

Hello Pastors/Leaders:

Over the last year I have been doing a series of articles on the subject of church health/revitalization. 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 covered the contentious issue of *Worship and Revitalization*. With the last article I addressed the topic of *Preaching and Revitalization*. All these articles can be seen on the resources page on our website: nwibaptist.com. With this article I'd like to concentrate on *Evangelism and Revitalization*.

Does evangelism revitalize a church or does a revitalized church evangelize? What I would say is that to attempt to do evangelization without working simultaneously on the internal spiritual health dynamics of the church will be ineffective and short-lived. Evangelism cannot sustain itself from an unhealthy church culture. It's not that evangelism awaits a fully revitalized church, but that evangelism cannot operate out of a vacuum — there must be the conditions set in which evangelism can naturally spring forth. Evangelism (or more specifically, an evangelistic program) cannot be seen as the “silver bullet” to turn the church around. However, evangelism must be part of the revitalization process. A church cannot be said to be revitalized until it rediscovers its passion for Great Commission evangelism.

So in the context of church health and revitalization, how should we approach the evangelistic task? That is, what are some principles and practices that especially need to be stressed in our churches as we think about evangelism in our context?

First, the pastor/leader must model evangelism - The “principle of the leadership lid” says that people will rise no higher than their leader. Although there are exceptions, this is generally the case. When we as leaders are not involved personally in evangelism, our people will not either. As Tim Beougher says,

As we begin the process of church revitalization, we need to pause and conduct an honest assessment of our lives. Are we really living as though we are “on fire” for the Lord, or is too much of our life lived at room temperature?¹

A revitalized pastor will set the evangelistic tone for the church. That doesn't mean that each pastor will have the same skills, opportunities, or fruit as it pertains to evangelism. Some have an evangelistic gift that drive their evangelism more than others. However, all should be actively engaged in seeking opportunities for gospel conversations and setting an example before their congregations of an “On Mission” lifestyle.

¹<http://equip.sbts.edu/article/church-revitalization-begins-personal-revitalization/>

Second, balance evangelism with discipleship - Often as Southern Baptists we look at the Great Commission in Matthew 29:18-20 and we say, “*We got to get on with evangelism...we got to get out and reach our communities for Christ...*” And that certainly is true...and I wish that all of our churches would say, believe, and do that. But the Great Commission is more than just about evangelism...really it is has two tracts. First, growing as disciples and second, making disciples - our going deeper in our relationship with Christ (discipleship) and our going further in our communication of Christ with our world (evangelism). Evangelism that is absent of a holistic discipleship is a violation of the Great Commission and can lead to false converts or superficial disciples.

Third, remind your people of lostness - Often times in churches in need of revitalization people have lost that sense of awfulness concerning the lostness of human beings. Emphasize over and over again the spiritual condition of lost people...that they are separated from God and without hope. One of the dangers we have today is what is called *practical inclusive-ism*. That is, we cognitively believe John 14:6 (I am the way, truth, life no one can come ...), but we don’t practice it. We act like it is not true and that others who don’t embrace Jesus are going to heaven. Emphasize the utter lostness of humanity without Christ.

Fourth, train people in sharing the Gospel - In declining churches most people are not sharing the Gospel. First, it’s important that our people are trained in what is the Gospel message. Make sure they have a good grasp on the Gospel. In fact, I believe it should be a part of a church’s membership process to not only have a prospective member explain their personal encounter with the Gospel, but also to be able to articulate the Good News. Second, your people need to be trained in practical ways, how they can have gospel conversations.

Fifth, change the evangelism approach - Evangelism should not be seen, especially in modern times, as a one-sided presentation. However, it needs to be approached as a two-sided “relationship cultivating” conversation. That is, it is essential to treat people like friends, allow them to talk and ask questions, give them time and space to consider the truths shared, and set the tone for further conversations. A good evangelistic tool that helps with this kind of approach is: 3 Circles: Life Conversation Guide.

Sixth, look for practical community ministry that can lead to evangelism - We need *not* be afraid that we’re slipping into the social gospel if we look for ways to meet community human needs and when possible connect them to having gospel conversations. As Andrew Davis writes:

Missional churches find ways to connect with the surrounding community in which ministry to the body and soul are well-harmonized and properly proportioned. These

*ministries become a fruitful matrix of relationships in which the gospel can easily be shared.*²

Seventh, establish a missional approach to evangelism - Somewhat like the above principle, a missional approach to evangelism emphasizes a “go, be, and tell” approach rather than relying totally on the program approach of “come and see.” Some of the old approaches of evangelism that counted on people being attracted to a church building or event are not as effective today. We need a missional approach that puts the church in the community instead of depending on the community coming to us.

Eighth, emphasize that church members take ownership of their mission field - Generally in an unhealthy church, the members have outsourced evangelism to pastor/staff, programs, or mission organizations, e.g., IMB, NAMB. However, every believer has a mission field that can be evangelized, e.g., workplace, neighborhood, workout place, children’s activities, sports teams, etc. Your people need to be trained to think like missionaries on a foreign field and to see their daily world as their unique mission field that they are responsible to cultivate for the gospel.

Ninth, make reproduction as part of the DNA of the church - The significant problem with much of the discipleship done in our SBC churches is our disciples were never expected to reproduce themselves. Disciple making requires personal investment of one’s life into another person’s life. This is what disciple making looks like. This is God’s grand scheme to reach the world — disciples discipling others who will in turn disciple others.³ Relational discipleship was Jesus’ method of winning the world to Himself. Although Jesus had the crowds and spoke to the masses, that is not where He spent most of His time and energy. He quietly poured His life into twelve men, eleven of which would go on to multiply themselves many times over. As Dr. Robert Coleman again says, “*Jesus staked His whole ministry on twelve men. He was not trying to impress the crowd, but usher in the kingdom.*”⁴

Lastly, evangelism is about the glory of God - When reintroducing evangelism to a church in need of revitalization, we must stress its correct motive — the glory of God. Too often in our churches the motive for evangelism was tied to lesser or non-biblical motives, e.g., church growth, survival, etc. However, the ultimate motive for evangelism is the glory of God...that He would be glorified through the salvation of individuals. Jesus said to the woman at the well that the “*Father seeks people who will worship Him in Spirit and Truth.*” As A.W. Tozer said about this passage, “*Jesus is not primarily seeking workers or witnesses, but He is seeking worshippers...*” We must have a healthier motive for evangelism than just pragmatics or guilt if it is going to take root in our churches — it must be the glory of God!

²Davis, Andrew M.. Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again (p. 205). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

³ 2 Tim. 2:2

⁴ Robert E. Coleman, The Master Plan of Evangelism (Grand Rapids, MI, Revell, 1972), 91.

Churches in need of renewal have often become inwardly focused and more concerned about their comforts and concerns than they are about their community's lostness. Evangelism is an antidote to the inward focused and self centered consumerist mentality. We need a radical confrontation with the Cross of Christ where we die to our self focus tendencies, and learn to take up His Cross and follow Him on mission, individually and corporately, into the lives of the multitudes of people in our mission fields. Revitalized churches will return to the centrality of the Great Commission. May it be so with the churches of the NWIBA!

In His Service,

Dr. Wes Rankin
Director of Missions
Northwest Indiana Baptist Association
219-615-9774
domnwiba@gmail.com
nwibaptist.com