

Hello Pastors/Leaders:

I started a series of articles over a year ago on the subject of church health/revitalization. You can read these articles on our webpage at nwibaptist.com. I began with *How does a church know if it needs revitalized?* In my second article I addressed the *Essential Qualities of a Revitalization Pastor*. In the third article, I focused on the fact that *Church Decline is a Spiritual Issue*. The fourth article dealt with the lack of biblical contextualization as I discussed the need of *Contextualization without Compromise*. With my fifth article I discussed church health as the root of church revitalization in an article entitled *Revitalization is a Church Health Issue*. The sixth article dealt with the contentious issue of *Worship and Revitalization*. With the last article I addressed the critical role that preaching has in church health and revitalization with *Preaching and Revitalization*. In this newest writing, I will focus on *The Metrics of Revitalization*.

Historically, in Southern Baptist Churches, success was measured in numbers, and those numbers were generally focused around the 3 B's – Budget, Baptisms (Bodies), and Buildings. That is, if the money was coming in, and the attendance was growing with steady baptisms, and the building was adequate - well maintained and attractive - then the church, and more particularly, the pastor would be considered successful. While measuring these metrics is important and is necessary in gauging the overall status of the church, by themselves they are insufficient in assessing ministry effectiveness ...and in fact, can cover up deep systemic church health problems. In fact, these numerical indicators can easily become an unhealthy way that a pastor seeks his identity. In a blog article by professor Dr. Robert Scott Clark entitled *The Killer B's: Idols of the Minister's Heart*, he wrote:

These are the things by which ministers often define themselves. These are the things they covet. These are the status symbols: a growing budget, increasing attendance, and a bigger building. These are the idols that shape the program-driven church. These are the gods that drive the liturgy and the gods that promise rewards to those who serve them faithfully.¹

Since church success is typically measured both by our congregants as well as our colleagues with these numerical factors, then they can become the objective of our ministry and the source of our identity. However, numbers tell us something, but they don't tell us everything – they cannot tell us the underlying factors beneath the numerical increase or decrease. Churches can grow numerically without Jesus and they can decline numerically with Jesus. As Jared Wilson comments:

Some things in ministry take a deeper wisdom to discern or decipher. These can't simply be measured by counting heads. I would even argue that the more important a metric is the more difficult it is to quantify. This is one reason why Jesus appointed shepherds for his flock and not accountants.²

¹ <http://heidelblog.net/2013/01/the-killer-bs-idols-of-the-ministers-heart-2/>

² Wilson, Jared C. *The Gospel-Driven Church* (p. 54). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

Therefore, especially when it comes to measuring church health and a church in the process of revitalization, it is important that we have a more complete and holistic set of metrics to gage our ministries. The following are some of the indicators to focus on in assessing the health of our churches. These metric indicators will be divided into two major categories, quantitative (those metrics that can be measured objectively through numerical quantifying) and qualitative (those metrics that are subjective and are more difficult to quantify).

Quantitative Metrics

First, the metrics of *missional effectiveness*. Just because numbers don't tell the whole story of church effectiveness, does not mean they're not an important factor to consider when considering missional effectiveness. So, what are the areas that need to be measured in regard to evangelistic impact? Do look at the number of *conversions* and *baptisms*. However, in addition we need to measure the *number of members trained to engage non-believers with the gospel*, the *number of members engaging lost people with the gospel*, the *number of outreach activities conducted with the total number involved in these missional undertakings*, and the *percentage of the budget apportioned to evangelism/missional endeavors*. Tracking some of these numbers will require some creativity. However, measuring missional effectiveness in this new world requires assessing real world "on mission" engagement by membership.

Second, the metrics of *discipleship effectiveness*. When measuring quantitatively how effective the church is doing in discipling its members, the following can be helpful. *Assimilation into church membership*. I especially believe this is a helpful if the church has an assimilation process with a discipling feature. That is, a *new members class* that explains the gospel, baptism and Lord's Supper, basic elements of the nature of the church, and expectations for church membership. But also, the *number and percentage of congregants in small groups* as well as *numbers engaged in other discipleship class offerings*. The numbers involved in *serving in and through the church* is another key indicator of discipleship effectiveness. *Budget giving trends, and particularly weekly per capita giving* reveals a stewardship aspect of discipleship.

Third, the metrics of *worship effectiveness*. Obviously, measuring worship effectiveness is difficult to do quantitatively. However, the closest we can get is to measure our *average weekly Sunday morning worship attendance*. That number alone doesn't necessarily indicate the quality of worship or the health of the Sunday morning gathering. However, it is important to look at trends in worship attendance. Continual downward trends can indicate problems with the health of the church. Another metric in this category would be the number of *new and returning visitors*. Along with this metric, measure the *number of new visitors to your website* and compare that with the new visitors to your church. If the number of new visitors to your website vastly outnumber the new visitors to your church, then the website could be the reason why they never checked out the church.³ The metric of new visitors, and returning visitors, can indicate something about the attractational element of the church.

Qualitative Metrics

³ <https://tonymorganlive.com/2017/11/02/website-metric-church-front-door/>

It's important when assessing church effectiveness that we move beyond only measuring inputs - attendance, giving, spending, etc., to measuring outputs - transformed lives, healthy congregations, exercising faith, hope, and love etc. However, the outputs are extremely difficult to measure. Some of the outputs can be measured as listed above, e.g. conversions and numbers engaged in missional outreach etc. However, many of these are qualitative metrics and require more work and discernment to measure. Here are a few to consider.

First, a growing love for Jesus. This requires a discerning pastor to measure - but are the people in your church growing in their love and devotion to Jesus? Is He increasingly at the center of their conversation, or do sports, weather, politics and the mundane make up the gist of their conversation? Does moralistic behavior (doing good) overshadow your people's esteem for Jesus and the gospel- does legalism outweigh love for Jesus?

Second, a growing love for the Scriptures. A huge misnomer in some of our SBC's churches is that we highly value the Bible. But my general observation is that we value it theoretically, but not necessarily actually. That is, we declare the inerrancy of Scripture, but deny its sufficiency. As Pastor David Prince stated, "*Affirming inerrancy in principle, while rejecting its sufficiency in practice, is like saying your wife's perfect while having an affair.*"⁴ So in our preaching, teaching, discipling, and living are we treating the Scriptures as reliable and sufficient. Do we see a growing hunger for the reading, the study, and application of the Word in our congregation? Is there a growing eagerness among the congregants to drink in the proclaimed Word on Sunday morning?

Third, a growing knowledge of doctrine. I realize that some people's pursuit of knowledge of doctrine can be dry and purely intellectual, and not touch the heart or effect their living. However, just because some become puffed up with pride over what they know doesn't mean that believers shouldn't be growing in doctrine and theology. After all, theology is simply the knowledge or study of God. We cannot pit emotional love for God against an intellectual pursuit of God - both are necessary. Loving God with our minds is directed to us most notably in the great commandment: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*" (Matt. 22:37). So how are your members growing in their knowledge of doctrine? Can they articulate the gospel? Do they understand basic doctrines of justification, sanctification, and glorification? Do they know the God's grand scheme of salvation history- creation, fall, redemption, and restoration and how they fit into His story?

Fourth, a growing practice of prayer. A church that is becoming healthier is one that is seeing prayer as more of a priority. This doesn't mean that because your church has a Wednesday PM "prayer meeting" that it has made prayer a priority. In fact, in many cases it is not. Indicators of growing in prayer are manifest in our churches when there are more expressions of absolute dependence on God; when there is more prayer being directed toward needs of spiritual maturity, evangelistic needs, and missional impact; and when corporate prayer is not just a line in the order of service -but is a meaningful expression of the church's engagement and dependence on a sovereign God.

⁴ David Prince on Twitter (September 30, 2016), <https://twitter.com/davideprince/status/781963836177907712>.

Fifth, a growing sense of the church's purpose. One characteristic of a church becoming healthier is a growing corporate understanding of its unique purpose and identity. Do they know and can they articulate the church's mission? Do they know the church's values? Are they able to describe what makes their church unique? Can they express the church's strategy of discipleship (if the church has one) and identify where they are (as an individual member) in that plan?

Sixth, a growing love for community. Community in this sense refers to the *church community* and the *immediate community (neighborhood)* in which the church resides. *First*, how well do the members of your church love one another? Are the "one another" commands of Scripture increasingly being carried out? Are the spiritual, physical, and emotional needs of the congregation being met by members of the body? *Second*, how well does the church love its neighbor in the community? Is the church as a corporate body sacrificially serving its community? Is the church leaving a mark in its community? Would the neighborhood notice or care if the church was to close its doors?

This list is not exhaustive. These are just some of the quantitative and qualitative metrics to consider when attempting to measure church health. They make up a new scorecard that is needed that goes beyond measuring size. Jared Wilson states it this way: "*We will need the metrics of grace, which tell us not simply how many there are but more importantly how healthy those many are.*"⁵ In addition a new scorecard is need as the 21st century church paradigm continues to transition further out of the attractional to the missional model. Reggie McNeal states:

The old church scorecard of how many, how often, how much—measures of church activity—is counterproductive to participating in the missional renaissance. The old scorecard keeps us church-absorbed. As long as we use it, we will continue to be inward focused, program-driven, and church-based in our thinking.⁶

Therefore, it's important that we measure! However, let us measure with metrics that matter – with an array of metrics that measure not only the size of the flock, but also its health!

In His Service,

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⁵ Wilson, *The Gospel-Driven Church*, 55

⁶ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2012/spring/measuringmatters.html>