



40 DAYS OF PRAYER

Devotional Guide for Church Revitalization

Inherent in the natural rhythms of individual and organizational spiritual growth is renewal... renewal of our minds, renewal of our spirits, and renewal in the vitality of our churches.

As the staff of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware, we are committed to walk with you on this spiritual journey...a journey we pray awakens you and your church to more of what God has for you all!

HOW CAN WE SERVE YOU?

Cooperative missions & ministry for His kingdom



Starting and
strengthening
congregations to fulfill
Jesus' commands.

Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware

(800) 466-5290

10255 Old Columbia Road

Columbia, MD 21046

bcmd.org



40 DAYS OF PRAYER

Devotional Guide for Church Revitalization

Content © 2014 Kentucky Baptist Convention
PO Box 43433 · Louisville, KY 40253 · kybaptist.org

All rights reserved. Reproduced with permission for use by the
Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware · bcmd.org

Dear Readers,

From exploring the claims of Christ, to embracing the grace of Christ, to cooperating with God's Spirit as He seeks to build in us the image of Christ...it is surely a journey. All of us who have walked the path have known unspeakable heights, unfathomable depths, and all of the steps of the faith adventure that connects those points. Along the way we continue to learn that God is true to His promise "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5, HCSB).

Regardless of where you find yourself on your spiritual journey, we commend you for setting aside a season to meditate your way through this 40-day devotional prayer guide focused on renewal and revitalization. Our prayer for you and for your church is the same prayer the Apostle Paul prayed for the believers in the church at Ephesus....

That God, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ and the all-glorious Father, will give you spiritual wisdom and the insight to know more of him: that you may receive that inner illumination of the spirit which will make you realize how great is the hope to which he is calling you—the magnificence and splendor of the inheritance promised to Christians—and how tremendous is the power available to us who believe in God.

That power is the same divine power which was demonstrated in Christ when he raised him from the dead and gave him the place of supreme honor in Heaven—a place that is infinitely superior to any conceivable command, authority, power or control, and which carries with it a name far beyond any name that could ever be used in this world or the world to come. Ephesians 1:17-21 (JBPhillips)

As the staff of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware, we are committed to walk with you on this spiritual journey...a journey we pray awakens you and your church to more of what God has for you all!

As you read, pray, and meditate on the greatness of our Lord, let us know how we can assist you further in your journey.

We would like to express extraordinary gratitude to our friends on the Church Consulting & Revitalization Team of the Kentucky Baptist Convention for first developing this resource, then sharing it with our churches.

simply HIS,
Church Services Team | BCM/D

Devotional Guide

Week 1

7	Day 1	Avoid the Tragedy of Unbelief
8	Day 2	Remember God's Power
9	Day 3	Confess Pride/Embrace Humility
10	Day 4	Purify Your Heart
11	Day 5	Search Me O God
12	Day 6	He Must Become Greater
13	Day 7	Take a Soil Test
14		Article: Self Examination

Week 2

16	Day 8	Ask, Seek, and Knock
17	Day 9	Value His Name
18	Day 10	Bear the Fruit of the Spirit
19	Day 11	Forfeit My Agenda
20	Day 12	Be Controlled by the Spirit
21	Day 13	Forgive One Another
22	Day 14	Raise up New Leaders
23		Article: Spiritual Renewal Begins With Me

Week 3

25	Day 15	Teach Me to Love
26	Day 16	Be a Peacemaker
27	Day 17	Be a Servant
28	Day 18	Begin with Brokenness
29	Day 19	Be Salt
30	Day 20	Rely on God's Power
31	Day 21	Strengthen Your Faith in the God who Revives

Week 4

- | | | |
|----|--------|-------------------------------|
| 33 | Day 22 | Discern God's Plan |
| 34 | Day 23 | Choose Your Side |
| 35 | Day 24 | Pursue the Keys to Healing |
| 36 | Day 25 | Love Jesus Above All |
| 37 | Day 26 | Seek God First |
| 38 | Day 27 | Consider What Others Think |
| 39 | Day 28 | Pursue Church Unity |
| 40 | | Article: The Compliment Plate |

Week 5

- | | | |
|----|--------|---------------------------------------|
| 42 | Day 29 | Love Your Leaders, Don't Idolize Them |
| 43 | Day 30 | Become a Church Cheerleader |
| 44 | Day 31 | Discover and Do Your Part |
| 45 | Day 32 | Build Up the Church |
| 46 | Day 33 | Love One Another |
| 47 | Day 34 | Schedule a Church Check-up |
| 48 | Day 35 | See the Power of Agreement |
| 49 | | Article: Stewardship |

Week 6

- | | | |
|----|--------|--------------------------|
| 52 | Day 36 | Look for God Among Us |
| 53 | Day 37 | Obey His Marching Orders |
| 54 | Day 38 | Raise the Temperature |
| 55 | Day 39 | Strengthen What Remains |
| 56 | Day 40 | Evaluate Your Church |

WEEK 1



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? The 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 transformational power. In contrast to this passage of Scripture 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)

When Jesus looks at your life what does He find? An attitude of faith? Or unbelief? Do you believe Jesus can do a work of renewal and revitalization in your church? Do you believe He will? Do you believe that to the extent you 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 that He has done in the past. We often allow the immensity of our own problems and challenges to overshadow the greatness of our God. Our view of God diminishes 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. No one but God could do that. Creation itself is a testimony to the fact 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). As we read the Scripture, we are reminded 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 can do anything.

Have you forgotten God's ability to do anything? Today recall the many great things that God has done as recorded in Scripture. Remember the great things He has done in your life personally. Remember the great things He has done in your church.

Prayer

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

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 with the two characters in this parable. The Pharisee was an example of how pride behaves. The tax collector was an example of how humility behaves.

Pride refuses to admit it has a need. Not one time in the parable did the Pharisee admit he had a need. Humility on the other hand readily admits it has a need. The tax collector struck 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 on the other hand sees its own sin. The tax collector declared, “God turn your wrath from me, a sinner.”

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.

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

I love to watch the snow fall as it accumulates on the ground. However, once the snow has fallen it begins to lose that pure white color because of the dirtiness of our world. After that beautiful snow falls on the roads and vehicles begin to move about, the snow changes to a very 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? You see, 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. 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?

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 for 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 that God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. In fact, 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 service. We desire solitude with the One who can reveal the most intimate things about us. During the moments of solitude, 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 service? 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.

How long has it been since your last spiritual examination?



Prayer

Lay your calendar open before God in prayer today, and ask Him to guide you to a time where you can enter an appointment date with Him, a date to practice solitude. Commit that date and time to our Father. Then, at that appointed time, include a place to ask God to search your heart and your attitude. Then listen and note all that He says.

Read John 3:30

“He must increase, but I must decrease.” John 3:30 (HCSB)

Service involvement isn’t immune from dangers. The enemy loves to see pastors and Christian leaders disobey God, divide churches, and destroy ministries. One tool the enemy uses is pride. As Pr. 16:18 reads, “Pride comes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall.” John’s heart was in the right place. He desired to see people focus on the Son of God and the Savior of the world. John wanted the watching world to remember Jesus’ name, not his name.

Trouble comes when pastors and Christian leaders fail to follow John’s example. For example, a pastor believes he is irreplaceable; he positions himself to climb the “ministerial ladder” of success; and he seeks to take credit for the church’s advancement and growth. God longs for His Son to increase and for His servants to decrease. Jesus increases when He becomes the “thread” of every sermon and Bible study, when He receives the glory and honor that are due Him, when His grace is embraced and given, and when He is followed with heartfelt devotion and surrender.

As you reflect on your life and service, are you following John’s inspirational example? Is the spotlight of service shining on you or on the One who converted and called you?

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):

- (1) A calloused heart. This person lacks spiritual expectations, goes through the motions, and relates to God with a selfish agenda.
- (2) A shallow heart. This person is often immature in the faith and busy in service. It’s possible to be a mile wide and an inch deep.
- (3) A distracted heart. This person battles the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth.
- (4) 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.

Are you willing to be broken for God’s glory? What is currently breaking your heart and spirit? What kind of soil are you?



Prayer

Ask God to show you the soil type in your own life... in the life of your church. Then, once more, ask God to do a work of revitalization in you and your Church for which only He can receive credit.



Self-Examination

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 through your life 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 any lost joy in your walk with Him

Thanksgiving:

- Thank God for hearing you
- Trust that God is at work to accomplish His will

*Jason Stewart
Kentucky Baptist Convention*

WEEK 2



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. In fact, 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.”

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 does answer.

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 has been long lasting effects on the companies and individuals impacted. Value is something that 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. And each of us knows that 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 in those times as well. One of the ways we see the value of the Lord is He will not forsake His people. Not due to our value; but because His name and reputation is that valuable.

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 would 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 (NIV)*

As followers of Jesus we are to daily yield to the control of the Holy Spirit. Verse 25 encourages us to “live by the Spirit” and “follow the Spirit.”

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

When the Holy Spirit is in control, our lives will be characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, 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.

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 Holy 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. In a few short hours, He would carry the weight of the world’s sin in his body. The Scripture states that, “He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

As Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, He prayed with such intensity that His “sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.” (verse 44) He wanted the Father to remove the cup of suffering. On the other hand, He was willing to face suffering and death, if in so doing, He would fulfill the Father’s plan for Him. Therefore, He ultimately prayed, “Not my will but Yours be done.”

Above all Jesus wanted the will of the Father to be carried out in His life.

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.”

“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 television remote control flipping channels. On my remote there are several buttons, one for the cable box, those for the television, and those for an audio system. Sometimes while I am watching cable I will accidentally hit the audio system buttons and then the remote will not control the cable box. It takes me a moment to understand that I have by mistake touched the wrong button.

The text in Romans 8:5 reminds me that in our human nature we are controlled by sinful desires. That we are sinners from the start is not unbelievable to us because it is so easy to live life as a sinner, right? The text 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 which we are controlled by; our sinful nature or our spiritual nature.

We must choose what controls us, whether sinful nature or spiritual nature. In our churches we often speak before thinking and, in so doing, make the wrong ‘control’ selection.

How would your life be different if every day you chose to be controlled by your spiritual nature? What about your church? Over these next weeks, ask God to speak to you and guide you in the revitalization of your spiritual life and your church.

Prayer

Ask God to show you areas of your life where you need to allow Him to be in control. Also, pray for the leaders in your church to be guided by Him.

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 have 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 we are hurt by others?”

The Scripture passage for today sites several possible responses that often accompany the hurts we encounter: anger (verse 26), bitterness, wrath, malice (verse 31). When we identify these things in our lives we are challenged to “remove” or “put away” these things. In place of these responses we are called to choose the response of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is the way God has chosen to relate to us. Forgiveness is the way God encourages us to relate to each other. Forgiveness means we treat the person in the future with love and respect. Forgiveness involves refusing to relate to the person out of anger and bitterness. Forgiveness means we choose to extend grace to the person who hurt us.

Have you harbored anger, bitterness, wrath or malice toward someone in your church? Take time today to confess your sinful response to that person. Choose with the help and grace of God to forgive that person.

Prayer

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

Read II 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.”
II Timothy 2:2 (HCSB)*

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

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

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

Prayer

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



Spiritual Renewal Begins with Me:

Investing Through Sunday School

Ed Stetzer, responding to recent research findings, stated that 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 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 . . .

1. seeking God in Bible study in class and during your daily quiet time.
2. praying for and inviting guests to group time.
3. communicating regularly with group members.
4. fellowshipping with group members and guests.
5. helping group members in need.
6. reading and preparing for group time.
7. participating honestly and openly in group time.
8. living out the truth learned in group time.
9. serving in some way to strengthen the group and church.
10. 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. On 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.

Darryl Wilson
Kentucky Baptist Convention

WEEK 3



Read I 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.” I Thessalonians 4:9 (HCSB)

Most problems in any church can be overcome by love. Love causes dissensions to be settled. Love prompts a church to serve the poor. Love moves us to do missions and evangelism. Love even makes us want 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 action of all types. But what if we just don’t have that much love?

1 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.

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

Pray a prayer like this: Dear God, I do not feel much love for _____.” I am 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.

*“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 people, we see trust broken and lives 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, the only winner is Satan. Most church conflict has little to do with biblical issues and more to do with individual choices such as color, styles, and practices.

Jesus teaches us that peacemakers are needed. The people with the gift of being a peacemaker find ways to squish conflict to help the church work in peace. The actions of a few can cause the church to lose its effectiveness in the community. The conflict side of church has divided family, friends and neighborhoods. Conflict holds bondage where peace gives freedom.

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 have been part of there was a lady named Ruth who was a remarkable servant. Many people that did not know her name called her the “tea lady.” In that role she would serve drinks at every church social. Ruth’s smile was remarkable and her heart to serve others was remarkable as well.

In churches today, there are many who would be labeled people of influence. These folks make a lot of the decisions of direction. There are also those folks that talk a lot without any real direction. The church is made up of many different types of individuals and various characteristics. But too few are those who love to serve others.

Jesus tells us that many want to control others, but He has called us to be “ministers” (KJV) or “servants.” For church revitalization to become part of your church, servants are needed. Servants who will give themselves to impact others. The value of servanthood is critical as we seek church turn around. Let us never confuse leading with serving the needs of others. Serving the needs of others is how we lead and influence in God’s Kingdom.

Prayer

What ways do you serve others in your church? Ask 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; and you need to be revitalized as a leader. (3) Nehemiah acted now. 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?

Are you broken over the “current reality” of the church to which God has called you?

Prayer

As you pray today, ask God what questions you should be asking, what realities you should be accepting, and what action you should be taking. Thank God for His desire to use you as a revitalizing influence in your church.

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 the potential to influence. We have the potential to influence others for good. Our lives when lived for Christ, can encourage others to glorify God (Matthew 5:16). We have the potential to influence others in a negative way (Luke 17:1-3). But, we also have the potential to influence others in a negative way. 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 the temperature in the room. 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 temperature of the room. 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 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 and try to get people motivated, but the reality is that words without action are of no lasting value. Someone once said, "Words are cheap."

One of the great characteristics of God is that He has great power. For our church to be revitalized we must plug into the power that comes from GOD!

Throughout His Word we find God using supernatural power to sustain His people, and He still does!

How much God power is your church currently using? God wants to be 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

In today's prayer, devote yourself to be in God's Word and prayer daily. Ask God's Spirit to show you how to encourage others in your church to do likewise.

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 could do. As Ezekiel preached, the bones came together, were wrapped by muscle and skin, and those corpses were resuscitated. The dry bones lived! Likewise, Israel was revived and restored.

There is a lesson 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 4



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 familiar and beloved passage, Jesus teaches us how to pray. Each portion of His teaching gives us an important insight into prayer.

God has a plan for our church. Our church is a part of God's kingdom. He desires that His kingdom penetrates neighborhoods, communities, cities, and ultimately the world with the gospel. When we pray, "Your kingdom come," we are also 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. Some call that "God's preferred future." He loves our church so much He doesn't want it to remain where it is today. He has in mind a "preferred future."

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. In prayer 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.

Prayer

Ask God to reveal to you and to other church members what God envisions for the future of our church. Share your willingness to yield to what He wants. Prayerfully consider this question: How do you want our church to 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 naturally went to the man and asked if he was for them or against them. The man, who Joshua soon discovered to be an earthly appearance of God, answered that he was not for them or against them, but instead the Captain of the Lord’s army. Joshua appropriately bowed down and worshipped him.

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

So based on the above listed criteria, are you for God and His vision for the church?

Prayer

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

Read II 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 not every day would be like the day of dedication. There would be days when, in an effort to draw His errant people back to Himself, there would be drought and pestilence.

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

Today God’s people are His church. In many churches, indicators mark the need for revitalization. If this is true of your church, are you pursuing renewal with the keys of humility, prayer, seeking God’s face, and repentance?

Prayer

Ask God to help you and others in your church to humbly walk with Him, prayerfully depend upon Him, diligently seek His face, and honestly repent 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 revitalization. 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 re-viving 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).

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 a great way to live and serve, whether the vocational minister, or a servant of God in any role in your church. The daily responsibilities of life, the challenge to raise godly children in an ungodly world, a clear vision from God for His church, and the ability to live on less than we make testify that we need to see all of our decisions from God’s perspective.

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 service 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 in his or her church. Trouble arises when those opinions clash and some are getting their way while others are 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 desires. One way to consider the needs of others is to ask them what they would like to see happen in our 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 others in the family.

In what ways are you seeking to promote the interest of others in your church?

Prayer

Pray today that God will give you opportunities to listen to the desires and wishes of someone in your church from an age category other than your own. Pray also that God will enable you to hear what is really important to them through this conversation.

Read Psalm 133:1-3

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

There are not many things more discouraging, or distasteful, than a heated church business meeting over a trivial issue. At the moment, when tensions are high and voices are raised, no issue seems trivial. Later on, however, when relationships have been severed and people have left the church over an issue regarding taste and not substance those meetings do leave an unpleasant feeling for the people involved.

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

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 Christian reconciliation?

Prayer

Pray today that God will help you be a person of peace in your congregation. Pray also that God will give you a peace-making, conciliatory spirit to aid your church as it moves forward toward revitalization.



The Compliment Plate

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, appearance, etc... 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.

If your church has a weekly meal, or a special meal time coming up, consider introducing the *compliment plate* to those occasions as well. Ask *groups* in your church - when they gather outside of regular meetings - to use the *compliment plate*. Create a culture of building each other up!

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

*John Bennett
Kentucky Baptist Convention*

A misty, mountainous landscape with a red banner in the top right corner. The scene is dominated by soft, hazy mountains and a layer of mist or low clouds. In the foreground, the dark silhouettes of evergreen trees are visible against the lighter background. The overall atmosphere is serene and atmospheric. A solid red rectangular banner is positioned in the upper right corner, containing the text 'WEEK 5' in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

WEEK 5

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, "Bro. so and so didn't do it that way"? These comparisons are seldom helpful and make life difficult for the shepherd God has assigned to the congregation today. While every church member should show honor to past ministers, we make a mistake when we begin to think that their approach to service and church leadership is the only approach God can use.

The Corinthian Christians had division in the church because of different leadership personalities that God had used in their congregational life. The members picked which side they were on 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 today to honor past leaders God has used in the church while at the same time submitting to the Christ-like leadership God has set before us today.

What is one thing you can do this week to honor your church 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 ball game can really make a difference as they cheer their team on 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 are in the game, while at other times we are in the stands cheering for those who are working hard for the sake of 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 their service. We cheer when we affirm ('amen') a truth surfaced by our pastor. We cheer when we participate joyfully in worship and greeting the guests. We propel others on to ministry greatness when we shout hardy approval at positive actions reported during church wide 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 of the congregation. What is 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 vocalized and magnified as a church desires to move into congregational revitalization. Those truths are that every person has a part, and that one person really can make a difference. 1 Corinthians 12 teaches that God gives a spiritual ability to every member of His church. God indwells us in the form of the Holy Spirit and empowers us to serve the body in some important way. That explains the first truth.

The second truth is also vital: one person really can make a difference. Many 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 in the church to which he or she belongs. One person who will witness, pray, give, serve, love and live for Christ will inspire and impact others as well as be used by, and blessed by, God in his or her faithfulness. Instead of waiting for others to join in, decide today to be one person who will make a difference.

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



Prayer

Today, pray a prayer of re-surrender. Maybe you could offer yourself to God the way you did when you first came to Him. Maybe also 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)

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

One of the challenges in the church today is that so few people know they have a spiritual gift, and what the gift(s) might be. The Bible teaches that each person is given at least one spiritual gift from God.

Have you determined your spiritual gift(s)?

Another challenge for the church related to spiritual gifts is the number of people who are not exercising their gift(s). If you know your spiritual gifts, then how are you using them in the church? If God gives us these gifts, He expects us to use them!

Many pastors I speak with tell me about their great 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 their 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 commandment: 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 conversation by challenging His disciples to love one another as He had loved them. Addressing this issue, in that climactic setting, 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 known and loved by the God of a group of people who do not seem to love one another.

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 your church? As people attend your church, do they see the “grace of God” at work?

What are some signs that 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 service.
5. Disciples believers. Barnabas and Saul taught a great number of believers for one year. Healthy churches never separate evangelism and discipleship.
6. Practices generosity. A worldwide famine convicted the early believers to give. Generosity characterizes a healthy church.
7. Trusts leaders. The Antioch church trusted Barnabas and Saul. Leadership trust is essential in healthy churches.

Prayer

As you pray today, hold each of the 7 traits listed above before God, asking Him to show you places of health in your church, as well as places where your church is falling short. Ask God to search your own life in regard to these traits as well.

Read Acts 6:1-7

“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 church problems to occur. These people 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 widows of the congregation. A solution was proposed by the leadership and the proposal found favor with the congregation (6:5). The result was a unified church that continued to reach out with the gospel and make more disciples for Christ.

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

Prayer

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.



Stewardship

Issues of agreement, love, and church health are often challenged by matters of stewardship. Yet, Scripture emphasizes stewardship. Many of Jesus' parables deal either directly or indirectly with stewardship issues. Why is stewardship so important? I believe it is because it is an outward visible indicator of an inner spiritual condition. Show me how someone handles their money and material possessions and it tells me volumes about their relationship with God. The same can be said for a couple and the same can be said 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 handled with integrity it is 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. At a higher level, it recognizes that all persons who handle money in the church affirm 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 as if it were their own, division and troubles 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 their 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 then impacts the church's collective witness to other believers as well as to unbelievers all throughout the community.



Integrity, Accountability, and Witness:

Stewardship *(continued)*

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. Serve with integrity, accountability and as a witness of Christ.

*Don Spencer, CFP®
Kentucky Baptist Convention*

A sepia-toned photograph of a sunlit forest. Sunbeams stream through the trees on the left side. The foreground is filled with dense, tall grasses and various plants. The background shows more trees and a bright sky. In the top right corner, there is a solid red rectangular box containing the text "WEEK 6" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

WEEK 6

Read 1 Corinthians 14:24-25

"...[A]nd 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 to the Lord?

In my current role, I attend many different churches over the course of a month. I have noticed that some churches are very warm and welcoming to guests 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. How great if this could be said about your church.

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

“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 in nature. 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 that His people make disciples. A disciple is a learner and follower of Christ. Is your church intentional about making disciples? What is your strategy for reaching all 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? Ask the LORD to use you to impact the nations, starting with your neighborhood or town, for His glory!

Read Revelation 3:14-22

“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. However, 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. In fact, He was standing outside of the church, knocking on the door, and hoping to be invited back in.

Generally not in words, but at least in actions, many churches rely on their structures, staff, and strategies rather than on Christ Jesus. The church’s Redeemer is left standing outside the fellowship, desiring to be welcomed back in. There’s hope for a lukewarm church. Jesus gives His people an opportunity to repent and change directions.

Is your church dependent on the presence and power of Jesus Christ? Is your church’s behavior causing Jesus to be nauseated?

Prayer

Position yourself to discover what Jesus thinks about your church. If you and your faith family are nauseating Jesus, hear His knock, open the door, and invite Him in. He longs to fellowship with you!

Read Revelation 3:1-6

“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 which needed attention before they lost their vitality.

Most churches have 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 in and making them feel loved and valued without feeling judged by people. Some are great worshipping congregations where folks are invited into the presence of God through singing and other means.

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

Prayer

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 service 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.

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

Prayer

Pray 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 life and service and be an influence for Christ in your community.

Renewal & Revitalization

Regardless of where you find yourself on your spiritual journey, we commend you for setting aside a season to meditate your way through this 40-day devotional prayer guide focused on renewal and revitalization. Our prayer for you and for your church is the same prayer the Apostle Paul prayed for the believers in the church at Ephesus....

That God, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ and the all-glorious Father, will give you spiritual wisdom and the insight to know more of him: that you may receive that inner illumination of the spirit which will make you realize how great is the hope to which he is calling you—the magnificence and splendor of the inheritance promised to Christians—and how tremendous is the power available to us who believe in God.

That power is the same divine power which was demonstrated in Christ when he raised him from the dead and gave him the place of supreme honor in Heaven—a place that is infinitely superior to any conceivable command, authority, power or control, and which carries with it a name far beyond any name that could ever be used in this world or the world to come.

Ephesians 1:17-21 (JBPhillips)