



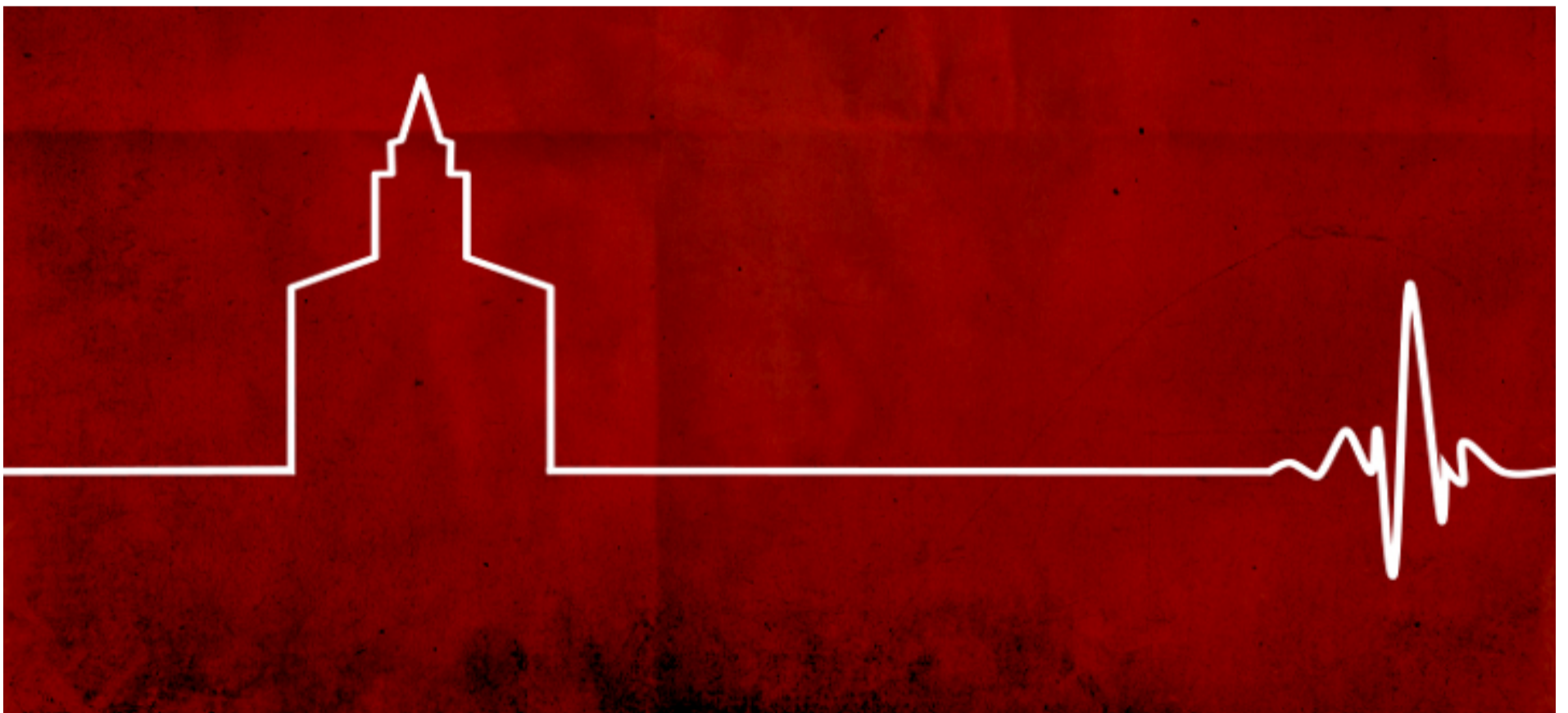
ABC GRR



CHURCH REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE

The Church Revitalization Checklist

By Sam Rainer



A Study Guide for Churches

Introduction: Leading Your Church into an Era of Renewed Optimism3

Chapter #1: Hit the Reset Button, Not Pause4

Chapter #2: The Revitalization Checklist.....5

Chapter #3: Priorities6

Chapter #4: Pace7

Chapter #5: Perspective8

Chapter #6: People.....9

Chapter #7: Place10

Chapter #8: Purpose11

Chapter #9: Pathway12

Chapter #10: Completing Your Church Revitalization Checklist13

**For a digital copy of this study guide, visit
www.opendoorcommunity.church/CRI**



INTRODUCTION: LEADING YOUR CHURCH INTO AN ERA OF RENEWED OPTIMISM

Key Quotes

- * If God can save any *person*, he can save any *church*.
- * Some local churches will die. But no church *should* die. Every congregation of God's people is worth the effort to revitalize.
- * Though it may not *feel* like it from one day to the next, God has sovereignly placed you exactly where he wants you to be. ... Regardless of your circumstances, there are many things you can't control. But what you can always control is your attitude—your posture. As you persevere, I encourage you to bend toward hope.
- * Don't give up. Your church is worth revitalizing.
- * The hinge of true hope is resurrection. Jesus defeated death. Through his resurrection, you can be optimistic about the future. Through his resurrection, you can have complete assurance in the present.
- * Cultural Christianity might be dead or dying. Maybe that's embarrassing for some. But I'm not embarrassed. We need more faith contenders and fewer church pretenders anyway.
- * I'm optimistic about tomorrow, but smaller and medium-size churches will have to move into a mode of exploration to take advantage of the opportunity.
- * Hope must be also willing to get up and move, even if we're unsure exactly where to go. Where *are* we going? Forward! Where is that? Right in front of us. The primary focus of this book is on the near-term.
- * Not all optimists are leaders, but every leader must be an optimist.
- * Just because national trends point to a decline in the North American church does not mean *your* church must decline.
- * My thesis is really quite simple: Moving your church toward the hope of tomorrow requires optimism. *The Church Revitalization Checklist* provides a way to implement this hope.

Application

- * Scriptures: Romans 15:13, Psalm 22, Job 5:16, Psalm 117
- * Discussion Questions
 1. Do you believe God can save any church? Why or why not?
 2. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being least and 10 being most, how hopeful are you about your church? Give your reasoning for that number.
 3. Would you consider yourself an optimist, pessimist, realist, cynic, or something else when it comes to your church? How can you infuse more optimism into your outlook?
- * Action Planning: How can you move your church (and yourself) from pessimism to optimism, from despair to hope? What are practical steps you can take? List them below.



CHAPTER #1: HIT THE RESET BUTTON, NOT PAUSE

Key Quotes

- * Far too many churches hit the pause button when what they really need is a full reset.
- * Now is the time for a reset. If the COVID-19 lockdown taught us anything, it's that the church can adapt quickly to changing circumstances.
- * Hitting the reset button doesn't mean we scrap everything we've been doing, but it does mean we're willing to try something new and experiment to see what works best.
- * The reset button is not a novel invention suddenly available to today's leaders. Over the past hundred years alone, dozens of *This changes everything!* moments have occurred.
- * Change will be constant until Christ returns. Tomorrow will be different from today. Will tomorrow's differences be subtle or culture-shifting? It is impossible to predict.
- * Unfortunately, evangelism is not the driving force behind growth in many churches. Growth is more likely to come from *transfer growth* and *biological growth* than from evangelism or growth from conversions.
- * Most people don't share their faith for two reasons: *fear of failure* and *fear of rejection*.
- * Your church will respond if you *show* them evangelism in action rather than simply talking about it on Sunday morning. Set a personal goal of reaching one person for Christ every six months.
- * The second wind of change is a widening generation gap. Two major reasons exist for this widening gap: *technology* and *life expectancy*.
- * Quite simply, the generation gap *feels* larger now because it *is*. People living long means more generations than ever in the church.
- * One of the best ways to hit the reset button for all generations is simply to show them, rather than try to explain everything.
- * Hitting the reset button includes leveraging our ability to become more diverse.
- * The church must do the hard work of assimilating people of different ethnicities, generations, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The more diverse a church, the more it reflects the true gospel.
- * Today, someone who comes to church twice a *month* is considered an active member.
- * At our church, we use no fewer than twenty pathways of communication.
- * It's a vicious cycle. The denomination can't help the churches because the churches can't fund the denomination.

Application

- * Scriptures: John 14:12, Ephesians 3:10
- * Discussion Questions
 1. What would hitting the reset button look like in your context? What scares you about that? What excites you?
 2. How is evangelism done in your church? Are you personally involved? If not, where can you start?
 3. Which generations are present in your church? What tensions have surfaced as a result?
 4. How does the diversity of your church compare with that of your neighborhood or community?
 5. What attendance trends have you seen in your church? How do you engage with infrequent attenders?
 6. How healthy is your connection with your denomination or association?
- * Action Planning: Make a personal goal for this year in each of the "winds of change" areas Sam addresses in the chapter: evangelism, multigenerational relationships, diversity, engagement with infrequent attenders, and strengthening the churches of your denomination or association.



CHAPTER #2: THE REVITALIZATION CHECKLIST

Key Quotes

- * Complexity is the killer of church revitalization.
- * The checklist has many uses, but three benefits are of critical importance: making my progress visual, providing constant accountability, and fostering a consistent focus.
- * Some of the best pastors are crippled by spending most of their time being *reactive*. The checklist is a way to help you focus on being *proactive*.
- * You cannot lead a church revitalization on your own. The complexities are too much for one person to manage.
- * The goal [of the checklist] is to create a series of flexible checkpoints and questions to help move your church in a healthier direction.
- * *Church revitalization* is the process of leading an established church to a place of better health, typically with an existing pastor and without changing the identity of the church.
- * An *established church* is a church with a defined location and history in a specific community.
- * *Adoption* is a newer term referring to the process of blending two congregations into one family.
- * Fostering happens when a healthier church sends people and resources to help a struggling church over a set period of time, typically three months to a year.
- * *Replanting* occurs when new leadership enters an existing church and the church decides to be “a new church in the old building.”
- * A church relaunches by shutting down for a season and then reopening with a completely new identity.
- * Typology of Church Revitalization: Geriatric (40%), Great Omission (25%), Ex-neighborhood (15%), War-torn (12%), Mismatched leadership (8%).
- * The Revitalization Checklist:
 - * **Priorities:** How do you discern what is most urgent?
 - * **Pace:** How fast can you lead change?
 - * **Perspective:** Are the church’s expectations properly aligned?
 - * **People:** What is your true capacity to move forward?
 - * **Place:** Is your church facility ready for revitalization?
 - * **Purpose:** What can you do to shift your church to an outward focus?
 - * **Pathway:** What is the most realistic next step?

Application

- * Discussion Questions
 1. Is your current church structure complex or simple? Try describing it to an outsider to see what they think.
 2. How much of your time is spent being reactive versus proactive?
 3. List the names of people who need to be on board for your church to revitalize.
 4. Which definitions in the chapter were most helpful for your context? Why?
 5. Of the five types of churches, which most closely describes your church? What unique opportunities and challenges does this present for your revitalization?
 6. What is your initial reaction to the seven checkpoints on the revitalization checklist? Which most excites you? Which question is most daunting?
- * Action Planning: Write out the seven checkpoints and their questions in a prominent, visible location. Begin having conversations with key people in your congregation about revitalization to secure their buy-in to the process.



CHAPTER #3: PRIORITIES

Key Quotes

- * Churches are simultaneously fragile and resilient. ... Struggling churches tend to maintain constant tension between fragility and resiliency. It's the perpetual state of not quite dying.
- * My goal in this chapter is to help you answer a key question: *How do I discern what is most urgent?*
- * A church lacking both an outward and upward perspective will inevitably move in the other two directions: *inward* and *downward*. Inward churches always decline.
- * Churches that grow stronger in the next five years will be focused on a “going out” effort. ... A healthy outward movement is driven more by obedience than by seeking numerical growth.
- * Pastors and church leaders must equip the congregation to vocalize the gospel as they serve.
- * Here's a reality that has come into focus as church congregations age: Your church will not grow larger with the oldest generation.
- * Embracing children means understanding that messy is normal and natural, ...valuing noise over perfection, ... protecting them at all costs, ...investing in children's ministry, ...[and] understanding church at their level.
- * The church is moving in a healthy direction when new believers are disrupting the peace.
- * You become what you celebrate. In most cases, the culture in an organization will follow what the leaders decide to champion.
- * Two movements—outward and upward—should determine every priority in the church.
- * Outward + Upward = Onward

Application

- * Scriptures: Ephesians 4:12, Matthew 28:20
- * Discussion Questions
 1. How has your church demonstrated fragility and resiliency over the years?
 2. Looking over your church's trends in the last 10 years, are you inward or outward focused? Are you moving downward or upward?
 3. In what ways are you serving your community? How are you connecting that service to evangelism?
 4. Does your church embrace or tolerate children? What evidence can you give to prove your answer?
 5. How have new believers been “disrupting the peace” in your church? If they haven't, what does that say about your church?
 6. With what your church has become, what would you say you have celebrated?
- * Action Planning: Write down one goal for the next sixth months in the areas of evangelism, children's ministry, and new believer assimilation.



CHAPTER #4: PACE

Key Quotes

- * It's one thing to know *what* to do. It's another thing to know *how fast* you can do it. Leading a church revitalization with a hopeful tone is a delicate balance between patience and urgency.
- * But if you can gain [the] support [of those before you and older than you], they are also the group most likely to champion and sustain change.
- * The *pace* of change will not be as much of an issue for [those after you and older than you] as the *type* of change. Too many changes that shift the culture of the church away from what they thought they were joining can create some resistance.
- * Constant change efforts, especially a string of unsuccessful attempts, will cause anyone to challenge their leaders.
- * Just as the human body cannot cope with multiple procedures at the same time, a church can only handle a certain amount of change at a certain pace.
- * If you're a leader and you have sufficient time to make a change, take your time.
- * Struggling churches stop struggling and start making progress when they refocus their survival energy into a series of one-thing next steps. ...Momentum builds with each incremental step of change.
- * [Y]ou can pick up the pace without knocking the wind out of your church. ...First, make prayer the top priority. ... Second, lead by example with evangelism. ...Third, show love when tested. ...Fourth, be prophetic without blaming others. ...One of the best ways ... is to pitch change with a trial period.

Application

- * Discussion Questions
 1. Do you lean toward too much patience or too much urgency in your leadership?
 2. What changes have you personally resisted? Why? How can that help you understand others' perspectives as you try to lead them to change?
 3. What have previous change efforts at your church looked like in terms of pace? Which were successful? Which were not? Can you identify any patterns or principles that will make future change efforts more successful?
- * Action Planning: Fill out the "How Resistant to Change" matrix for your church and discuss the results with your leadership. Which resistance level is your church? What does that mean for the pace of change you can sustain?

Those older than you and before you _____ %	Those younger than you and before you _____ %
Those older than you and after you _____ %	Those younger than you and after you _____ %



CHAPTER #5: PERSPECTIVE

Key Quotes

- * The third part of the revitalization checklist includes managing expectations. *Are your expectations properly aligned?* In most cases, a church's desires are far removed from what is most beneficial. Additionally, congregational expectations rarely align with leadership expectations.
- * All revitalization work will become discouraging at some point.
- * The problem is that struggling churches tend to *lower* the bar of expectations, thinking it will stem the tide of losses. But low expectations only make things worse, creating a vicious cycle in which the struggling church no longer attracts or keeps people.
- * When you inherit a church in a state of fragile resiliency, the low-expectation culture is often expressed as exhaustion, bitterness, or both.
- * The key to snapping out of a low-expectation environment is to focus the church on *one* effort.
- * There is no better place than where you are right now.
- * Stop dreaming about a better location! God has your church right where he wants you.
- * Stop dreaming about a different community! It's only a distraction from the ministry at hand.
- * Stop dreaming about a past era! Longing for a different time is the most wasteful dream of all.
- * You are in the right place at the right time with the right people.
- * Optimistic pastors dream about what God can do in their location. Church leaders should love their community as much as they love their church.
- * Optimistic pastors dream about what God can do right now.
- * Optimistic pastors dream about God using the existing people in the church. Love your church where they are today, not a future, idealized version of your church.
- * Where is God? He's hanging out at your address. He's waiting for you to seek him.

Application

- * Scriptures: Matthew 14:24-26, Mark 6:47-50, 2 Kings 14:25, Jonah 1:1-3
- * Discussion Questions
 1. What number did you score on the discouragement intensity scale? What does this tell you about your perspective of your church and ability to lead it through revitalization?
 2. Are the people of your church exhausted, bitter, or both?
 3. To which of the three bad dreams are you most susceptible? Which have you heard expressed most among the members of your church?
 4. What is good about your current location? Your current season of church life? Your existing people?
- * Action Planning: Brainstorm a list of dreams on which your church could focus based on your current location, timing, and people. Narrow the list down to one focus for the next six months.



CHAPTER #6: PEOPLE

Key Quotes

- * God does not bless us when we invoke his name as justification for our laziness.
- * The fourth part of the checklist includes understanding your church's capacity for change and helping them move forward. *What is their true capacity to move forward?* It's a key question, but there's another one you must answer first: Are you willing to love your people where they are now?
- * You must love people where they are to help guide them where they need to be.
- * Few churches are truly healthy. Most congregations need work in at least one area, if not several.
- * Most people want pastors to work on technical changes ... Few people desire cultural changes that will challenge the status quo.
- * Hungry implies a healthy appetite. Desperation can lead to rash decisions. ...A hungry church can take small bites. A desperate church needs explicit instructions.
- * Loving your church right now means not overreacting as a leader.
- * *Low-capacity churches* typically have short-tenured pastors and a history of conflict.
- * *Average-capacity churches* are not without conflict, but enough supporters exist to gain traction.
- * *High-capacity churches* will have multiple successful ministries. ...A spirit of unity defines these congregations.
- * *Churches with unusual capacity* typically have a long-term pastor with a string of successful initiatives over several years. Most churches will never reach this level of capacity, much less maintain it over time.
- * When faced with hostility, respond with humility.
- * When faced with agitation, respond with humor.
- * When faced with stubbornness, respond with history. ...Celebrate the parts of the past that support the future vision.
- * When faced with uncertainty, respond with courage.
- * "Expect great things; attempt great things." - William Carey

Application

- * Scriptures: Haggai 1:2-15, 2:9,19; Ezra 3:10-13; James 1:12; Amos 6:1
- * Discussion Questions
 1. Is your church engaged or unengaged with the community?
 2. Is your church willing to change, or are people entrenched in how things have always been?
 3. Is your church hungry or desperate for a solution?
 4. Is your church stable or on life support?
 5. How have you seen humility, humor, history, and courage work in your church? Which one is easiest for you? Which is most difficult?
- * Action Planning: Calculate your people's capacity using The Capacity Formula in the chapter. Where do you land on the scale? How can you take one practical step to increase that capacity?



CHAPTER #7: PLACE

Key Quotes

- * Dying churches are a waste of resources and prime locations. Revitalized churches are efficient use of Kingdom resources.
- * For the megachurch, the elephant in the room *is* the room. For tens of thousands of dying churches, the elephant in the room is all the empty rooms combined. *Is your church facility ready for revitalization?* From a financial perspective, this part of the checklist is paramount.
- * The church campus is not the most important discipleship tool, but it is often the most prominent. The building is not the church, but it is hard to be the church without a building.
- * There is a correlation between a healthy church and adequate facilities. Healthy churches take care of their facilities. Unhealthy churches tend to let their facilities decline.
- * Too often, church leadership advice involves new locations, new people, and new stories.
- * I believe *most* church relocations are unnecessary—and I think they really hurt the kingdom.
- * The church is not a destination point for crowds. The church is a vehicle designed by God to take the Good News of Jesus into our neighborhoods, our communities, and ultimately to the nations. You should view your church address as a launchpad.
- * When a church loses its connection to the community, it also loses its reason for being.
- * [I]n most cases, churches don't become hostile to their community. They simply become indifferent.
- * The location of a church is just as important as its doctrine. You can't separate who you are trying to reach (context) from what you believe (doctrine).
- * Excellent church facilities help to attract the unchurched. Church leaders need to take good care of their church facilities in order to maximize their evangelistic efforts.
- * Buildings are important, but ultimately it is the *people* of the church who create community.

Application

- * Discussion Questions
 1. Why is your church facility located where it is? Do you know its history?
 2. What has changed in the community since your facility was built?
 3. Do you believe God can still use your facility in its current state and location? Why or why not?
 4. Do you agree that you can't separate your context from your doctrine? Explain your reasoning.
 5. What does your building communicate about your people?
- * Action Planning: Have 5 longtime members and 5 new people (or people unaffiliated with your church) rate the aspects of your church listed in the chapter. Discuss the results with your leadership. What is the disparity between the two groups' perception of the building? What do both groups agree on? What do they disagree on? Can you formulate a plan from these results to get some "quick wins" with your facility?



CHAPTER #8: PURPOSE

Key Quotes

- * The next part of the checklist helps to answer an important question: *What can you do to shift your church to an outward focus?* Without a rekindling of evangelism and outreach, a struggling church will not be revitalized.
- * One way of determining evangelistic health is through a metric called *conversion ratio*. This ratio tells you how many people in your church it takes to win one person for Christ.
- * A healthy church will have a conversion ratio of 20:1 or less.
- * Sadly, most churches in North America are unhealthy. In fact, the average conversion ratio among churches in the United States is 85:1.
- * One of the best ways to rekindle an outward focus is by encouraging a few of your willing people to invite their neighbors to church.
- * The only way your church has *no one* inviting others is if *you* are not inviting others.
- * Evangelism is more about having an inviting culture than it is about hosting events.
- * [Evangelistic] programs are helpful *if you share success stories*.
- * The lead pastor must set the example. Rather than explaining evangelistic methods, *show* what evangelism looks like in your own life.
- * As a leader, free up one to three hours a week...[for] inviting guests and sharing your faith.
- * The problem is that a significant number of neighborhood churches have forgotten why they exist. They are right around the corner but off the radar of their neighbors.
- * Rather than trying to gather as many people as we can onto our own campus (church growth), we committed ourselves to help revitalize as many churches as we can in our area (Kingdom growth).
- * Some churches are messy precisely because they are healthy. When a church is growing and new people are coming in for discipleship, it's hard to keep things neat and tidy.
- * Every church that wants to become healthier should emphasize these three things. (1) *New Member Class*. (2) *Clear Doctrine and High Expectations*. (3) *A Process of Discipleship*.

Application

- * Scriptures: Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 1:8-11
- * Discussion Questions
 1. How many conversions have you had in the past year in your church?
 2. Who have you invited to your church in the last month? Who could you invite?
 3. What barriers do you experience to evangelism personally and as a church? Are they actual or perceived barriers?
 4. Is your church in a neighborhood? If so, what are the demographics? If not, is there a neighborhood you could “adopt”?
 5. How messy is your church? Is it messy because of the unhealthiness of stagnation or the healthiness of growth?
- * Action Planning: Calculate your “conversion ratio” by dividing your average weekly attendance for the year by the number of conversions in the same year. Are you healthy, somewhat healthy, somewhat unhealthy, or unhealthy? What are your next steps to move toward a healthy ratio?



CHAPTER #9: PATHWAY

Key Quotes

- * When optimism and creativity come together, a pathway opens up to a brighter future.
- * A helpful tool is a strategy called the MHAG. It is one of the best ways to determine your realistic next step in revitalization.
- * MHAG stands for *mid holy audacious goal*. The key to a good MHAG is choosing an initiative or emphasis that lasts months, not years.
- * The best strategies to spark creativity often come with mid-length timelines. Thus the first word, *mid*.
- * The second term, *holy*, establishes that the aim of the goal is to give God glory. Any creative effort must begin with prayer.
- * The third term, *audacious*, means the goal must be bold. It must get the attention of your church.
- * The last term, *goal*, refers to the singular focus of the MHAG.
- * Writing the MHAG is a critical step. Make sure you include a specific action with a measurable outcome.
- * Successful MHAGs always involve other leaders. No pastor should try to lead a churchwide initiative without the help of others.
- * Walk your leaders through these four steps: *Show, Explain, Ask, Support*.
- * After selecting your group of leaders, the next step is to set deadlines. Timetables are mutually agreed-upon intervals in which to accomplish the MHAG. They include individual deadlines that move the process toward the goal.
- * After completing the MHAG make sure to meet with your leadership team to debrief.
- * As you set each MHAG, consider using lead goals rather than lag goals.
- * When optimism is coupled with accountability, people will work toward a goal with a sense of purpose and encouragement. ...Accountability should be helpful and encouraging, not overbearing.
- * Think of encouragement and discouragement as weights on opposite sides of a scale. One piece of discouragement weighs the same as one hundred pieces of encouragement.
- * You must protect your MHAG from negativity. The other side of tomorrow includes a more positive, brighter future for your church.

Application

- * Discussion Questions
 1. What were your goals for your church this year? Could any of them be described as MHAGs?
 2. What gets your church excited? What deflates them or raises tension?
 3. Which leaders are both influential and supportive in your church?
 4. How critical is your church of new initiatives? How can you curb that criticism?
- * Action Planning: Follow the directions in the chapter to write and implement your first MHAG.



CHAPTER #10: COMPLETING YOUR CHURCH REVITALIZATION CHECKLIST

Key Quotes

- * You are not the hero of your church. Christ is.
- * The three knows are simple: *know yourself*, *know your church*, and *know your community*.
- * Self-awareness is one of the key intangibles of leadership.
- * Leaders should never act condescendingly toward those they lead. Knowledge is not a weapon to be brandished, but rather a resource to be shared.
- * Church health surveys can help with uncovering major problems, but revitalization work requires more than one churchwide survey.
- * The two demographics most often overlooked are the prevalence of young people and ethnic minorities.
- * The checklist exists to demonstrate visual progress, constant accountability, and consistent focus. It is meant to be more cultural and less comprehensive. The approach is collaborative, not formulaic. One person cannot lead the effort; it takes a group of leaders. The checklist is flexible, not systemized. It's meant to work with whatever systems or polity are already in place at your church. The checklist is practical, not theological. My goal is to help you connect your convictions to the heart of your people in a way they understand.
- * Ministry isn't glamorous. And the moment that ministry does become glamorous, you become an anti-minister. Church revitalization is gritty work, but God is glorified in the impossible challenge of leading a church back to health.
- * The solution to the church's problem is a tireless pursuit of God's glory.
- * We don't just recruit people to come to church on the weekend. We compel people to become active participants in the greatest mission this world has ever known—the proclamation of the glory of God to the ends of the earth.
- * If God can save any person, then he can save any church. Yours included. The pursuit of God's glory will take you to the other side of tomorrow. Onward.

Application

- * Scriptures: Ezekiel 37:4-6, Isaiah 43:7
- * Discussion Questions
 1. How would you rate your self-awareness? How would your spouse or a close friend rate it?
 2. How have you learned the history and culture of your church? Have you taken churchwide surveys? What historical documents are available for your perusal? Which people outside the church could add perspective to the story?
 3. What demographic research have you done on your community? Have you shared that with your church leadership?
 4. How does the case study of Ryan's church encourage you in your journey?
- * Action Planning: Decide your ONE next step for revitalization.