can bring

sight to hearts that are blind in sin, hearing to hearts that are deaf in sin, and life to hearts that are dead in sin. Remember, it wasn't your power that saved you if you are a Christian today. It was God's power and the work of his Spirit. The power of the Holy Spirit saved you, and his power is changing you from the inside out. His power will energize and equip you to make disciples of all nations for his glory.

Thankfully, whatever God commands us to do as his children, he also graciously empowers us to do by his Spirit. After Jesus tells his disciples both then and now that his Holy Spirit will empower us to be his witnesses, to make disciples, he next tells us where, or who, God is sending us to. He says we are to be witnesses for him in the city of Jerusalem, in the regions of Judea and Samaria, and to the very ends of the earth. In other words, Jesus tells his disciples that their mission is to testify to the

life-changing work of Christ they themselves have experienced to those in their neighborhoods and throughout the nations. Locally and globally. Across the street and around the world. You see, Jesus was sending his disciples out to reach ALL people, and the same is true for each of us today.

I love how Tim Yarbrough puts it when he writes,

Church culture many times focuses on what goes on inside its four walls rather than what goes on outside, nearby, and beyond...

As Jesus illustrated in Acts 1:8, the mission of the church is unique, purposeful, and urgent. Perhaps never before in history has the church been in such a position to boldly embrace Jesus' challenge to take the gospel to everyone, everywhere.

The words of Jesus in Acts 1:8 are just as powerful today as the day they were spoken. For today's church, Jesus' words are a "wake-up call" to be engaged in his mission on

earth...to take the gospel to every community, people group, and nation in the world.

Jesus' vision of the world is to break it up into manageable "fields" where churches have or can develop influence — their Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and ends of the earth. Jesus did not elevate one mission field above the others. Instead, He commanded that Christians reach out to all four.<sup>2</sup>

Just as he did with his first disciples, Jesus has sent us to be his witnesses to ALL people – real people, with real names and real faces. People that you know personally, in your neighborhood, your workplace, your school, your street, and your grocery store, among other places. Here's what I know. In some ways, it takes more courage to walk across the street to tell your neighbor about Jesus than it does to get on a plane, go across the world, and share about him. Most likely, you will never have to talk again to that person you shared the gospel

with on a short-term mission trip to

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Guatemala, but you will have to see your neighbor regularly. This is what it means to live on mission as individuals and as churches in a local context. It takes courage and power that can only come from the Holy Spirit.

Think about it. It's not an accident that you and your church are located in your community. The Lord in his sovereignty has placed you and your church right where you are, in your context as missionaries of the gospel. He's placed you there as his disciple, to be salt and light. To make disciples. But it all starts with being willing to go across the street. Meeting your neighbors. Pursuing them,

serving them, caring for them with the love of Christ.

Sadly, one of the things that you often see in dying and declining churches is that they begin to see the community as the enemy. The attitude is this: "It's the community's fault that our church is declining; the community is the problem; everything in this neighborhood has changed; it's not what it used to be." Listen, we have an enemy, but it's not the community. The community is not the enemy. The community is the mission field. Let me say that again. The community is not the enemy. The community is the mission field. And as long as we keep acting like they're the enemy, as long as we fail to go to them, love them, serve them, and pursue them with the love of Jesus, we shouldn't be shocked that those in the

THE COMMUNITY IS  
NOT THE ENEMY.  
THE COMMUNITY IS  
THE MISSION FIELD.

community don't want to step inside the walls of our church.

If we are going to “make disciples of all nations,” then we must be intentional, not only about reaching those far from God in our own neighborhoods with the gospel, but we must reach those around the world, in other nations as well. We must have an intentional focus on local missions, and at the same time, an intentional focus on global missions, as well. Jesus calls us as local churches to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. As Andy Johnson writes,

“Throughout his Word, God has given us a treasury of instructions on the global mission of the church—what it is and how to approach the mission in faithfulness and joyful confidence. We love and honor him not merely by working toward the final goal he's given—worshippers from every language, tribe, people, and nation (Rev. 7:9)—but also by using the

means he has decreed. And he has told us that his global mission will advance through holy lives, faithful prayer, gospel proclamation, and healthy reproducing churches. The local church is the engine of world missions.”<sup>3</sup>

The bottom line is this: If our churches are to experience Great Commission Revitalization, we must be obedient to King Jesus and his command to make disciples of ALL nations, both locally and globally. As we seek to move out on mission in this way, the Spirit of God will begin to instill fresh passion and zeal into the hearts of the remaining members of a dying congregation. As the Lord breaks our hearts over the lost in the surrounding community, along with the lost around the world, the Lord will infuse within our congregations a conviction to take our eyes off of ourselves that we might place them onto those Jesus came to save. This shift of attitude and focus is



absolutely essential for any church that truly desires to turn things around and be revitalized.

ESSENTIAL #5: WE MUST BAPTIZE THEM.

Baptism. How important is it for someone to be baptized? Is baptism really necessary for someone who seeks to be a faithful, biblical disciple? In short, absolutely. Jesus continues in verse 19 of Mathew 28 saying,

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations  
**baptizing them in the name of the Father and  
of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**

As we love people who don't know Christ, and as we seek to tell them the truth of who Jesus is and what he has done, we then plead with them to turn from their sin and place their faith and trust in him as Savior and Lord. From there we urge them to demonstrate their new faith in Christ through obedience to Christ's

call to be baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is to happen ideally within the community of a local church body where they can be shepherded by qualified pastors and disciplined by more mature believers.

Everywhere Jesus went, he preached a simple message: repent, believe, and what? Be baptized. I pray we will begin to see more and more declining churches begin to fill and use their baptism tanks on a regular basis. I pray that the faithful saints that make up so many of these congregations would no longer be shocked when somebody gets dunked, but rather, they begin to expect it! I pray more and more of these struggling churches will be so intentional, so passionate about reaching the lost in their communities, that more weeks than not, someone is getting baptized. That's the kind of thing that starts to happen when a

church begins to experience Great Commission Revitalization.

I still remember one of the first baptisms we celebrated at our church. I remember standing next to David Elliot, who was one of the long-haul, faithful patriarchs of the congregation when I came. He's been part of Calvary since he was a little kid, and he is the kind of guy who can make or break a church's attempt to be revitalized. How thankful I am that David is a man, who from day one, has demonstrated a humble desire to honor God and to do whatever it takes to see our church revitalized. Standing next to him on the day of that baptism, through tears, he shared with me what a joy it was to see that tank filled up again, and what a delight it was to see the lost people in the community come to know Jesus through the ministry of Calvary once again.

This is what Great Commission Revitalization is all about. Seeing the lost come to Christ and then baptized as an outward expression of the inner transformation the Lord has done inside of them. But notice that Jesus doesn't stop at baptism...

#### ESSENTIAL #6: WE MUST TEACH THEM.

Great Commission Revitalization doesn't end with baptism. We don't just dunk people and say, "Good luck!" Look at what Jesus says we must do next. He says,

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe** [*you could also translate that word, "obey"*] **all that I have commanded you.**

Jesus is clear: Obedience is vitally connected to faithful discipleship. Disciples obey their masters; disciples of Jesus obey Jesus. This

means obeying both the easy commands and the hard commands of Christ. One of the problems many dying congregations have is that they have not called people in their congregations to obey Jesus with all that they are. A culture has been created over time where lukewarm faith has become not only acceptable, but it has become the norm. Sadly, many are unaware that this has occurred. The spiritual temperature has dropped significantly over the years, but few are able to identify it. This kind of lukewarm faith is absolutely foreign to biblical Christianity. It is absolutely foreign to the kind of discipleship Jesus calls us to in Scripture, where we are to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow him.

For this reason, it is absolutely critical that declining churches recapture a vision for the unapologetic, clear, expositional preaching of God's Word. Growing disciples must be taught

the truth of Scripture that they might mature as obedient followers of Christ. They need the Word of God. The Word alone is infallible and sufficient for all things pertaining to life and godliness. Jesus exhorts us in our disciple-making to teach everything he has commanded. And everything means everything.

Healthy, Spirit-filled, God-glorifying churches are committed to teaching and preaching the truth of God and his Word. Not some of it. All of it. Congregations that are declining and in need of revitalization must seek to do the same. In faithfully teaching and preaching the Word, we will help people understand that Jesus does not call us to follow him as long as it's comfortable, convenient, and cool to do so. To the contrary, the Word makes it clear that Jesus calls us to follow him when it's uncomfortable, inconvenient, and not cool at all. This is the kind of disciple each of us

must be, and this is the kind of disciple each of us are called by Jesus to make. Great Commission Revitalization is marked by the faithful teaching of ALL that Christ has commanded.

ESSENTIAL #7: WE MUST TRUST IN THE POWER OF CHRIST.

As we come to the end of this great passage, Jesus concludes with one of the most wonderful promises we could ever ask for in this journey of revitalization. Look at verses 19 and 20 together, where Jesus says,

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, **and behold I am with you always to the end of the age.**

This is the good news of Great Commission Revitalization: Nothing I've addressed in the pages of this book can we do in our own strength. But praise God that our Lord says to us, *"I'm not calling you to do this on your own. I will be with you. I will be with you until the very end."* The hope that we have in all of this is that the Holy Spirit will assuredly empower us for the task that lies ahead. We don't make disciples in our own strength; we do it by the power of Christ and the Spirit within us.

Likewise, Great Commission Revitalization does not happen through our own strength and our own efforts alone. It doesn't happen as the result of some cool new program or some new strategy no one has ever thought of before. Great Commission Revitalization does not happen by fixing up your building, exchanging the old pews for new chairs, or substituting contemporary praise music for traditional



hymns. Great Commission Revitalization happens as we seek the face of God, constantly submitting our lives and our churches to the Lord. It happens as we joyfully place ourselves under the authority of King Jesus and his Word. It happens as we fall on our faces in humble, dependent prayer over and over again. It happens as we teach and preach the Word of God faithfully and unapologetically. It happens as we begin to walk in obedience to Christ's call, pursuing the lost and making disciples for the glory of God. Great Commission Revitalization happens when we cry out from the depths of who we are, "*Lord, not my will but Yours be done, in my life and in our church.*"

## CHAPTER 3

# TWO BIG QUESTIONS

In light of Matthew 28:18-20, which lays out the Great Commission of Christ, I want to ask two questions that each and every one of us must honestly wrestle with if we truly desire to see God revitalize our churches. These two questions should stretch us. They should make us a bit uncomfortable if we take them seriously. I would challenge you to think on these questions hard for a few minutes, a few days, or perhaps even a few weeks. Bring these questions to the Lord in prayer. The reality is that everything we have considered up to this

point leads us to these two questions. How will you respond?

The first question is this: *Will I surrender to Christ's call on my life to be a disciple and a disciple-maker?* This is where it all begins. Will I surrender to Christ's call to discipleship? Here's what we know; you and I have one life. We've got one life, and we have no idea how much time we have left. What are you and I going to do with our one life? What are we going to do for the rest of our days on this earth until we are with Jesus face to face? Matthew 28:18-20 tells us clearly what Jesus wants us to do. He wants us to spend the rest of our days making disciples for the glory of God.

I often think about the fact that not only do you and I have one life, but everyone else has one life too. Then eternity, then heaven or hell. Forever. The weight of eternity should move us out on mission with a sense of absolute urgency

to do whatever it takes to reach the lost with the good news of the gospel.

The second question is this: *Not only am I personally, but are we as a church willing to do whatever it takes to make disciples of Jesus?* It's one thing for us as individuals to do whatever it takes, but if we're going to see a movement of Great Commission Revitalization, if we're going to see a unique movement of the Spirit that brings many churches back to life and vibrancy, it's going to mean entire congregations saying together, "This is the Lord's church, not ours. And the Great Commission is what Jesus has called us to do. We don't exist for us. It's not about my comfort; it's not about my preferences. It's about obedience to our Lord and Savior. It's about making disciples of all nations!"

Let me shoot straight: *We don't have time to fight foolish battles in our churches.* So many of

our struggling congregations cannot afford to waste their remaining time, money, energy, and other resources fighting battles inside their walls that pertain in absolutely no way to the salvation of lost souls in their community.

There's a real Heaven, and there's a real Hell.

People's souls are at stake. As churches, are we willing to put our preferences aside in order to reach those far from God with the hope of Jesus Christ? Are we willing to do whatever it takes? Are we All-In?

#### EMPTY PEWS SHOULD BREAK OUR HEARTS

We have a saying we throw around at our church. It is a saying that helps keep us focused on what Jesus has called us to be about. But to understand why this saying is so important to us at Calvary, you first need to understand a bit about our church building.

You see, we've got an old, beat up church building. Sure, we've made some updates here and there, but for the most part, we've kept it old looking and old feeling on purpose. Why? Because we want to remain dependent on the Lord and not ourselves. *We must stay dependent on the Lord.* Not on some attempt to be cool or relevant, whatever that means. We know we must stay humble before God, trusting in his power and not our own. So, we've intentionally done things like keep our old, squeaky, uncomfortable pews instead of buying new, soft, comfortable, attractive chairs. The reason? Our old pews are a constant reminder to our people that following Jesus is not about our comfort. Following Jesus is about joyfully obeying him as we seek to make disciples of all nations, whatever it takes. Reaching the lost has nothing to do with comfortable seating. It has everything to do with pursuing and loving the

lost, sharing with them the glorious news of the cross, in the power of the Spirit, for the glory of God. It has everything to do with focusing not on ourselves and on our comforts as a church, but on looking outward to those in our community who desperately need Jesus.

So, the saying around our church goes like this: *Empty pews should break our hearts*. It is true. Empty pews should break our hearts. They shouldn't break our hearts because of our desire to be the next big, dynamic, hip church in town. No, our hearts should break because every one of those empty pews represents souls in our community that need Christ. Those pews have been built for a reason, and it's not just to look pretty. It's to hold somebody who needs to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ that they might be saved! That's why we've got pews. Empty pews should break our hearts.

## CAN YOU IMAGINE?

Not long after I became a Christian, I came across a quote that has had a huge impact on my life. The quote has often been attributed to the great evangelist, D.L. Moody, though some believe it didn't originate with him. Either way, I remember reading these words and desiring for them to characterize my life on this earth. The quote reads:

"The world has yet to see what God can do with and for and through and in and by the man who is fully and wholly consecrated to Him."

I remember reading this quote and thinking, "Oh God, I want to be that man. Would you make me that man? Help me to die to myself so that those words might be true of me, for your glory. Oh God, I want to see what you can do when someone dies of self and truly submits to



Your Will. I know I can't do this, but I believe You can do this in me!"

Well, it has been nearly 20 years since I first read this quote. And while to this day I still pray these words would be true of my life, I now pray these words would also be true of more and more churches, particularly dying churches that need to experience new life. Only one word in the quote is shifted. It goes like this:

"The world has yet to see what God can do with and for and through and in and by [**the church that**] is fully and wholly consecrated to him."

Can you imagine what would happen if more and more declining churches desired this? Men and women who desired to be this kind of church, surrendered and joyfully submitted to King Jesus and his Word? Wholly consecrated to our Maker? It would lead to the making of

countless disciples of Jesus. It would transform our communities. It would change the world.

Life is short. Eternity is long. May the Lord in his grace and kindness fill us with the conviction, the desire, the resolve, and the power to pursue Great Commission Revitalization with all that we are. For the sake of the lost, for the flourishing of our communities, for the joy of God's people, and for the fame of Jesus' name throughout the earth.



# APPENDICES

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PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR GREAT  
COMMISSION REVITALIZATION



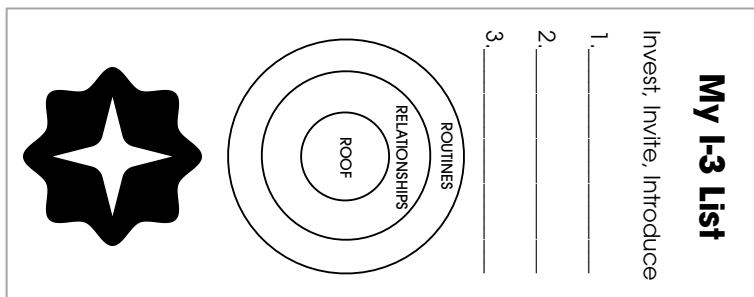
## I-3: AN EVANGELISM STRATEGY FOR YOUR CHURCH

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One of the great challenges in any church in our culture is helping people move from being members to being missionaries. Following Jesus' call to make disciples is one of the biggest leadership challenges in a declining church. The folks who have been part of this church for so long have most likely not been taught how to live as missionaries in the community. How do you help get them intentionally building relationships with people in the community? How can you strategically mobilize this

congregation to begin reaching those far from Jesus and inviting them to be part of their church? One simple tool that has been effective in equipping and mobilizing church members in a revitalization context to begin living on mission is I-3 Relational Evangelism. Here's how it works.

Each person is given a book mark like this that they can keep in their Bible or another spot where they can see it on a regular basis:



You will notice three words at the top of the bookmark: Invest, Invite, and Introduce. Here is what they mean.

## #1: INVEST

We want to invest in the lives of people in our community who are far from Christ. It begins with those under our **roof**. We need to help our people see that their #1 mission field is their family and/or roommates. Evangelism and mission must begin in our homes. Next, have church members think through faces of individuals they are in **relationship** with at their workplace, at school, on their street, on their sports teams, in other environments they regularly find themselves in. Finally, challenge them to think through their **routines**. Places where they shop, where they regularly get coffee or gas, the grocery store they go to the most. All of these places are filled with individuals, folks in your church can invest in, love and serve in order to build authentic relationships with them.



## #2: INVITE

When we talk about inviting, we are talking about inviting those you are investing in to connect with your church on some level. It could be inviting them to come to a special outreach event, Sunday worship, or a Bible study at a coffee shop. For those who may say no to all three of those invitations, it may be as simple as inviting them over for a BBQ at your house just to hang out and watch a game. It is amazing how a seemingly non-church function like eating burgers and watching a game can help build a bridge of love and trust with nonbelievers. Whatever it might be, and however it might look, the pastors and church leaders should lead the way when it comes to

inviting anyone and everyone to connect with your church family.

### #3: INTRODUCE

Introducing people to Jesus is our great calling and the mission of the Church. Introducing people to Jesus that they might experience salvation and grow as his disciple for the glory of God and the advancement of his Kingdom. Introducing people to Jesus must serve as a core conviction and commitment of any and every church seeking revitalization. If this is to happen, it must begin with church leaders serving as the model of what it looks like to live this out in their daily lives, not just as part of a mission trip or formal program. There are many excellent tools you can use to help equip your

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FAMILY.

congregation to introduce others to Jesus. Here are just a few:

#### EVANGELISM TOOLS & APPS

- Two Ways to Live -  
<http://www.matthiasmedia.com.au/2wtl>
- Life On Mission: 3 Circles: -  
<http://lifeonmissionbook.com/conversation-guide>
- The Bridge to Life -  
<https://www.navigators.org/Tools>
- One-Verse Evangelism -  
<https://www.navigators.org/Tools>
- The Story - <http://spreadtruth.com/thestory>
- Life in Six Words -  
<http://www.dare2share.org/mobile-app/>

- The Roman Road -  
<http://www.allaboutgod.com/the-roman-road.htm>
- Evangelism Explosion -  
<http://evangelismexplosion.org>
- The “GOSPEL” –  
<http://www.dare2share.org/products-resources/free-teen-stuff/>
- 1Cross App -  
<http://sbtexas.com/evangelism/1cross-gospel-presentation/>

Overall, I-3 Relational Evangelism is a great strategy to implement as you seek to revitalize your church. It will help equip the congregation to live on mission and help keep them focused on what the church must be all about: Making disciples for the glory of God.



## *Appendix B*

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### IT BEGINS ON OUR KNEES: LAUNCHING A WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING

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As discussed throughout this book, true church revitalization only happens by the grace of God through the Spirit of God. If God is going to move, if there is going to be any real momentum built, if God is going to breathe life and zeal into towns and communities through your church, then you need men and women that are going to fall on their faces in prayer. For this congregation to become healthy and

fruitful, it must be a church that is made up of praying people.

I often think of a story that I heard years ago about Charles Spurgeon. There was a group of American pastors who went over to London because they had heard of the great Spurgeon. They heard about this Baptist preacher; how his church was blowing up; and how they were reaching thousands upon thousands of lost people with the gospel. So, this group of American pastors are over there asking, “What’s the secret? We’ve got to see this for ourselves.” They visit Spurgeon and his church. Spurgeon takes them for a walk through the church building. It’s a Sunday morning, the time of morning when worship is going on. Folks are singing in the sanctuary. He takes these pastors into the depths of the church building ... into the boiler room. Spurgeon opens the door and all of a sudden, in front of them is a group of

four hundred people on their knees praying; Praying for the service, praying that God would move in power, praying for Spurgeon as a preacher. Spurgeon then looks at this group of men and says, “There, gentlemen, there is the secret for God’s blessing his work here.”

I remember the first time I heard that story and thinking, “Our church must have prayer like that because we need God to move like that!” It is through prayer that the power of God moves in and transforms the hearts of people. For this reason, one of the first things that must be prioritized in any church revitalization effort is intentional, devoted, dependent, persistent prayer. Scheduling a weekly prayer meeting can help serve as a catalyst for this kind of committed prayer. Regardless of when you choose to have the prayer meeting or what particular form the meeting takes, make a weekly prayer meeting



part of the DNA of your revitalization strategy from the very beginning.

## BUILDING BRIDGES WITH THE LOST

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While there are many excellent books and resources that have been written to help mobilize congregations to connect with the lost in their communities, let me offer four very simple strategies our church has found to be effective:

### #1. NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKING

Building relationships is key to gathering people. Which means it is critical to be thinking of different ways you can help mobilize your congregation to connect with

more and more people relationally. In particular, connecting relationally with their neighbors.

Increasing numbers of people in our culture are comfortable using social media to connect with new people. This includes our neighbors. One social network site, Nextdoor, is a key way people today are connecting in your neighborhood. Let me give you a few simple ways this can be a helpful tool for your people.

- Fewer young moms feel comfortable going to the park with their kids alone these days. As a result, many will check Nextdoor to see if other young moms with kids are having a play date at the park to go join them. Young moms from your church can be intentional about setting up regular play dates at the park on Nextdoor.

- Families can use Nextdoor to advertise special picnics and other social events they want to invite other families in their neighborhood to in the local park.
- Nextdoor is a great way to advertise a garage sale that folks from your church are having. This is a great way for their neighbors to come to them to shop for treasures. Encourage them to be ready with a note pad or an app of some kind to document their neighbors' names and where they live in the community. Then they can follow up later by inviting them to dinner or other church events.

### REACHING YOUR NEXTDOOR NEIGHBORS

*Here is an example of how one church replant, Calvary Summitview, has used Nextdoor to connect with their neighbors.*

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Everyone has walked by the community bulletin boards in coffee shops, local stores and city buildings. You scan the board for local news, upcoming events, stuff (for sale or FREE!) and services being offered. Often churches can take advantage of the community board by posting a flyer. Now, imagine being able to post to a community board that delivers your church's news, event or ministry directly to your neighbor's inbox. Nextdoor is a neighborhood-oriented private social media site. They offer a platform for any community member to post free stuff, news, events and concerns shared

to neighbors' inboxes and community pages on their website. *The Verge* says about Nextdoor, "It's trying to build a local graph to complement the social graph, and it has quietly grown into one of the largest social networks in the US, with over ten million registered users spread across more than 100,000 neighborhoods."<sup>4</sup> Not just pastors and replanters, but church members have an opportunity to share relevant events and news with their neighbors all across town. Calvary Summitview is a church that uses Nextdoor to help them connect with neighbors and share news from the church that would cost thousands of dollars in direct mail advertising.

So how can you use Nextdoor? A few weeks before your event, compile all the details for your event in an easy to read format. Make sure to include why the community should

know about and come to your event. Clearly identify your church with your name, address and picture of your church's logo, sign or recognizable building. Tell your church members to join Nextdoor who live in the surrounding neighborhoods. When they see your event emailed to them that same day they can "THANK" you for sharing it. The more thanks clicked, the more likely people are going to see your event at the top of their newsfeed. Does it get any easier to promote your events to your community? In many ways, Nextdoor is the easiest resource to broadcast your church's events with the surrounding community.

**Gabe Reed**

*Lead Pastor, Calvary Church Summitview*

## #2: INTENTIONAL ACTS OF LOVING SERVICE

Serving the community in the name of Jesus has been critical for us at Calvary as we seek to reach those far from God. It is amazing how walls come down and trust is built when a church simply tries to love on and serve their community in practical ways. When a congregation adopts the mindset of Paul when he writes in Philippians 2:5-7,

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

The Lord has called us as his people to serve others. As disciples of Jesus, service should mark our lives just as it did the life of our Savior. It should mark our congregations as well.

I completely agree with Mark Clifton, National Director of Church Replanting for the



North American Mission Board, when he speaks of the importance of dying churches serving their communities. Reflecting on his own personal experience leading Wornall Road Baptist Church, he writes,

For a normative-sized church of around 150, Wornall Road has an enormous ministry footprint in our neighborhood. In just the past four years, we have been featured on local television news at least 25 times—and all of them in a positive manner. As we have looked to meet the needs of the neighborhood and serve people with the love of Jesus, people have taken notice. You don't redefine your church for your community by changing your name, updating your sanctuary or changing your music. You redefine the church for your community by how you serve it. You don't serve your community to get people into your church either. You serve the community to get your church, the people of your church, into the lives of the people in the community on a consistent basis.<sup>5</sup>

Clifton is exactly right! We must help struggling churches build relational bridges with those in their communities through intentional acts of loving service. Consider some of these practical ways you can get your congregation engaged with the community through service:<sup>6</sup>

#### GENERAL

1. Host a free garage sale.
2. Bring free lunches to construction workers and servicemen in your area.
3. Hand out free gum at a city parade.
4. Clean up a widow's yard.
5. Give out free chap-stick or sunscreen at a water park.
6. Give out free bottled water at a busy traffic intersection.
7. Plan a "Back to School Bash" for foster care children. Have free food, games, and a backpack/school supply giveaway.

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8. Give out free donuts and hot chocolate at a city bus station.

### NURSING HOMES

1. Deliver fresh flowers to the residents.
2. Host a regular church service at a nursing home (offer worship, devotions, prayer, and fellowship).
3. Throw a “Senior Prom” complete with live music, food, and decorations.

### COLLEGES

1. Band: Serve free drinks or snacks at their practices.
2. Fraternities/Sororities: Often these groups have a required number of community service hours to complete. Consider opening your outreach projects as an opportunity for them to get involved, thus creating an chance for your team to witness and share God’s love with those that volunteer.

3. Sports teams: Serve free bottled water at their practices.
4. Give away free pencils and pens to college students during exam week.
5. Help college freshmen move into a dorm.
6. Prepare free meals for students and faculty.

## SPECIAL NEEDS

1. Host a fun day for children with special needs and their families to relax and enjoy themselves.
2. Start a pen-pal program matching volunteers to a person with special needs. Ask them to write letters and send small treats on a regular basis, sharing God's love in a simple way.

## HIGH SCHOOLS

1. Serve free watermelon to high school football teams.
2. Host a free car wash for the faculty.
3. Deliver gift baskets to teachers for "Teacher Appreciation Day."

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4. Serve free hot breakfast to students before the school day begins.

### INNER CITY

1. Serve hot breakfast for the homeless in your community.
2. Do a community trash clean up.
3. Host a “Block Party” with free food, games, music, etc. for families.
4. Renovate a run-down school in the area.
5. Do a mass door-to-door grocery giveaway.
6. Hold a graffiti clean up day.
7. Have a “Free Grass Cutting” day.
8. Adopt an apartment complex.
9. Adopt a school.

### HOSPITALS

1. Serve free coffee, energy drinks, and snacks to staff and those waiting in the emergency room.
2. Give out healthy snacks to patients of chemotherapy.

3. Deliver small gifts to patients and families in the children's ward (toys, care packages, etc.) Or send clowns, balloon twisters, magicians, etc. to visit with children and their families.

## HOLIDAYS

1. Hand out conversation heart candy to people for Valentine's Day.
2. Host an Easter Egg Hunt for children with special needs and their families.
3. Do a free water giveaway in your city on Independence Day.
4. Plan a grocery and Turkey drive for families in need of a Thanksgiving meal.
5. Host a Christmas toy drive for needy children.
6. Offer to go Christmas shopping for prison inmates who have children.

**What are some other ways your congregation can serve the community?**

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### #3. PARADES AND OTHER COMMUNITY EVENTS

A great way to let the community know that your church is there is to show up and serve at the popular public events in your community. Church members can have a powerful presence at events like parades, local fair and rodeo, whatever it may be. Calvary Church, a revitalized church in La Junta, Colorado, has done this with great effectiveness. Located on the main street in downtown La Junta, Calvary has made a point to provide water both to drink and play in each year during the parade. It has allowed for great fun and connection with the La Junta community. It also serves as a wonderful opportunity to invite individuals and families to come check out their church.

### #4. PURSUING THE LOST THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is here to stay. Over two billion people on our planet have at least one social

media account. Two billion! Whether it is Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, or other avenues, people in our world are staying connected through social media. As Christians, we can either shun it or engage it with care and wisdom. I am of the persuasion that while I don't believe everyone should use social media, there is a place for it when it comes to engaging and connecting with others, particularly the lost. It can be a wonderful tool to let people know about all that God is doing through your church. Sharing pictures of outreach events or posting testimonies of how people have been impacted by your church can be used by God in powerful and encouraging ways. It is also a great avenue to let the community know about upcoming events and activities. Word spreads quickly through social media. How can your church use it for redemptive purposes?

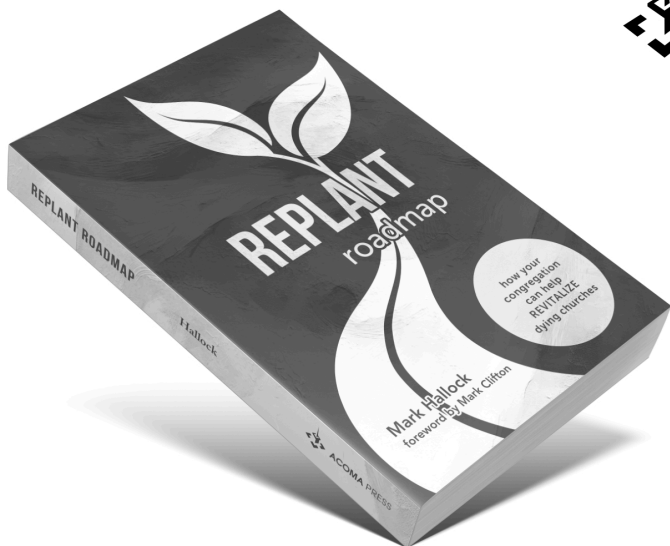




# NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> John J. Murray, “Does the Church Need Repentance?”, *bannerofthetruth.org*, accessed March 13, 2018, <https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2016/church-need-repentance/>.
- <sup>2</sup> Tim Yarbrough, “Acts1:8: A Challenge for Eternity,” *sbclife.net*, accessed March 17, 2018, <http://www.sbclife.net/Articles/2004/12/sla5>.
- <sup>3</sup> Andy Johnson, “Your Local Church: Engine for Global Missions,” *imb.org*, accessed March 17, 2018, <https://www.imb.org/2017/08/03/global-missions-primarily-local-church/>.
- <sup>4</sup> Ben Popper, “Nextdoor — a private, localized social network — is now used in over 100,000 US neighborhoods,” *theverge.com*, accessed June 23, 2016, <http://www.theverge.com/2016/6/23/12005456/nextdoor-100000-neighborhood-social-network-app-changes-business-plan-expansion>.
- <sup>5</sup> Mark Clifton, “Exegete and Serve the Community,” *markclifton.net*, accessed March 17, 2018, <http://markclifton.net/2016/06/10/exegete-the-community/>
- <sup>6</sup> List from <http://www.servolution.org/ideas.php>





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