

RENEW & RESOUND

A 40-DAY GUIDE TO RENEWAL

Edited by
BRANDON MOORE



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INTRODUCTION

One-size-fits-all solutions don't exist for church revitalization and replanting. Each church and its context is unique. Yet, one component remains essential in every effort: spiritual renewal. Facilities, leadership, ministry, and a host of other issues may need to be addressed, but apart from a move of the Holy Spirit to renew the people of God through the power of the gospel, we have no hope. Every church seeking to resound in fresh ways for God's glory and the good of its community must begin by relying on the Lord to renew it spiritually and provide clarity for its future direction.

This guide has been developed by Missouri Baptist pastors and associational leaders for the sake of cultivating spiritual renewal and healthy churches. This 40-day journey provides six daily devotions per week (Monday-Saturday), and a weekly challenge to engage as you gather with your church. As you read and pray together, you will reflect on the foundations of renewal and the target of renewal:

A Biblically Healthy Church

- Identity – Worshipers, Family, Missionaries

- Foundations – Gospel, Scripture, Prayer
- Structure – Leadership, Membership, Discipleship

Additionally, you and your church may want to add days of fasting, mid-week group studies such as *Flickering Lamps* by Henry Blackaby, or a sermon series that aligns with the focuses for the week. However you utilize this tool to pursue renewal, our hope and prayer for you and your church is that this 40-day journey is just the beginning of a fresh season of health and transformation for your church.

DAY 1

HOPE FOR RENEWAL - THE FATHER

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

EPHESIANS 1:3-6

OUR HOPE for renewal doesn't find its source in our efforts, programs, or strategies. For instance, we can do whatever we want to a car, but if we don't fill it with gas, it's not going anywhere. Similarly, we can do whatever we want to adjust the life of our church, but if we don't connect with God in a fresh way, we won't experience

renewal. Our hope for renewal lies in God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The good news is that the Father has been planning our salvation not only from sin, but also for holiness and life with him. He's been planning this salvation from before the foundation of the world. His plan is one of hope against all odds, and he provides hope for every church that pursues his plan for them.

REFLECT: Are you hopeful for the renewal of your church? If so, what do you expect will bring about that renewal? How will you pursue God's plan for your church?

PRAY: Father, we praise you for the incredible salvation you planned before time began. Strengthen our hearts to find hope for our church in you and you alone. May we recognize and pursue your plan for us.

DAY 2

HOPE FOR RENEWAL – THE SON

He has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard.

COLOSSIANS 1:22-23A

THE FATHER PLANNED our salvation and sent the Son to accomplish it through his death and resurrection. Jesus laid down his life so we could find life in him and experience his power over sin and death. If he has the power to overcome death, he certainly has the power to renew our church. In fact, our hope for renewal rests in Jesus' clear purpose: "to present us holy and blameless."

We may have wavered in our faithfulness. We may have lost sight of his mission. We may have struggled through a changing world under the weight of spiritual warfare. Yet, Jesus will not fail in his

mission. He will present to himself a pure bride. May we enjoy that promise by “continuing in the faith, stable and steadfast.”

REFLECT: How does the good news about Jesus give you hope for your church? What promise from Jesus do you need to remember to encourage hope in the hearts of others?

PRAY: Jesus, thank you for the amazing love you showed us when you came to earth and died in our place. Our sin is far more serious than we realize, but your grace toward us is even greater. If you can save us from our sins, you can certainly bring renewed life to our church family. May we find our confident hope in you and you alone.

DAY 3

HOPE FOR RENEWAL – THE SPIRIT

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

EPHESIANS 4:7

IMAGINE GETTING DROPPED in the middle of nowhere with no food or water, no tools, and only the clothes on your back. Maybe a few of us could last a few days, but most of us wouldn't make it long at all. Likely, we'd be overwhelmed by fears. Similarly, when Jesus left the disciples as he ascended to heaven, they huddled together fearful, not knowing what to do next.

But the good news is that Jesus didn't leave them alone. He sent his Holy Spirit in power to be with them, guide them, equip them, and empower them for their mission. And here's the really good news: Jesus poured out his Spirit graciously on us, as well.

We aren't left alone to find renewal on our own. The Holy Spirit is with us to make us more like Jesus for God's glory and the good of

others. He has given us everything we need to experience fresh life and leave a lasting impact in our communities.

REFLECT: What does the Spirit provide churches in need of renewal? How does the Holy Spirit's presence and power give you hope to overcome obstacles and experience renewal as a church?

PRAY: Holy Spirit, your comforting presence encourages us in the best of times and the worst of times. Your power gives us hope to be a people that bear your fruit, boldly witness to the gospel, and love one another. Your gifts empower us for your mission, and your guidance enables us to understand your word and walk in faithfulness. God, may we find hope for renewal by walking in your Spirit.

DAY 4

PATH FOR RENEWAL – REMEMBER

But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen....

REVELATION 2:4-5A

IN HARRY REEDER'S classic work on church revitalization, he highlights Jesus' path toward renewal in Revelation 2 as "Remember, Repent, and Recover." Prior to God's target for our church, we'll spend the next three days reflecting on this path.

Nostalgia is a powerful feeling. We love the opportunity to relive some of our best memories by enjoying activities, places, or foods from times past. But Jesus isn't calling the church to nostalgia. He's calling us to remember something deeper than the programs of our past. He's calling us to remember the joy and love we had for him during those times, the growth we experienced, and the fruit he produced in us.

For many of us, we need renewal because we remember and long for past programs and preferences. Instead, we must seek to remember and long for knowing, loving, and sharing Jesus above all else.

REFLECT: Consider when your love for Jesus was greatest and express your longing for that to be renewed.

PRAY: Father, we are often up and down in our walk with you. Our hearts are so easily distracted, and our love is so easily given to other things. Renew our love for you above all else and let that flow into our love for others inside and outside the church.

DAY 5

PATH FOR RENEWAL - REPENT

But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.... repent....

REVELATION 2:4 & 5B

PRIOR TO GOOGLE MAPS, one wrong turn on a road trip could result in tons of wasted time as you unknowingly headed in the wrong direction for minutes or even hours. Unless you recognize the error and turn around, the situation only gets worse and worse.

Thankfully, in this passage, Jesus is giving us the rerouting signal. His call to repent is a call to turn — turn from aimlessly going through the motions, turn from preserving programs over prioritizing people, and turn from division, pride, or other sinful detours from God's word. No matter how healthy or unhealthy you and your church may be, we always have sin we must repent of and growth in faithfulness we must pursue.

REFLECT: Do you simply go through the motions of church life? Has preserving specific programs become a significant priority for you? What sin do you need to confess and turn from personally or corporately?

PRAY: Jesus, thank you for your gracious call to repentance. We need you to expose our sin. Reveal to us where we have detoured from your path. Help me to see this personally, and help our church to recognize any sin that characterizes our life together. We praise you that your grace is far greater than all our sin and that by your strength we will not be overcome. May we be a holy people who love you more and more every day of our lives.

DAY 6

PATH FOR RENEWAL – RECOVER

But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.... do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

REVELATION 2:4-5

YOU'VE LIKELY HEARD stories of incredibly talented athletes suddenly quitting the sport they once loved. For many, they were driven by well-intended parents to invest in a game they loved and in which they could compete at the highest level. However, over time, the same practice and games became work rather than joy, and they burned out, leaving it all behind.

When we lose our love, even the works we do become hollow obligation or ritual. The church at Ephesus was doing good works but not works filled with love. Jesus was calling them to return to the joy-filled works of worship, fellowship, and mission that overflowed from

love rather than duty or maintaining the status quo. After remembering and repenting, we're called to recover Spirit-inspired, word-directed, joy-filled efforts to love God and love others as a church.

REFLECT: What acts of love naturally flowed from you when you were first walking with Jesus or when your church was thriving? What could it look like to recover love-driven, joy-filled work for God in your community today?

PRAY: Spirit, fill us with your love so much so that we overflow in grace and mercy toward others. May we be a people who work for your glory and the good of others, not out of obligation, but joy.

WEEK 1 CHALLENGE & REFLECTION
PREPARING FOR THE SUNDAY GATHERING

Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!

PSALM 46:10

TAKE a moment before you enter the church doors to read Psalm 46, praise God for who he is, and thank him for the chance to worship with other believers.

DAY 8
WORSHIPERS, PT. 1

Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!
Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts!
Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth!

PSALM 96:7-9

WHAT COMES to mind when you think “worship service”? Most would think about what happens on Sunday morning in churches. Does the word “worship” make you think about a programmed event or liturgy? Does it make you think of singing and preaching? Whatever the word denotes to you, it should principally indicate our response to what God has revealed about himself. We encounter the Creator of all things, who has made himself known, and in response, we declare his worth.

In Psalm 96 we are called upon to ascribe or attribute glory to the LORD. The whole earth is called to worship him and tremble before Yahweh. So, what does worship mean? It is derived from the Anglo-Saxon “worth-ship” meaning “to attribute worth.” Worship is to revere, honor, and declare supreme value to something or someone. When we worship we are declaring God’s worth. John Piper describes worship as a way of gladly reflecting back to God the radiance of his worth.

We also see that part of our response is to come into his courts and bring an offering. Worship is something we do as individuals, but also something we do in assembly with other believers. In Hebrews 10:24-25, we’re called to not neglect gathering with others in worship. Declaring God’s worth is also expressed in our giving to the Lord. Worship is an active response that reveals our love and adoration to a glorious and gracious God.

REFLECT: Part of our response in worship is thanksgiving and praise. What are you thanking God for today? For which of his attributes are you praising God?

PRAY: Heavenly Father, thank you making yourself known as a holy and gracious God, who has created us and sustains us. Today we declare that you are worthy of our worship, and we glorify you with our lips and our very lives.

DAY 9
WORSHIPERS, PT. 2

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

JOHN 4:23-24

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN shares the story of Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. As the conversation got a little too personal for the woman, she tried to divert Jesus' attention to a theological debate on where a person can worship God. While our Lord answered the question, he also helped her discover his true identity as the Messiah. We discover some very important principles in Jesus' answer.

First, we see there is a difference between true and false worshipers. Those who are true worshipers worship in spirit and truth. God is spirit and therefore is not limited to time and space. He can be

worshiped in any place and at any time. This is not to suggest he can be worshiped in any way. Again, Jesus makes a distinction between true and false. We must worship God in truth. It is imperative that our understanding of God is grounded on the truth of Scripture correctly interpreted. The basis of Christian worship is theological. The doctrines that we hold determine the nature of our worship.

Second, we see that God is seeking such people who will worship him in spirit and truth. The essence of grace is that God seeks us without our merit. The Scripture declares that no one seeks God (Rom. 3:11). Yet the Lord extends us this invitation and stirs our hearts by his Spirit, so our hearts become inflamed by a desire to know and seek him. And as we do, we discover afresh who he is and the extent of his love and mercy. And our response, then, becomes one of praise and adoration that he may be glorified.

REFLECT: In what ways have you encountered God that have led you to worship him? What truths have you recently learned about God that have increased your love and adoration for him?

PRAY: Heavenly Father, thank you for your grace that sought us out and stirred our hearts to find our greatest satisfaction in you. You are worthy of our highest praise and utmost honor. May our lives reflect our supreme priority to glorify you in everything.

DAY 10
WORSHIPERS, PT. 3

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear O Israel, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

MARK 12:29-31, NIV

JESUS WAS ASKED a question by a religious leader in an effort to test him. “Teacher, which command is the most important of all?” Jesus answers that it is to love God with all we are and all we have. God is to be the highest aspiration of our total life. We are to love him preeminently and completely. This is the heart of worship.

First, our love for God is to be with all our heart and soul. We were made to worship, and we worship what we value most – what is of greatest worth at the core of our being. Jesus told his disciples that

where our treasure is, there our hearts will be also. Jesus is calling us to desire God above all else and make him our supreme desire.

Second, we are to love God with all our mind. The psalmist declares, “The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD, but gracious words are pure” (15:26). How we think and what we dwell on shapes our mind and affections. Paul calls us not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). How? By focusing on God’s word.

Third, we are to love God with all our strength. Jesus said, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word” (John 14:23). Obedience is an expression of love. This requires our active participation in fulfilling the teaching of Christ.

REFLECT: As you examine your life and activities, what would people who know you best say is your greatest longing and most evident aspiration? Is there anything that you should change to make the Lord supreme?

PRAY: Heavenly Father, thank you for first loving us and giving us a heart to love you. Help us to love you completely with all we are and all we have. You are worthy of our highest devotion and deepest affection. Be glorified in our lives today.

DAY 11

FAMILY, PT. 1

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

ROMANS 8:15-17

THE FAMILY IS the first of all human institutions established by God. It is the basic unit upon which every society in the world is built, even those of non-Christian populations. It is no wonder that the language of family became commonplace for understanding our relationships with God and other believers within the church: “Our Father in heaven...” (Mt. 6:9); “Now, as to the love of the brothers and sisters, you have no need for anyone to write to you...” (I Thess.

4:9). In Romans 8, alone, believers are referred to as children of God or sons and daughters of God six times. This is our identity in Christ. We are “heirs of God and coheirs with Christ.” In addition to these, the New Testament highlights our special relationship through over 50 more “one another” commands. “Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor” (Rom. 12:10).

We must take the strong, familial bonds of love, loyalty, and devotion we feel for our own flesh-and-blood family and apply them to a greater degree to those brothers and sisters within the body of Christ, the church. Oh, how differently disagreements and conflicts within the body might be reconciled if we had this strong, devoted love for our fellow church members. What a great difference it would make in our attitude towards those immature and emotionally wounded members if we would but remember the depth of our spiritual relationship with them. How much more patience, forbearance, and mercy would we demonstrate to fellow believers if we loved them as we are loved in the family of God?

REFLECT: How have you experienced God’s love through the family of God? Are there ways you or your church have failed to live up to this for one another? Who in your church do you need to pursue with the love of Jesus: encouraging, forgiving, or confessing your own sin?

PRAY: Oh Lord, forgive me for my impatience and the arrogance I’ve felt toward your children and my brothers and sisters at times in the past. Truly give me the spirit that Paul encouraged when he told us, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4).

DAY 12

FAMILY, PT. 2

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

1 JOHN 4:10-12

JESUS RESCUED us from sin and death, and he reconciled us to God and one another as family. Just like our physical family, we don't choose who we're family with, God does. We don't love one another because of shared interests or passions or even out of the goodness of our hearts. Instead, we love because God first loved us. None of us earned our way into this family, and none of us deserves one another's love. However, since God loved us with such indescribable grace and mercy when we were so indescribably unworthy, how can we not then love one another?

If Jesus has determined to love his bride with all her flaws, how much more must we love one another? We're called to love the irritable, the irrational, and the immature. As family, we love with vulnerability, recognizing we may get hurt, because that's how Jesus loved us. That means we bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things (1 Cor. 13:7). We bear one another's burdens, forgive one another, pray for one another, encourage one another, and much more – not because others are easy to love or deserve our love, but because God's love is in us, and his love is graciously poured out through us.

REFLECT: How does God's love for you encourage you to love others? How does God's love for others in your church need to transform the way you relate to them?

PRAY: Jesus, your sacrificial, steadfast love for me is humbling and overwhelming. May I love others like you have loved me. Strengthen me to love with a selfless, gracious, faithful love those who are hard to love, who disagree with me, or who even annoy me. May your love be displayed through me for your glory and the good of others.

DAY 13

FAMILY, PT. 3

Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, “I believed, and so I spoke,” we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:13-17

ALLOW me to challenge you to meditate on a weighty spiritual truth. This spiritual family on earth that you're a part of, which includes those believers who have lived and died before us and those who will live and die after us, if the Lord tarries, are the very people

we will spend eternity with in heaven. If I may borrow a few thoughts from C.S. Lewis' book, *The Weight of Glory*, consider that this flawed, fallen, human family of redeemed people we call "the church" will one day be glorified and experience the perfecting glory of God.

As Lewis says it so well:

"It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbour. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbour's glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization — these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit — immortal horrors or everlasting splendours."

Since every believer will be a creature of absolute beauty, nobility, and perfection in heaven, shining with the very glory bestowed from above, and, since we don't always know who is about to place trust in the Lord Jesus unto salvation, we should treat every person we meet with the respect and reverence due these glorified beings who will one day shine with the glory of our Savior.

REFLECT: Am I guilty of failing to consider the outcome of my faith and the glory of my own state in heaven to the neglect of my worship of the one true Lord? How have I been dismissive and disrespectful to others in society I deem to be of lower station than I? How can I be more intentional about considering the spiritual reality of my position in Christ and others so that I have the proper perspective in my encounters with others daily?

PRAY: Having reflected on the weight of the glory of God and our relationships with one another in Jesus, pray that God would strengthen you to embody his love toward others. For as Jesus says, it's by our love for one another that we'll be known as his disciples (John 13:35).

WEEK 2 CHALLENGE & REFLECTION

PREPARING FOR THE SUNDAY GATHERING

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

HEBREWS 10:24-25

FIND ONE PERSON TO ENCOURAGE. Share why you are thankful for them or how you've seen God growing them, and be specific.

DAY 15
MISSIONARIES, PT. 1

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that

clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades.

"The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

LUKE 10:1-20

JESUS MOVES from explaining the cost of being his disciple to appointing 72 disciples to be sent out in pairs ahead of him to the towns he is about to visit. He is developing a missionary identity in his disciples early in their preparation using on-the-job training. Jesus, as our creator, knows that we learn best by doing, so he gives them a little instruction and a lot of practice using it. He is intentional and detailed in his instructions. He knows what awaits them and seeks to prepare them for the two possible responses to the message they will be proclaiming: a response of either acceptance or

rejection of the message. Even though some rejected the message, the disciples returned with joy because they personally witnessed the power and authority of Jesus, even over the demons.

Like the disciples, we also are totally reliant on the power and authority of Jesus to engage those in the harvest. We also need opportunity to engage in his work. There is no better place to get a lot of practice than in the communities around your church. As we are faithful to work in the harvest, Jesus replaces our fear and apprehensions with joy, and our faith grows, resulting in our going to communities more distant, either geographically or culturally.

REFLECT: How is your church intentionally providing hands-on training and equipping to develop every member to be sent to those that need to know the good news of Jesus? How will you commit to engaging in those opportunities?

PRAY: Ask the Father where he would send you in your surrounding area to engage people with the gospel, resulting in your being equipped for other, possibly longer-term, assignments.

DAY 16
MISSIONARIES, PT. 2

I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

PHILIPPIANS 2:25-30

THERE ARE many ways for churches to engage in sending. It might be sending volunteer teams for a week, sending youth for a summer,

sending college graduates for a year or two, or even sending trained leaders for a career in church planting or replanting. In today's Scripture reading we find the church in Philippi sent one of their members, Epaphroditus, to assist Paul in the church-planting work in which he was engaged, likely even bringing financial support from his sending church for Paul's work. This may have been intended to be for a short-term assignment or perhaps something longer. Because of Epaphroditus' illness, he returned sooner than expected, it seems. Regardless, Paul acknowledged Epaphroditus' contribution to the work of Christ and how he was an extension of the church in Philippi in the church-planting work Paul was engaged.

The church at Philippi is modeling a well-developed missionary identity. They recognized the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18-20 was more than a task or command to be obeyed, but a part of who they are as a church. For this reason, they sensed something lacking in their service to Paul.

REFLECT: How is your church sending members to come alongside church planters in other areas? How can you help develop a culture of sending in your church?

PRAY: Remember those that your church has sent out, asking the Father to continue the flow of sending out people from your church to serve alongside those from other churches working together to see new churches emerge where currently there are none.

DAY 17

MISSIONARIES, PT. 3

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

ACTS 11:19-26, 13:1-3

THE ELDERS of the church gather together to pray. It was normal for the elders in Antioch to gather and pray, worshiping and fasting together. Barnabas and Saul (later called Paul) were among the elders there. Barnabas had been sent from the church in Jerusalem to assist the believers in Antioch and recruited Saul from the city of Tarsus to come help in teaching them. The church was being conformed to the image of Jesus to the point the people of the city began referring to them as "little Christs" (Christians). On this occasion of their praying together, the Holy Spirit spoke to them and called for them to send out their two most experienced and mature elders, Barnabas and Saul, for the work of planting new churches throughout Asia and Europe.

The Holy Spirit knows that church planting in cross-cultural settings is challenging. Therefore, he sends mature, faithful, experienced disciples to lead the work, often the key leaders of the church. The church is called to trust and obey the Spirit's leading, knowing he will raise up people to lead in their place. Such confidence in the Spirit enables us to fast and pray for those that are being sent out to perform this new work.

REFLECT: Who might the Spirit be calling out from among your church? What needs to be developed in your church to create such a pipeline of leaders to be sent out?

PRAY: Pray for your leaders, those that serve in pastoral roles as well as those that faithfully teach and lead small groups. Ask the Lord to send out some of these leaders into long-term, cross-cultural church-planting and replanting assignments.

DAY 18
GOSPEL, PT. 1

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-2, NASB

THE APOSTLE PAUL is crystal clear that the same message that birthed the church in Corinth would continue to sustain the church throughout its life. What was that message? “Jesus Christ and Him crucified”! The gospel plants churches, and the gospel preserves churches; the gospel makes churches, and the gospel maintains churches. Revitalization often begins with rediscovering the centrality of the gospel in the life of the church. A drift has happened — a straying. It appears slowly and unintentionally and is often realized much later than churches care to admit. This drift happened in Corinth, and Paul writes to remind them of the church’s structural

and functional center: the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Get back there and stay there.

Paul taught, preached, and wrote many things, but indicates that there was a genuine sense in which he knew nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified. How could that be? It seems that he is saying that every message and ministry in some foundational and decisive way was connected to Christ's saving work on the cross. How does the life and ministry of your church reflect such gospel-centrality?

REFLECT: How might you begin the process of helping bring the church back to her structural and functional center? Do you treat the gospel as the "basics" of Christianity — the ABCs, as it were — or do you see it as the foundation of the church that informs, influences, and colors everything about the church? How have you treated the gospel?

PRAY: Father, make the gospel the structural and functional center of my life — as well as the life of my church. Capture hearts with the glory of what you have done for us in your Son. Help me to connect the dots between this transformative reality and the day-to-day life of following Jesus.

DAY 19
GOSPEL, PT. 2

I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

1 CORINTHIANS 2:3-5, NASB

CHURCH REVITALIZATION IS NOT the result of a charismatic or dynamic leader. It doesn't come through viral-worthy sermons or the powerful persuasion of worldly wisdom. Thankfully, it comes through the power of God's Spirit through the humble and faithful preaching of God's word by ordinary men who God has given the task of serving as under-shepherds in his flock. Paul says this ordinary means by less than extraordinary men showcases the wonder of the gospel. Church revitalization, like faith, does not rest on the pastor's ability to impress or excite his listeners — but on the power of God

contained in the gospel (1 Cor. 1:18; Rom. 1:16). As the gospel saturates word-driven sermons, God's wisdom is spotlighted, and his power is manifest. The very same simple and straightforward gospel proclamation that established the church in Corinth is what God desires for all his churches. This is his desire for your church.

REFLECT: As God's people, we gather to remember and realign our lives with the gospel of Jesus Christ. How do your weekly worship gatherings, especially the sermons and songs, showcase the wonder of the gospel? How have you seen the Spirit "demonstrate" his power in your life and others through your gatherings?

PRAY: Father, I recognize how easy and tempting it is to rely on the world's methods or to seek a silver-bullet solution to our church's needs. Renew my trust in the power of the gospel, especially as it's shared in simple gospel-centered, word-saturated sermons, sung in songs, and shared in everyday conversations. May we trust in you and your message to strengthen and sustain our church.

DAY 20
GOSPEL, PT. 3

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So, I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27

CHURCH REVITALIZATION, like all ministry, is a glorious, yet laborious, work requiring perseverance and discipline, and endurance and self-control. It takes the intentionality of a boxer — direct, target-centered actions — and the sustained discipline of a competitive athlete — self-control on and off the track. The cost is great, but the reward is greater! But notice how Paul ends. He wants to make sure all this painstaking effort doesn't end with the greatest upset a Chris-

tian could ever face: having ministered to others, but they themselves are disqualified! How awful it would be to achieve every one of your revitalization hopes for your church and yet lose your own soul in the process (Mark 8:36)! Remember, the recovery of the centrality of the gospel is not just the greatest need for your church, it is *your* greatest daily need as well. Only the gospel can give you the internal fortitude to embark on such a journey, to lay down your preferences and experience transformation, and only the gospel enables you to weather both the struggles and successes.

REFLECT: How are you keeping your identity grounded and maintained in the gospel instead of your church's style, programs, or successes? What are the red flags to watch for as indicators that the main ground of your identity has shifted from what God has done for you in Christ to something else?

PRAY: Ask the Lord to reveal ways in which you've wandered from the gospel for your source of life and satisfaction. Confess your daily need for him and seek help to live in radical dependence on Jesus moment by moment.

WEEK 3 CHALLENGE & REFLECTION
PREPARING FOR THE SUNDAY GATHERING

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:20

LISTEN for one truth from the gathering you can share with someone to encourage them and invite them to join you next Sunday.

DAY 22

SCRIPTURE - LOVE GOD'S WORD

Until I get there, focus on reading the Scriptures to the church, encouraging the believers, and teaching them.

1 TIM. 4:13, NLT

I TOOK driver's education in high school. That teacher was not paid enough. Of all the lessons taught, the one skill that stuck was this: "Where you look, the car will go." He was right. If you looked to the left or the right, the car would follow. You will drift in the direction you put your attention. You can experiment next time you are driving.

The same is true in your life and church. Where you focus your attention, your heart will follow. This is why Paul commands Timothy to focus the church's attention on the public reading of the Scriptures. Looking to the Scriptures will direct us to God.

Though established by Paul, the church of Ephesus was drifting. The church's drift included troubled relationships and confusion

about the church's purpose, and the witness for Christ in Ephesus was diminished and diluted. Timothy's daunting task was to renew the established church in Ephesus, in part by encouraging the church to love the Scriptures by fixing its eyes and ears on the foundation of God's word.

Timothy's public reading of Scripture and his teaching flowed from keeping a close watch on his life (4:16). The principle of the combined instruction is that public reading of Scripture is an outpouring of personal reading of Scripture. Similarly, personal reading of Scripture is reinforced by its public proclamation. A church then will love the word of God only to the extent its people cherish his word.

Just like the kid in driver's education class learning that where he looks, the car will go, we are reminded that where the church focuses, it too will go. Regularly and publicly concentrating your attention on the Scriptures will draw you closer to the Lord and his purposes in your life and church.

REFLECT: Do I demonstrate my love for the Scriptures by giving it my regular attention? Do we, as a church, read God's word aloud, beyond the text preached, when we gather for worship?

PRAY: Lord, thank you for revealing yourself to us through your word. Forgive us for looking to programs, conferences, and personalities to renew our church instead of setting our eyes, opening our ears, and embedding your word in our hearts. Please refresh us by your word today.

DAY 23

SCRIPTURE - RECEIVE GOD'S WORD

If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished by the words of the faith and the good teaching that you have followed.

1 TIMOTHY 4:6, CSB

A CRITICAL COMPONENT necessary for a church to experience revitalization is for the leaders to be renewed in heart. Paul reminds Timothy that for the church to have sound doctrine, they must receive instruction from pastors who have also received it and are practicing it. And for a church to experience renewal, its leaders and members must also embrace the same word.

I was building a project that required measuring and cutting some lumber. I followed the sage advice I had received and measured twice, so I could cut once. When I went to place the board where it was supposed to fit, the material was too long. I checked my measurements with my tape measure, and they were right. I could not figure

out why the board was too long. Then I noticed that the hook on my tape measure moved. The metal surrounding the rivet holding the hook to the tape measure had chipped away. When the tape was stretched out, it measured long. Everything I cut was wrong because I was using an incorrect measurement.

We do something similar when it comes to our churches. We measure how we are doing based on how everyone else is doing. If everyone is doing okay, so are we. If everyone in our circle is struggling, we might be as well. We need instead to measure our lives and the health of our church not by what others are doing, but by the received word of God so that we might be nourished by the words of faith and good teaching.

The health of our churches is dependent upon a regular diet of God's word. Timothy is praised for his faithfulness to feed the church by the same word of God with which he has been nourished. God has revealed himself to us so we might know him and his purposes for us. We can only know him when we receive what he has said about himself. The spiritual health of your life and your church is dependent upon receiving and cultivating God's word.

REFLECT: Are you finding regular nourishment in God's word? Are you receiving his word more now than you were six months or a year ago? How can your church feast on God's word together?

PRAY: Lord, help me today to receive your word. Let me be nourished by what you have said. May my church long to be filled by the living words of Christ as they dwell within us richly.

DAY 24

SCRIPTURE - PROCLAIM GOD'S WORD

Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and teaching.

2 TIMOTHY 4:2, CSB

THERE IS a good chance you know what season is coming. You can tell when fall is near and when winter is trying to bring its icy grasp. Hope emerges as spring tempts its arrival. Summer melts our brains and our hyper-scheduled agendas. You know what season it is and what season is next. Just as there are seasons in the calendar, there are seasons in your church's life, and Paul's word to Timothy is to be ready to preach in every season.

When times are good, a healthy church preaches God's word. When times are bad, a struggling church preaches God's word. God's word surpasses every season when it is proclaimed. A healthy church

is built on the Bible. A revitalized church is made healthy again by a regular dose of his word.

To be a people of the book means that we are a people who hear his word proclaimed regularly. While thirty-minute, or longer, monologues are out of fashion in society, they take a preeminent place within our churches. The entire facility and service are centered around one critical activity: preaching the word. God's word proclaimed redirects us when we are wrong, scolds us when we need correcting, and encourages us when we are downhearted. The Bible contains all we need for life and godliness for ourselves, our families, and our churches. Neither you nor your church will ever receive all that God intends without the proper elevation and instruction of his word. Therefore, proclaiming his word is a primary matter for revitalized churches.

REFLECT: Do I value the preaching of God's word? Is my pastor afforded the time to study and prepare a message from God's word? What can I do to ensure that he does have the necessary preparation time? If we don't have a trained pastor in our church, what do we need to do to have preaching in season and out?

PRAY: Lord, thank you for speaking. Thank you for wanting us to know you through your word. Forgive us when we do not make the preaching of your word of great importance in our lives. I pray for my pastor. That he would preach the word. That he, in love, would correct and rebuke us. That he, in that same love, would encourage us.

DAY 25

PRAYER - PRAY FOR GREATER WORKS

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

JOHN 14:12-14

SOME MAY READ this passage and think that Jesus is telling us that if we just use his name in each prayer, he will give us our heart's desires. That would be a lot easier, wouldn't it? Just to use a magic formula and the things we want to happen for our church would come to pass, but that is not correct. What is true is that God wants us to pray and believe in his will, not our own. If we desire to see Jesus-type works taking place around us, we must pray through the Holy Spirit according to what God desires for our church.

Jesus also said that we would do even greater works than he did.

What this means is that we can share the gospel much farther and wider than Jesus did in his time. I have heard many times, “Your church’s address is not a mistake.” God’s plan is for your church to be fruitful right where it is planted. God wants to use your church to produce even greater kingdom growth than what Jesus saw in his entire ministry.

REFLECT: What are you praying for today that is bigger than your church can do itself? Is God glorified by what and how you pray as a congregation? What are some “greater works” God is leading your church to pray for and do in your community?

PRAY: God, may you lead us to greater kingdom work than we have ever been a part of before. Jesus, we believe in the power of your name, and we ask in your name to lead us out to those around us that we may be faithful in sharing the gospel with them. May you be glorified in all that we do.

DAY 26

PRAYER – ORDINARY PEOPLE WITH EXTRAORDINARY POWER

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

JAMES 5:16

JAMES DESCRIBES HERE the actions of the church as they care for their members. Undoubtedly, people get sick and need prayer. But what about your church? What do you pray, and how do you care for your church when it needs care? The same principles can be applied here. There is healing that takes place when a congregation confesses its sins to each other on a normal basis. This is very foreign to our modern worship services today. We must work hard to get past our own preferences each Sunday and model our services after what God desires. As we grow in our concern for each other on the things that matter to God, like sin, we will grow closer to him as a whole.

The next two verses following this passage describe the faithful

praying of Elijah. It is said he was an ordinary man like we are, yet his prayers were effective. These words should be an encouragement to us, that we too can see great and mighty works of God in and through our church. The confessions and prayers of a healthy church have great power.

REFLECT: Does your church have a time of confession in corporate worship? If, not, why? In what areas does your church need to be healed? How do you see God's power working through your church's prayers?

PRAY: Lord, we humbly bow before you to ask for your healing on our church. We confess that we have allowed our comforts to come before your commands. We pray that we would see a mighty revival in our community, and it starts right here in our prayers to you. Lord, may we see you at work today.

DAY 27

PRAYER – COMPASSION FOR THE CROWDS

And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

MATTHEW 9:35-36

MY WIFE and I both wear glasses, but we don't have the same prescription. Where my eyes are weaker, hers are stronger and vice versa. Our kids will undoubtedly need glasses at some time. One could say that our vision is limited to what we *can* see with our own eyes, and then with the help of glasses or contacts, what we *should* be able to view.

The same is true for churches. We must rely on God's help to correctly see the crowds around us and their needs. Many times, we

can get so busy focusing on the things going on within the church that we fail to realize our vision has decreased for the world around us. Jesus intentionally traveled around to the people and places so he could clearly see the people and their needs. His vision was better because he was with the people. May we strive to do the same.

REFLECT: How does your church go about knowing the people around you and their needs? How could you begin seeing and praying for the needs of your community? What should compassion for your community look like?

PRAY: Lord, help us to know our community. Guide us to the people around us and to their needs. We know that you are the Great Healer of both the physical and spiritual. May we see the crowds like you see them. May we have a true and genuine love for them just as you love us. And may you use your people gathering at this church to point them to you, our shepherd. Lead us, oh Lord.

WEEK 4 CHALLENGE & REFLECTION
PREPARING FOR THE SUNDAY GATHERING

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

JAMES 5:16

ASK one person how you can pray for them and offer to pray for them right then and there.

DAY 29

LEADERSHIP – KINGDOM LEADERS HAVE A NEW DEFINITION OF GREATNESS

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

JOHN 15:13

BE A WORLD-CHANGER! Be a difference-maker! Make your mark on the world! These encouraging words have likely been cheering us on to live significant lives since preschool. Here is the best news you will hear today: the world has already been changed. Somebody really did make the ultimate difference. The only mark that ever needed to be made has been made. That mark is in the shape of a cross. The work Jesus did at Calvary is a finished work, and you and I have been relieved of “save the world” duty. The pressure is off. We no longer need to prove our worth.

The great news of the gospel is that we are free to live rather unimpressive lives. We don't have to be amazing because Jesus is. Our lives have value and meaning now, not because of what we

accomplish, but because of who made us. Our most significant work is to boast joyfully and abundantly about what he did, what he is doing, and what he is going to do.

We are free to pursue a new definition of greatness: helping someone else get what they need. Kingdom leaders focus on the needs of those they lead. In this definition of greatness, the leader's job is to see and hear the needs of those around them and respond in service. The leader's strength is the joy of the Lord and the knowledge that he never grows weary or tired and renews those who wait on the Lord.

REFLECT: What is my definition of greatness? Who am I supposed to help today?

PRAY: Father, thank you for being amazing. Thank you for being a strong Savior and the heavy lifter of the work needed to run the universe. Help me live today without the pressure of performance and instead run in the joy of service to others.

DAY 30

LEADERSHIP – KINGDOM LEADERS MAKE IT SAFE TO FAIL

When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place,
with fish laid out on it, and bread.

JOHN 21:9

THE FIRST YEAR in my new position at work was a complete failure. I jumped into the assignment, confidently announcing my aggressive plans to my supervisor. Then, 365 days later, I had absolutely nothing to show in the way of progress. Confessing my failures in his office, I awaited the inevitable criticism. It never came. Instead, he leaned in with a smile and said, “Okay, here’s what we’re going to do.” He proceeded to coach me into a new way of working. He led me into the most effective work I had ever accomplished. Teams were built, leaders were developed, and I grew tremendously through his encouragement.

Another unexpected, but familiar, catch of fish. Breakfast waiting on the beach. A new commission in front of the other disciples. Jesus

communicated to Peter that his colossal failure was not final. Through these kindnesses, Jesus leaned into Peter and said, “Okay, here’s what we’re going to do.” Kingdom leaders make it safe to fail. They slow down and pick up developing disciples and leaders with humility and courage. When they do this, they create a culture full of grace, compassion, humor, and whimsy that allows us all to laugh at ourselves, care for each other, and try things together for God’s glory we might never attempt in less forgiving environments.

REFLECT: How do I handle failure in myself? In others?

PRAY: Father, thank you for the grace that is bigger than our failures. Thank you for holding on to us tighter than we could ever hold on to you. Today, teach me how to make it as safe for others to fail as you made it for me.

DAY 31

LEADERSHIP - KINGDOM LEADERS GIVE CONTROL

The twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.

ACTS 6:2-5

SCRIPTURE CRUSHES the myth of the complete leader — the flawless person at the top who’s got it all figured out. The sooner leaders stop trying to be all things to all people, the better off everyone will be. Only when leaders see themselves as incomplete —

having both strengths and weaknesses — will they be able to grow from leader to multiplier. Today’s passage illustrates this truth and displays a healthy picture of how kingdom leaders behave.

The rapid growth of the Jerusalem church came with problems. The disciples faced a potential church split. Instead of attempting the “hero” thing, they trusted the body and the Holy Spirit and directed them to jump in and solve the problem. Their proposal pleased the church. The result: The word of God spread, disciples multiplied, and the most unlikely people stepped into the kingdom of God. When leaders embrace their limitations, focus on their strengths, and trust the Holy Spirit in others, more leaders emerge, more people get involved, and God gets the glory. Kingdom leadership is not about getting better and better at doing more and more. Kingdom leadership is about becoming more and more dependent on God’s presence and power and the people he has placed around us.

REFLECT: Can I trust the Holy Spirit in others? Do I have to be the smartest person in the room? Am I focused on getting stuff done? What problem or project today is an opportunity to develop another person?

PRAY: Father, thank you for making me a limited, created human being. Thank you for my strengths and my weaknesses that force me to depend on others who are strong where I am weak. Help me to see today’s problems and projects as opportunities to develop others.

DAY 32

MEMBERSHIP - BELONGING

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

EPHESIANS 2:17-22

MANY ARE LIVING with the virus of isolation or with virtual relationships through social media. We are more connected than ever, but lonelier. We are posting more, but engaging less. As culture

becomes more digitally connected, there is a greater hunger to belong because we are designed for something more.

Our Trinitarian, fellowshiping God created us with the desire to belong and a place for us to belong. Paul refers to this place in Ephesians 2 as “God’s household,” built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ as the cornerstone. God builds a dwelling place for himself where we belong by the Spirit.

1 John 1:3-4 says, “That which we’ve seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.” The apostolic proclamation comes from their witness of Jesus, whom they heard, saw, and touched. God took on flesh to bring believers into fellowship with himself and to place us in fellowship with other believers by the work of the Spirit.

REFLECT: How can you share with a leader and another church member that you are grateful you belong to your church?

PRAY: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for creating me with a need to belong and for creating a place for me to belong. Increase my appreciation for my church with all its imperfections. It’s where I belong.

DAY 33

MEMBERSHIP – PARTICIPATING

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart....

1 PETER 1:22

IN THE VERSES surrounding 1 Peter 1:22, we are reminded that as believers we have been ransomed from our futile ways by the precious blood of Christ and born again by an imperishable seed, through the living word of God. It's our obedience to the gospel (the person and work of Jesus on the cross) that purifies our souls and calls us to "love one another earnestly from a pure heart." Our response to the gospel obligates us to sincerely love our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Peter uses "brotherly love," which is the Greek word *phileo*, and "love one another," which in the Greek is "*agapao* one another." According to *Strong's Concordance*, *agapao* means: "To welcome, to

entertain, to be fond of, to love dearly.” We lovingly participate in our local church family as we gather with sincere love for others who have been obedient to the gospel. God has created a people for us to love with same kind of committed, gracious love of Christ.

Church membership is making clear our commitment to love a particular people, because I need the church and the church needs me.

REFLECT: How will I love deeper by participating in my local church this week? How do I need to love the local church? How do others in my church need me?

PRAY: Dear gracious Father, thank you for ransoming me through the precious blood of Jesus and causing me to be born again through the living and abiding word of God. Thank you for all my brothers and sisters who have also been obedient to the gospel. Give me a heart to participate with them, welcome them, and love them dearly.

DAY 34

MEMBERSHIP - MATURING

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

EPHESIANS 4:11-13

FAR TOO MANY folks come to church to be an audience. They watch the pastor preach, the teachers teach, the deacons pray, the worship team sing, and then go home. This is a very underdeveloped view of church and incomplete view of ministry. Ministry isn't just for pastors, teachers, and worship-team members. God designed the church for shepherds and leaders to equip the saints. Every believer is to be engaged in the work of ministry. The local church is a great place to be equipped, minister, and grow!

As we identify our gifts and mature in serving, the body of Christ is built up! We minister together with each member doing their part with the goal that “we all attain to the unity of the faith.” Paul sets some lofty goals. When we are equipped and minister together, we move towards full maturity and become more like Christ, who loved the church. Take the challenge to try a variety of places of service in your church until you and the church find your sweet spot of service.

Remember: You need the church, and the church needs you.

REFLECT: In what area do I need to be trained that I might minister and build up my church family?

PRAY: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for the leaders you have given our church to equip each believer in our church for ministry. Help me to continue to embrace the ministry you have given me at church. May we minister together so that you would bring us to full maturity.

WEEK 5 CHALLENGE & REFLECTION
PREPARING FOR THE SUNDAY GATHERING

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

GALATIANS 5:13

FIND one way to serve someone in your church family.

DAY 36

DISCIPLESHIP – A DISCIPLE’S COMMAND

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

MATTHEW 28:18-20, NASB

FORTY DAYS AFTER JESUS’ resurrection, he spoke these words to his disciples on the Mount of Olives. Jesus is about to ascend, returning to heaven to be with his Father. For the last three years, Jesus has taught, corrected, encouraged, illustrated, and empowered 12 men to be his followers.

His final words include a command for his church — make disciples. Making disciples is Jesus’ main assignment for his church. God is glorified when his people obey him.

What is a disciple? A disciple is one who engages in learning through instruction from another, and who is associated with a teacher and his ideas.

In essence, a disciple is one who learns from and imitates his teacher. The call for every believer is to imitate Jesus, to know, love, and obey him, and to help others do the same.

REFLECT: Am I a follower of Jesus in learning his truth from Scripture? Am I a follower of Jesus in imitation of his earthly life by seeking those who are lost, hurting, and needing hope? Jesus expects his followers to be disciples who make disciples. Am I?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, thank you for saving me. I choose to learn your truth from your word. Open my mind to you. Lord Jesus, help me to display you to others today by the power of your Spirit. I am your disciple.

DAY 37

DISCIPLESHIP – A DISCIPLE’S DESIRE

Jesus said, “...the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.” And He was saying to them all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”

LUKE 9:22-26, NASB

JESUS NEVER CALLED anyone to be a Christian. He called people to be his disciples. A disciple learns from his master and

imitates his master's life. A disciple is never above his master. Jesus warned that if anyone "desired" to follow him, three commands must be obeyed. A disciple of Jesus is commanded to "deny," "take up," and "follow." All three commands expect continual obedience:

1. "Deny himself" commands that self-preferences be buried to the living desires of Christ for his church.
2. "Take up his cross daily" is more than just enduring difficult circumstances, but involves daily death to personal desires for the sake of glorifying Jesus made possible by his complete redemption on the cross.
3. "Follow me" is a perpetual command of obeying Jesus' directives so that disciples are created internationally through you, his disciple.

REFLECT: Entering the revitalization process can cause pain and will challenge personal preferences. Therefore, these questions must be asked, daily: Are my preferences more important than Christ's preferences? Am I desiring to glorify Christ or elevate me? Who guides my life — Christ or me?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, I surrender all of my life to you. Guide me by your desires. What you desire is what I will desire. I will surrender to you today. Fill me with the Holy Spirit so that your commands will be heard and obeyed, for your glory alone.

DAY 38

DISCIPLESHIP – A DISCIPLE’S EXPECTATION

And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

2 TIMOTHY 2:2 NASB

A DISCIPLE of Jesus learns from Jesus, imitates Jesus’ life, and multiplies Jesus through other disciples. As Paul commands Timothy, multiplication of disciples is the responsibility of every disciple of Jesus.

Timothy was expected to imitate Paul in discipling others, just as Paul had disciplined Timothy. Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to establish order and theological clarity, and to develop leaders. All three actions are accomplished when disciples are multiplied.

Most churches are in need of revitalization because multiplication of disciples either stopped or never existed in the context of the church.

REFLECT: As a disciple of Jesus, who knows Jesus and is following Jesus because of you? Who could you invite to learn to follow Jesus with you by praying and reading Scripture together?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, thank you for saving me from sin. I choose to die to my selfish desires in order to follow you. Lord, show me people you are drawing to yourself for salvation and discipleship. Holy Spirit, make me sensitive to your working in my life and in the life of another for your glory. Jesus, revitalize your church as we obey your command to multiply disciples of you.

DAY 39

PURSUIT OF RENEWAL – DEPEND ON THE LORD

If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

2 CHRONICLES 7:14

MY WIFE and I love dreaming about the potential of home projects like replacing our kitchen countertops and backsplash, but once we make the plans and get the supplies, I can quickly get overwhelmed at the thought of taking the first step. I don't have any experience with these things and figuring out where to start and how to troubleshoot problems along the way can easily keep me from engaging at all.

How often is that us in the church? Over the last several weeks, we've gained a big picture of God's design for our churches and his desire for our renewal. What an incredible picture of what could be!

Our hearts long for God's vision to be reality for our churches. But where do we start?

Here's the great news: unlike DIY home projects, God provides the steps.

1. Humble yourself – Lay down your preferences and plans; prioritize God and others.
2. Pray – Rely on the Lord by crying out to him for what you need.
3. Turn and seek God – Repent of distractions and idols; listen to the Lord in his word.

REFLECT: What will you do immediately to begin to pursue personal renewal? How can your church practice these steps together?

PRAY: Father, forgive us for all the ways we have pursued things far less worthy than you. Help us to taste and see your goodness and to be totally dependent on you. May your Spirit reinvigorate our love for you and others through the power of the gospel.

DAY 40
PURSUIT FOR RENEWAL – THE JOY OF
THE LORD

...the joy of the Lord is your strength.

NEHEMIAH 8:10B

MY WIFE and I have a “Go Big or Go Home” approach to our kids’ birthday parties. She loves the hospitality and decorating, and I love creating games along whatever theme our boys have chosen. One year I decided to create an entire Super Mario level in the backyard, and as it became more elaborate and the work piled up, I was driven even more to do whatever it took to build the obstacle course. Why? Because the joy welling up inside of me at the thought of my son’s excitement gave me all the motivation and strength I needed to do the job.

Far greater, our joy in God and his love for us can strengthen us for whatever work to which he is calling us. This is why we must first seek him, remember his mercy and grace, and dwell on his delight in us. If we attempt to pursue revitalization or replanting because of

obligation or guilt, we will be crushed by the weight and never find the refreshment we long for, but if we work out of joy in the Lord, we will find strength and endurance for the road ahead.

REFLECT: How have you experienced joy supplying strength to your life or work? What lesser joys distract you from the greatest joy of knowing the Lord? What steps can you take to taste and see that the Lord is good?

PRAYER: Father, we pray as David did in Psalm 51: “Restore to [us] the joy of our salvation.” You are good, merciful, just, kind, gracious, and loving, yet that’s just the tip of the iceberg with you. May we be captivated by you and delight in you.

WEEK 6 CHALLENGE & REFLECTION
PREPARING FOR THE SUNDAY GATHERING

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:23-24

REFLECT on your 40-day journey with at least one other person and identify one specific next step you can take to continue pursuing renewal individually or as a church.

HEALTHY CHURCH TARGET

Healthy Identities

- **Worshippers** – Local churches are created as worshippers of God to reflect his character, gather to worship him together, and serve him above all else. They must be centered upon Jesus and the gospel in all they do, and they are to find their power in the Spirit.
- **Family** – Local churches are created as family with one another. The community of believers is called to sacrificially love and serve one another, bear one another's burdens, forgive one another, encourage one another, and even rebuke one another.
- **Missionaries** – Local churches are created as missionaries to the world. Every church is called to make disciples faithfully and boldly in its local context and to partner in missions efforts to make disciples of all nations.

Healthy Foundations

- Gospel – The good news about Jesus must be the center of every local church. Believing and applying the gospel is our only hope for salvation and church revitalization. Churches must never move on from the gospel but be saturated by it.
- Scripture – Scripture is the inerrant, inspired word of God. The Bible is the sufficient source for life and godliness as well as for the revitalization and replanting of churches. Thus, the faithful, clear preaching of God’s word is essential.
- Prayer – God intends to do greater works through us than Jesus did (John 14:12-14), and prayer is the primary means by which he keeps us reliant upon him and enables us to do his works in power. The Spirit empowers revitalization through prayer.

Healthy Structures

- Leadership – While every church member is a minister, God gifts the church with pastors as servant leaders who provide oversight of souls, sound preaching, godly examples, and overarching leadership and direction for the church. Also, God provides deacons as leading servants to care for the church’s unity and physical needs.
- Membership – Every believer is called to covenant with a local church through membership in order to live out the “one another” commands of the New Testament, submit to specific pastors’ leadership, and be accountable to a particular congregation as they seek to persevere together in pursuing holiness and God’s mission.

- Discipleship – From evangelizing the lost to building up the saints, churches are called to make disciples, and healthy churches will have intentional strategies and structures to involve people in discipleship no matter where they are on their spiritual journey.

PASTOR'S TOOLKIT

NO ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL SOLUTION exists for church revitalization and replanting. Every church, and its context, is unique. Yet, one component remains essential in every effort — spiritual renewal. Facilities, leadership, ministry, and a host of other issues may need to be addressed, but apart from a move of the Holy Spirit to renew the people of God through the power of the gospel, we have no hope. Every church seeking to resound in fresh ways for God's glory and the good of its community must begin by relying on the Lord to renew it spiritually and provide clarity for its future direction.

The *Renew and Resound* 40-day devotional guide has been developed by pastors and DOMs across Missouri Baptist life for the sake of cultivating spiritual renewal and providing a picture of a healthy, renewed church. The following toolkit provides pastors with optional supplements to the *Renew and Resound* 40-day guide.

- Sermon Series Plan
- Small Group Study Suggestions
- Partnership Prayer Strategy
- More Supplemental Options

Six-Week Sermon Series Plan

The following series follows the timeline of the *Renew and Resound* 40-day guide.

- The Hope of Renewal — Ephesians 1:3-6
- The Path of Renewal — Revelation 2:1-7,
focus on vss. 4-5
- The Target of Renewal: Identities — 1 Peter 2:9-12
- The Target of Renewal: Foundations — Acts 2:42-47
- The Target of Renewal: Structures — Ephesians 4:1-24
- The Pursuit of Renewal — 2 Chronicles 7:14

Twelve-Week Sermon Series Plan

The following series focuses on each aspect of the healthy church target to give more time to process the target as well as to intentionally pursue renewal. The *Renew and Resound* 40-day devotional guide could function as a part of an overall plan to pursue renewal during the series.

Foundations of Renewal

- Vision Sunday: The Hope of Renewal — Ephesians 1:3-6
- The Path of Renewal — Revelation 2:1-7,
Focus on vss. 4-5

The Target of Renewal

- Identities: Worshipers — 1 Peter 2:9-12
- Identities: Family — Ephesians 2:11-22
- Identities: Missionaries — 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 or
Matthew 28:18-20 or John 20:19-23

- Foundations: Gospel — Colossians 2:6-7
- Foundations: Scripture — 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- Foundations: Prayer — Acts 2:42-47; 4:23-31
- Structures: Leadership — 1 Peter 5:1-5
- Structures: Membership — 1 Corinthians 12:12-26
- Structures: Discipleship — 2 Timothy 2:1-7

Conclusion

- The Pursuit of Renewal — 2 Chronicles 7:14

Small Group Study: *Flickering Lamps* by Henry Blackaby

Blackaby provides a great resource that instills hope and purpose for struggling churches. The book and video series are set up well for a six-week small group study.

- Option 1: *Flickering Lamps* can serve as a great precursor to your renewal focus if you choose the six-week sermon series to coincide with the *Renew and Resound* 40-day devotional guide.
- Option 2: If you choose the 12-week sermon series, *Flickering Lamps* can serve as a community study that precedes or follows the use of the *Renew and Resound* 40-day devotional guide since both require six weeks.

Find the book and video study at: blackabystore.org/collections.

Partnership Prayer Strategy

- *Partner with One Another*: Challenge each member to partner with another to pray specifically for each other as well as the church.

- *Partner with Other Churches:* Ask at least two other churches in your association to pray for your church during this season.

More Supplemental Options to Consider

- *Host a Solemn Assembly:* Based upon the Old Testament practice, NAMB and Richard Owen Roberts have each put together resources to help lead your church in a focused gathering for confession, repentance, and reconciliation. Find them at: resoundnetwork.com/renew.
- *Invite the Church to Fast:* Whether you call the church to fast regularly throughout the process or over a specific day or two, invite it to join you in cultivating a hunger for the Lord and calling on him for renewal with specificity.
- *Celebrate Together:* Plan to wrap up your season of renewal with a special gathering to share testimonies of how God renewed individuals to encourage one another, and to thank God for how he worked in the church as a whole.

More resources are available at resoundnetwork.com/renew.

CONTRIBUTORS

Brandon Moore

Resound Network Director, MBC

The Hope, Path, and Pursuit of Renewal: Days 1-6, 39-40

Gary Mathes

Director of Missions, Clay-Platte Assn.

Healthy Identity – Worshipers: Days 8-10

Gregg Boll

Director of Missions, Blue River-KC Assn.

Healthy Identity – Family: Days 11-13

John Vernon

Director of Missions, Cape Girardeau Assn.

Healthy Identity – Missionaries: Days 15-17

Josh Boley

Pastor, FBC Chaffee

Healthy Foundation – Gospel: Days 18-20

Rob Hurtgen

Pastor, FBC Chillicothe

Healthy Foundation – Scripture: Days 22-24

Preston Thompson

Director of Missions, Heart of MO Assn.

Healthy Foundation – Prayer: Days 25-27

Jim Misloski

Developing Leaders Director, MBC

Healthy Structure – Leadership: Days 29-31

Mike Parry

Pastor, Fruitland Community Church

Healthy Structure – Membership: Days 32-34

Alan Brock

Director of Missions, Shoal Creek Assn.

Healthy Structure – Discipleship: Days 36-38

THE RESOUND NETWORK

The Hope of Our Work | Our Vision

A movement of revitalized and replanted churches resounding for God's glory.

The Heart of Our Work | Our Values

We enjoy the King, love his bride, and pursue his target.

The How of Our Work | Our Mission

Catalyze church revitalization and replanting through partnership.

The How of Our Work | Our Strategy

We equip leaders for the work of revitalization and replanting, engage churches in a process of discovery that results in customized recommendations, and encourage multiplication through partnering with other churches.

Learn how you can get involved in the movement at:
resoundnetwork.com