

# Facts & Trends

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# Revitalize

NEW LIFE FOR DYING CHURCHES

ESSENTIALS  
FOR CHURCH HEALTH

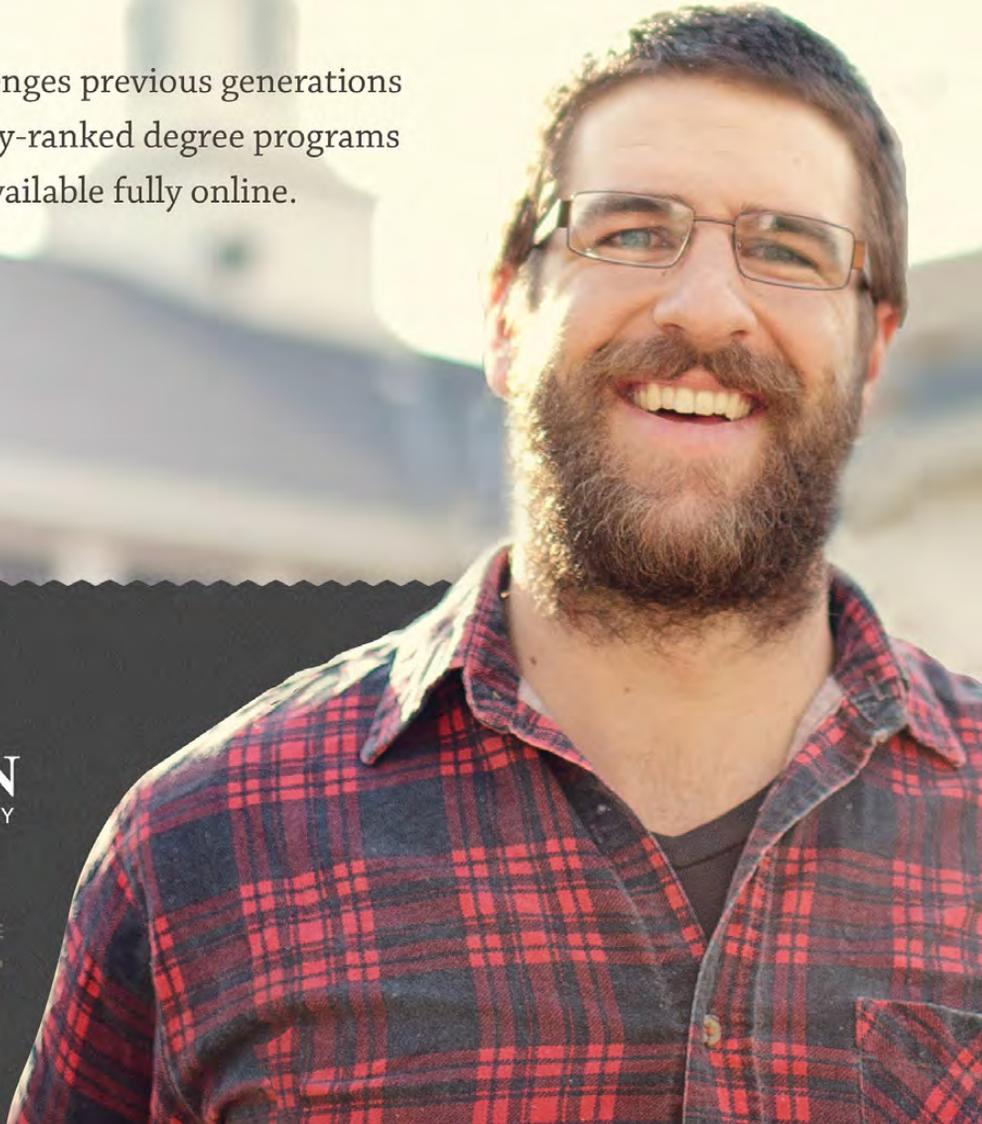
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REVITALIZATION

8 REASONS CHANGE  
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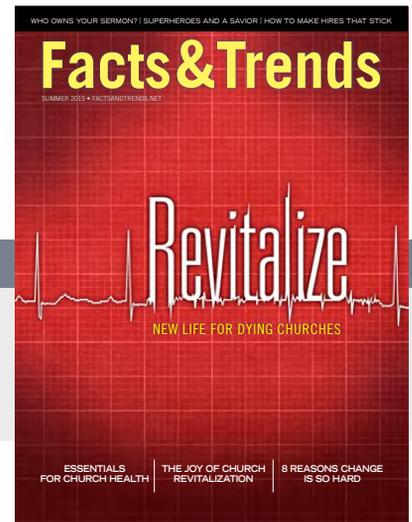
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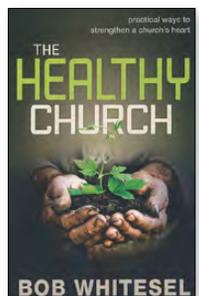
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INSIDE F&T

## Comeback churches

**I** love a good comeback story. One of my favorites is that of James J. Braddock—the Cinderella Man. As an entire nation struggled to overcome a devastating economic nosedive, this unlikely hero stepped into the role of a lifetime. A one-time contender for the light heavyweight title, Braddock hit a losing streak in 1929. Braddock's claim to fame was that he'd never been knocked out. But when the stock market crashed in 1929, Braddock seemed down for the count. He struggled to win fights and put food on the table for his family. He eventually lost his house and his savings. No longer fighting in the ring, he fought instead to keep his family together.

One day his former manager offered him the chance to stand in for the opener to the 1934 heavyweight match at Madison Square Garden. It meant fast cash and a chance to say goodbye to boxing forever. He didn't even have to win. But things didn't go as planned. Braddock won the fight. He became a symbol of hope for an entire nation fighting to pull itself out of ruin and back on its feet. And then on June 13, 1935, Braddock, a 10 to 1 underdog, won the heavyweight championship of the world. He made one of the greatest comebacks in the history of sports.

Today, churches in the United States have the opportunity to make the kind of comeback necessary to accomplish Christ's challenge to make disciples of all nations. Studies show a majority of churches are plateaued or declining in attendance. Many are on the verge of closing their doors—desperately in need of revitalization. It's easy to get discouraged by the statistics, but there is hope. Many churches once down for the count have experienced revival and a renewed sense of purpose and mission.

In our cover story, churches that were once down for the count share how they've gone from stagnation and decline to vibrant and growing congregations reaching their communities for Christ. We celebrate with those churches that have made turnarounds—that have rediscovered God's mission for the church. They remind us that comebacks are possible.

Revitalization isn't an easy road, but it's a road worth taking.

Carol Pipes, Editor

@CarolPipes | Carol.Pipes@lifeway.com

# Facts&Trends

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*Facts & Trends* is designed to help pastors, church staff, and denominational leaders navigate the issues and trends impacting the church by providing information, insights, and resources for effective ministry.

### Production Team

Editor | Carol Pipes

Managing Editor | Matt Erickson

Online Editor | Aaron Earls

Graphic Designer | Katie Shull

### LifeWay Leadership

President and Publisher | Thom S. Rainer

Executive Editor | Ed Stetzer

Senior Editor | Marty King

### Contributors

Ron Edmondson, Micah Fries, Trip Lee, Gary Locke, Paul Lopez, Jeffrey Melvin, Jay Mitchell, Gary Nicholson, Robert Noland, Bob Smietana, Charles Stone

### Advertising

Rhonda Edge Buescher, director, Media Business Development  
Tim Huffine, Marketing Sales Strategist

Send advertising questions/comments to:

One LifeWay Plaza, MSN 136,  
Nashville, TN 37234

Email: AdOptions@lifeway.com

Media kits: LifeWay.com/mediaoptions

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Contact Us: Email- FactsAndTrends@lifeway.com

Mail - *Facts & Trends*, One LifeWay Plaza,  
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# Characteristics of breakout church leaders

**L**ittle doubt exists that many churches in America are sick. The statistics paint a dismal picture. But I remain optimistic about churches across our nation because we serve a God of all possibilities. Can a dying church find life? Absolutely. But it takes leaders who are willing to do the hard work of leading their churches toward health.

While conducting research for *Breakout Churches*, a study of churches that moved from decline to significant and sustained growth, I discovered several traits that distinguish breakout church leaders from merely good leaders. Here's a brief look at each.

**Biblical faithfulness.** Breakout church leaders never stray from biblical truths or central doctrines of the Christian faith. Belief in the authority of Scripture is requisite for church leaders. But breakout leaders also passionately live out their beliefs. They are hopeful, believing all things are possible with God, including the revitalization of dying churches.

**Perseverance.** Declining churches are usually mired in unhealthy structures and traditions that cannot be reversed in a short time. Fortunately, breakout leaders have a long-term view of ministry. The average tenure of a breakout church leader exceeds 21 years, while the national average is only 3.6 years. Pastors who make it to their 5th year have a good chance of experiencing their most fruitful ministry at a church. A long-tenured pastor is one of the key requisites for churches to experience revitalization and long-term health.

**Confident humility.** Breakout church leaders are often reluctant to attribute

the church's accomplishments to themselves. While they confidently believe their leadership was critical to the health of the church, their confidence centers more on what God is doing in their lives and less on their own inherent abilities.

**Acceptance of responsibility.** Weak leaders blame people and circumstances when things don't go well. Breakout church leaders accept responsibility for things that go wrong, and they see God's possibilities even in difficult situations.

**“A DISTINGUISHING MARK OF A BREAKOUT LEADER IS THE DESIRE TO SEE THE CHURCH THRIVE BEYOND THE MINISTRY OF THE CURRENT LEADERSHIP.”**

— THOM S. RAINER

**Christlike spirit.** Most pastors experience some pain, heartache, and frustration as they lead their churches. But those who are leading a church out of a downward spiral experience more than their share of discouragement. The revitalization process is difficult and invites criticism. Despite the pains and trials they experience, breakout church leaders express an intense love for the members of their congregations. They follow Jesus' model for their ministries and demonstrate an unconditional acceptance of all their members.

**Legacy focused.** A distinguishing mark of a breakout leader is the desire to see the church thrive and make a difference beyond the ministry of

the current leadership. They make decisions that will benefit the church after they are gone.

**Persistence.** Most breakout churches don't experience explosive, overnight growth. For most, the path of growth is slow, methodical, and strewn with obstacles. Because they have a long-term perspective, these pastors are willing to lead in a way the congregation can manage—one intentional step at a time.

**Outwardly focused vision.** Breakout church leaders lead their churches to look beyond the walls of the congregation. They devote time and energy to connecting with their communities. These pastors are passionate about reaching the lost and unchurched, and they consistently communicate this priority to their congregations.

Some pastors are born with gifts and characteristics that make them great leaders. But I'm convinced many of these traits can be learned and sharply honed. The process of revitalization includes more than the transformation of a church; it includes the transformation of a leader.

Though any story or report of church revitalization is encouraging, I am always particularly encouraged to hear about pastors who are moving from a sense of hopelessness in their own leadership and churches, to an attitude of hopefulness and possibilities. ■

**Thom S. Rainer** (@ThomRainer) is president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources.



# INSIGHTS

Beliefs, issues, and trends impacting our world

## Utah boasts highest weekly religious services attendance, lowest in Vermont

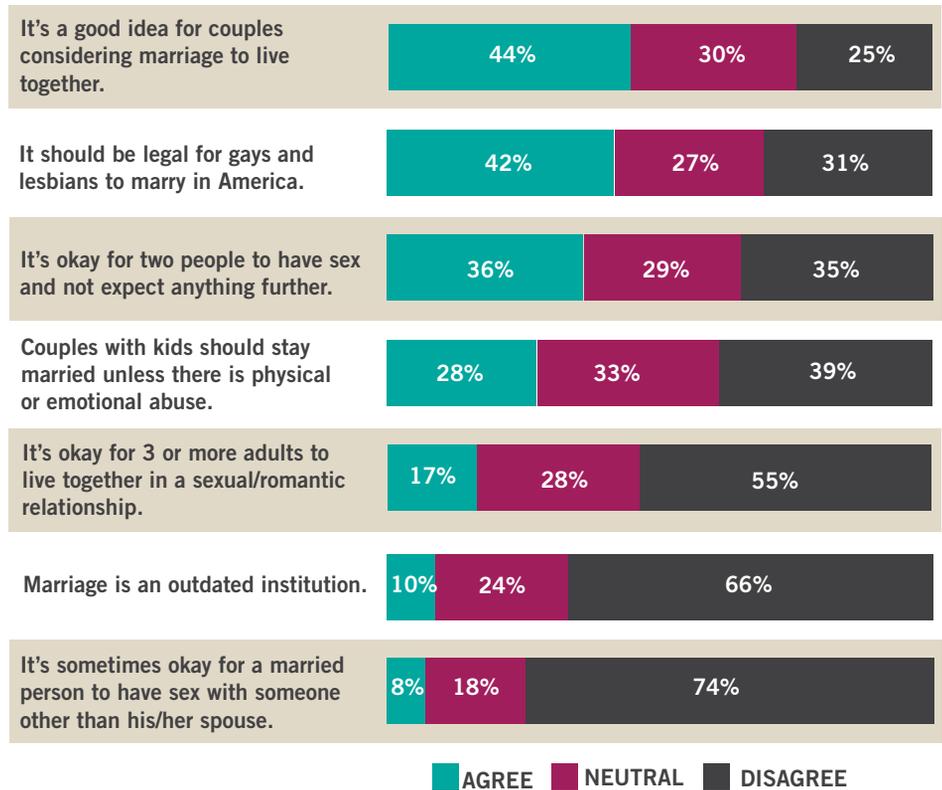
Slightly more than half of Utah residents say they attend religious services every week, more than any other state in the U.S., according to a Gallup poll. Residents in Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana and Arkansas are the next most likely to be frequent church attendees, with 45 percent to 47 percent reporting weekly attendance. At the other end of the spectrum is Vermont, where only 17 percent of residents say they attend religious services every week.

Ten of the 12 states with the highest self-reported church attendance are in the South, along with Utah and Oklahoma. The strong religious culture in the South reflects a variety of factors, including history, cultural norms, and the fact that these states have high Protestant and black populations—both of which are above average in their self-reported religious service attendance. Utah's No. 1 position on the list is a direct result of that state's 59 percent Mormon population, as Mormons have the highest religious service attendance of any major religious group in the U.S.

Source: Gallup.com

## Relationship issues

It's no surprise that what is socially acceptable has expanded in recent decades. A recent study of Americans' views on sex, relationships, and family found Americans are more supportive (or tolerant) of cohabitation, the legal recognition of same-sex unions, and no-strings-attached sex. And when it comes to divorce, Americans aren't so sure the once popular mantra "staying together for the sake of children" is sound advice for couples. Americans are less accepting of polyamorous relationships and adultery. However, what's interesting is the number of fence-sitters—those who hold neutral attitudes. Only time will tell which direction their attitudes will shift.



Source: The Austin Institute for the Study of Family and Culture (relationshipsinamerica.com)

### BY THE NUMBERS: IMMIGRATION

# 68%

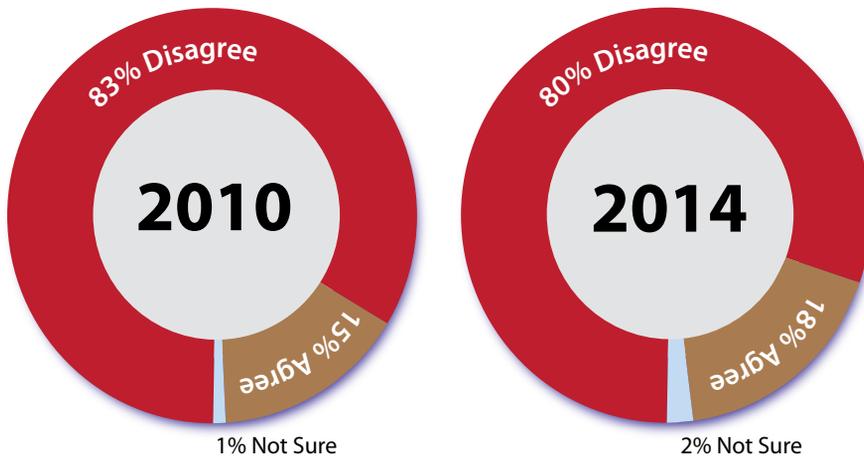
68 percent of evangelicals say they have never been encouraged by their local church to reach out to immigrants in their communities.

# 73%

73 percent of evangelicals agree the arrival of immigrants to the United States is a great opportunity to share Jesus Christ and make disciples of all nations within our own communities.

## Protestant pastors' views on gay marriage

*"I see nothing wrong with two people of the same gender getting married."*



Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Source: LifeWayResearch.com

“Entertaining is often impressing others, hospitality is about serving others. Entertaining is often about the host, hospitality is about the guest. Entertaining is often shallow and superficial, hospitality is about depth and authenticity.”

— Tony Merida, Ordinary: How to Turn the World Upside Down

## Marriage and religious freedom

A majority of Americans remain committed to the historic, biblical understanding of marriage. By wide margins, Americans believe the government shouldn't prevent them from following their beliefs about marriage in the marketplace, or force a redefinition of marriage on all 50 states by court order.



**53%** Agree marriage should only be defined as one man and one woman.

**81%** Agree people should be free to exercise marriage beliefs in the marketplace.

**61%** Agree Supreme Court shouldn't force states to redefine marriage.

Source: BPNews.net

# 53%

53 percent of evangelicals say they are very familiar with what the Bible says about how immigrants should be treated.

# 68%

68 percent of evangelicals would value hearing a sermon that taught how biblical principles and examples can be applied to immigration.

Source: LifeWayResearch.com



# INSIGHTS

*Beliefs, issues, and trends impacting our world*

## Child poverty in U.S.

In one of the wealthiest nations in the world, 1 in 5 kids live in poverty. More than 16 million children live in households with an income below the federal poverty level—about \$23,550 annually for a family of four. Another 22 percent of children live in families above the poverty level but would still be considered low-income.

More than 21.5 million children in the U.S. receive free or reduced-price meals through the National School Lunch Program during the school year. But during the summer only about 2.3 million receive assistance. Your church can help fill the gap. Contact a local food bank to see how your church can help feed kids in the summer.

*Sources: National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP.org) and FeedingAmerica.org*



Global Hunger Relief

## Most worshipers OK with segregated Sunday mornings

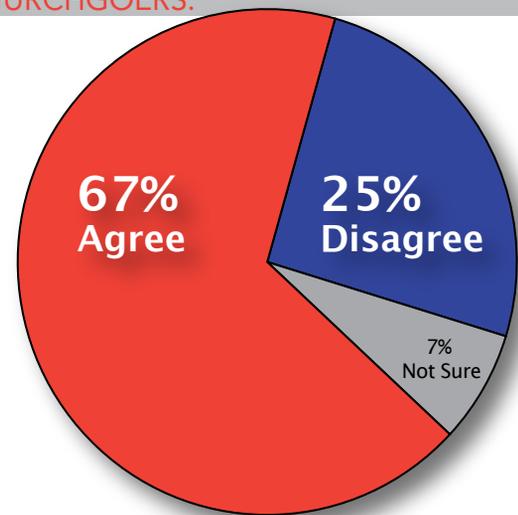
Sunday morning remains one of the most segregated hours in American life, with more than 8 in 10 congregations made up of one predominant racial group. And most worshipers think their church is fine the way it is. Two-thirds of American churchgoers (67 percent) say their church has done enough to become racially diverse. And less than half think their church should become more diverse.

Churchgoers, researchers found, are lukewarm about diversity. More than half (53 percent) disagree with the statement, “My church needs to become more ethnically diverse.” Four in 10 agree. Researchers also found churchgoers who oppose more diversity do so with gusto. A third (33 percent) strongly disagree that their church needs to be more diverse. More than 4 in 10 (42 percent) felt strongly their church was doing enough.

## CHURCH SEGREGATION

VIEWS AMONG CHURCHGOERS:

“Our church is doing enough to be ethnically diverse.”



*Source: LifeWayResearch.com*

## BY THE NUMBERS: SHARIA LAW

# 37%

37 percent say they are worried about Sharia law—an Islamic legal and moral code—being applied in America.

The percentage who agree among the following:

Women: 42% Agree

Men: 33% Agree

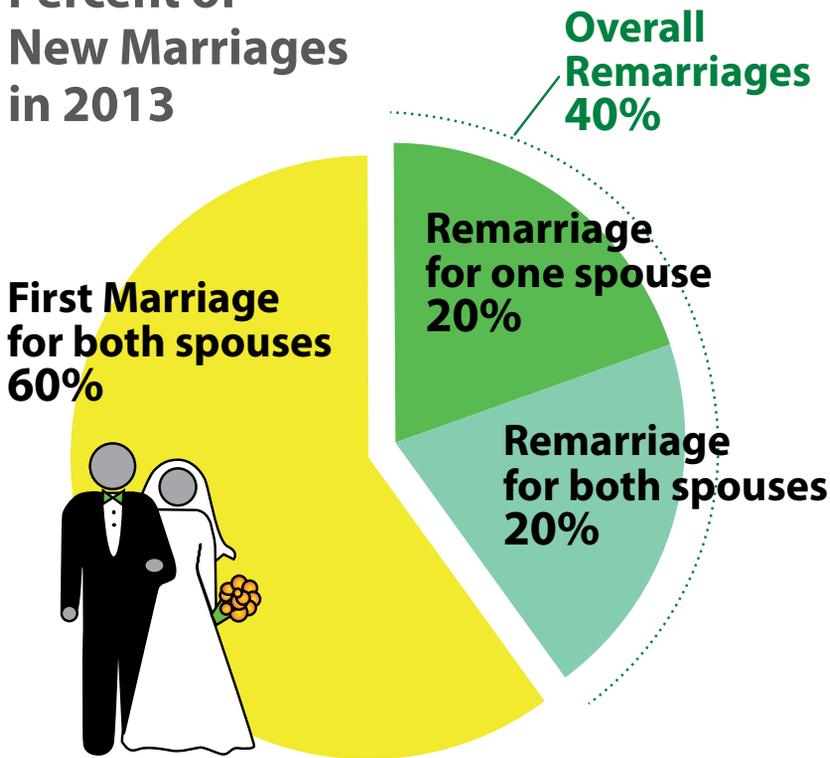
Age 45 and older: 47% Agree

Age 18-44: 27% Agree

## “I do,” again

A growing number of American adults have remarried, according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau. Almost 42 million adults have been married more than once, up from 22 million in 1980. That’s triple the number since 1960, when there were 14 million.

### Percent of New Marriages in 2013



Note: “New marriages” began in past 12 months. Based on couples, not individuals, where at least one spouse is age 18 or older.

Source: [PewResearch.org](http://PewResearch.org)



Lightstock

## U.S. satisfaction with religion settling at lower levels

A slight majority of Americans, 53 percent, are satisfied with the influence of organized religion in the U.S. This has changed little over the past three years, but is down from higher levels of satisfaction measured in 2001 to 2004. Nearly two-thirds of Americans (64 percent) were satisfied with the influence of religion when they were first asked this question in January 2001, exactly eight months before the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Satisfaction rose to its high point of 69 percent a year later, then dropped below 60 percent the following years. Although Americans’ satisfaction with religious influence has fluctuated some from year to year, the basic pattern has been generally stable since 2005, with slightly lower levels of satisfaction recorded over the past three years.

Source: [Gallup.com](http://Gallup.com)

# 43%

43 percent of Americans say that “true Islam” creates a peaceful society.

The percentage who agree among the following:

All Pastors: 30% Agree

Mainline Pastors: 42% Agree

Evangelical Pastors: 23% Agree

Source: [LifeWayResearch.com](http://LifeWayResearch.com)



# INSIGHTS

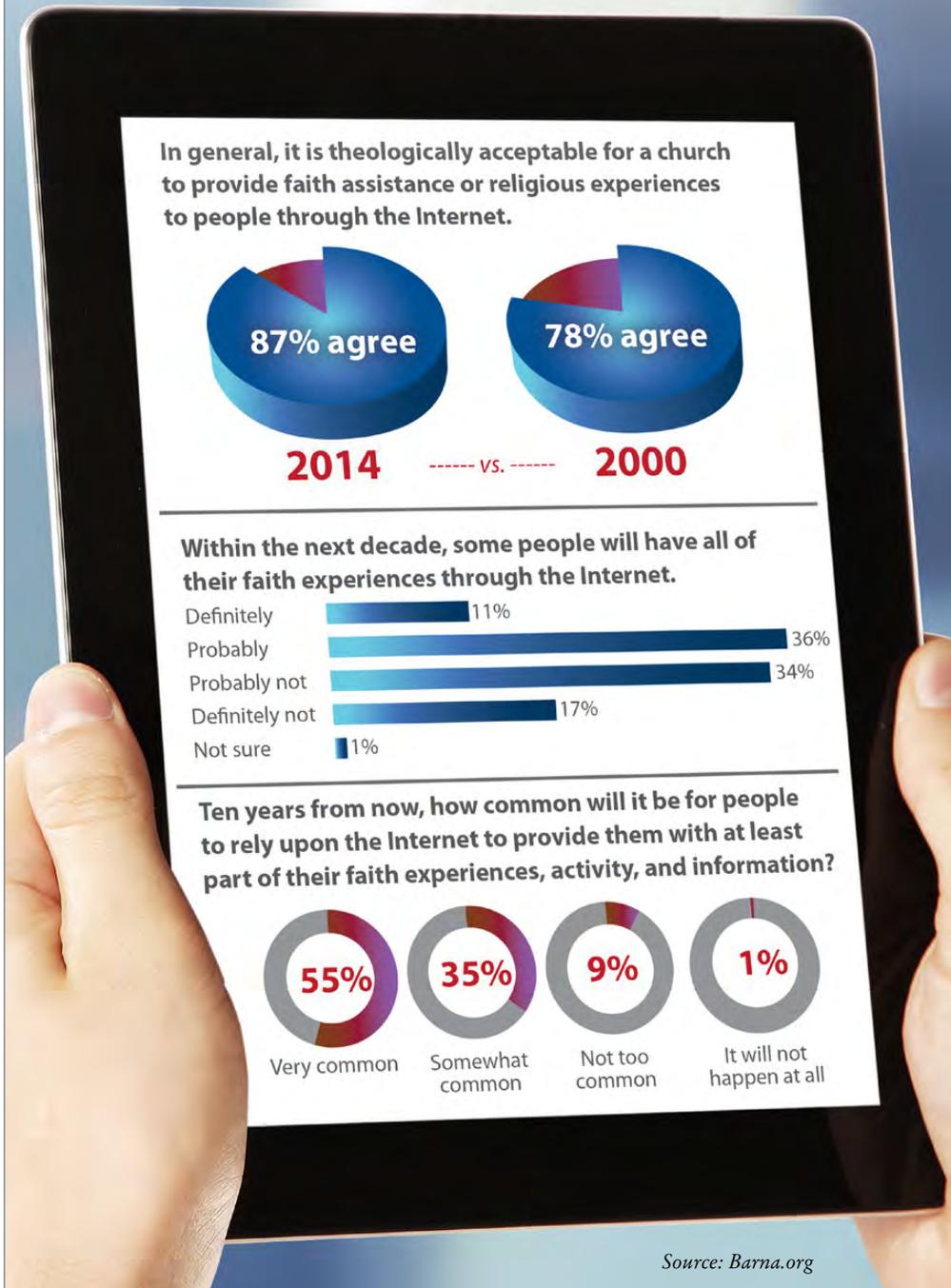
*Beliefs, issues, and trends impacting our world*

## Cyber church

A majority of pastors see the Internet as a useful tool for doing ministry and are increasingly open to people experiencing religion online. Today, 87 percent of pastors say they believe it is theologically acceptable for a church to provide faith assistance or religious experiences to people through the Internet, up from 78 percent in 2000. A majority of pastors believe 10 years from now it will be common for people to rely on the Internet for at least part of their faith experiences, activity, and information. And 47 percent say within the next decade some people will go online for all of their faith experiences.

**“Online church has the potential to become a massive front door for the curious, the unconvinced, and for those who want to know what Christianity is all about.”**

— Carey Nieuwhof, the pastor of Connexus Church north of Toronto Canada



Source: Barna.org

## Persecution of Christians reached record high in 2014.

Open Doors USA released its 2015 World Watch List, ranking the top 50 countries where Christians face the worst persecution. North Korea topped the list for the 13th year in a row, while persecution continued to grow in places like Africa and the Middle East. Open Doors president David Curry said 2014 had the highest level of global persecution of Christians in the modern era, and it appears things are getting worse. He estimates more than 100 million Christians worldwide are currently suffering persecution.

### Top 10 places where Christians are persecuted:

1. North Korea
2. Somalia
3. Iraq
4. Syria
5. Afghanistan
6. Sudan
7. Iran
8. Pakistan
9. Eritrea
10. Nigeria

Source: [OpenDoorsUSA.org](http://OpenDoorsUSA.org)

“Christians are the No. 1 enemy of the state in North Korea.”

— David Curry at [OpenDoorsUSA.org](http://OpenDoorsUSA.org)

## Persecution & Population

Megacities with a projected population of more than 10 million by year 2030.

Cities in all caps are expected surpass 10 million by 2030. Cities not in all caps are already at or above 10 million people.



Combining Open Doors' persecution map and one designating the world's megacities shows the stark reality for Christians worldwide. In most of the world's largest population centers, Christians are under threat of violence.



# CHURCH Revitalization



# NEW LIFE FOR DYING CHURCHES

By Bob Smietana

**F**or years, Galilee Baptist Church was a vibrant evangelical presence on Chicago's North Side. The 500-member strong congregation had one of the largest Sunday schools in the city and a thriving missionary program overseas.

Then, a little at a time, the church slowly declined. New people stopped showing up. Old members died off or moved away.

By the late 1990s, Galilee was a church full of empty pews, with a handful of people hanging on.

"We tried to reach the neighborhood," says longtime member Chuck McWherter, "and we just couldn't do it."

But then the church merged in 2000 with New Life Community Church, a multisite congregation that specializes in church restarts, and the people started coming back.

Today, about 200 people worship at the church on Sundays, including young families and a stream of visitors. The music is different—an eclectic mix of guitar, drum, and cello that McWherter describes as "lively"—and the name has changed, to New Life West Lakeview. But the mission remains the same.

McWherter spends Sundays as a greeter, shaking hands with newcomers. It's the best job in the world, he says.

"I am thrilled to see what God is doing," says McWherter.

New Life West Lakeview is one of a small but growing number of churches around the country that have experienced new life after years of decline. Some are joining up with church plants or with larger congregations. Some have found new life after rediscovering the stories of past ministry. Others have been jump-started by denominational revitalization programs.

All, says Mark Jobe, senior pastor of New Life, have discovered that God loves to breathe new life into old things.

"God has a fondness for restoring things He has used in the past," says Jobe.

## FINDING NEW LIFE

Jobe didn't always feel that way. Although he'd

helped New Life grow from a small, struggling congregation into a megachurch, Jobe was skeptical about the future of struggling churches.

"I always said I didn't want to get into the politics of an old church," Jobe says.

But seeing the relaunch of New Life West Lakeview changed his mind. He began to believe God could do something new in the life of that congregation.

Still, restarting the church wasn't easy. Along with a new name and different music, the church also hired a new pastor and adopted a new culture.

"If you have 25 older people and one young pastor, you haven't changed the culture," says Jobe. So New Life sent out a core of 30 people who joined the two dozen or so Galilee members when the church relaunched.

That created a new culture for the congregation and added some momentum to the relaunch. New Life West Lakeview is still going strong 15 years after the relaunch.

Where once they were cut off from the community, now church members volunteer at a local school. In the summer, they hand out free popcorn during outdoor movie nights at nearby Hamlin Park.

"We're a neighborhood church," says McWherter. "That's all we ever wanted to be."

## REMEMBER THE MISSION

Leading a congregation to embrace a new vision and new culture isn't easy, says Bob Whitesel, professor of Christian ministry and missional leadership at Wesley Seminary at Indiana Wesleyan University.

Whitesel, who often consults with struggling congregations, says many declining churches often focus on survival, rather than mission.

"If a church is simply trying to survive," he says, "newcomers can tell. They will flee. We have to get the mission right."

Getting the mission right starts with regaining a sense of urgency about the gospel.

When he meets with churches, Whitesel reminds them to worry first about the spiritual needs of their neighbors, who are often far from God and in

need of the good news Jesus offers.

Whitesel also recommends pastors in struggling churches try to find as many allies as possible. Those allies should include gatekeepers in the congregation who oppose changes, as well as those who want to make changes. And these influential people should be empowered to help shape the church's future.

"Often pastors get ahead of this," says Whitesel. "They create vision and want people to follow. But other leaders in the church are smart people too—they are used to making decisions."

Along the way, he says churches should look for short-term wins—small signs the church is making some progress. For some churches, a win has come when someone is baptized, or when a few young families show up, or an outreach project is a success.

"People need to see this new direction is working," Whitesel says.

For New Community Church in Mesquite,

Texas, one of their first small wins came when the church started a community outreach called "FamFest." Church members and other volunteers handed out backpacks for schoolkids, gave haircuts, conducted health screenings, and hosted a meal for low-income neighbors.

The event was a boon for families in Mesquite, a formerly well-off suburb that had struggled for a number of years. It also helped the church reconnect with their community.

As new people came to church, some gave their lives to Christ and were baptized. That, too, gave the church, which had shrunk to about two dozen people, hope for their future.

Bill Henard, author of *Can These Bones Live?*, cautions pastors that new methodologies or programs don't guarantee success. "Healthy churches are ones that experience growth through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's presence



Above: The revitalization process has helped First Covenant Church in Everett, Washington, see their community as a mission field. Photo by Paul Lopez



and movement are evident, not only in the preaching, but in the lives of the people.”

## WE HAVE DONE THIS BEFORE

John Wenrich, director of congregational vitality for the Evangelical Covenant Church, says churches often find hope for the future by looking to the past. He recommends churches practice “narrative archeology,” by digging through their archives to see how God worked in their past.

“There are radical, life-giving stories locked up in your church archives,” he says.

At First Covenant Church in Everett, Washington, pastor Jason Mohn discovered the congregation of about 100 people had a long history of innovation.

Founded in 1903, First Covenant has recently been working their way through their denomination’s congregational vitality program. As part of that process, the church called Mohn as their pastor in 2011.

Early on, he visited longtime members of the church and explored the church’s archives. There he discovered a number of times the church had made big changes in order to become more effective in ministry.

In the 1930s, for instance, the church, which was founded by Swedish immigrants, began holding services in English for the first time. Around the same time, the church’s young people started a Sunday night radio program that ran for 14 years.

At the time, radio was the latest in modern technology, says Mohn.

Now, if he hears the familiar phrase, “We’ve never done this before,” Mohn has an answer from the church’s past.

“We have done this before,” he says. “We can do it again.”

First Covenant has also been inspired by its connection to missions. In the past, missionaries have visited the

church to report back their work.

Now those missionaries give feedback on how the church is doing in reaching its own backyard.

“What we have woken up to is that we have missionary work to do here in Everett,” says Mohn.

## ROAD TO RECOVERY

There is a real need in today’s landscape for healthy and vibrant churches. Years ago the church was the social hub of most communities. Today, that is no longer the case. Many churches have either stalled out or are in decline.

Whitesel says pastors have a vital role to play in revitalizing churches. They can provide vision for the future and inspire people in the pew to reach out to their neighbors.

But church members must help drive the revitalization process because the average churchgoer will still be in a church long after the pastor is gone.

Whitesel encourages pastors and lay people alike to find a Bible story—like the story of Joshua and the people of Israel entering the Promised Land—that the congregation can rally around during a revitalization process. And he reminds churches to keep an eye on what God is doing in their midst.

“God is writing a new chapter for your church,” he says. “Tell that story.” ■

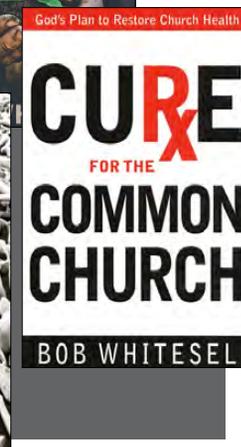
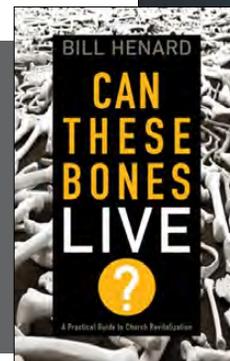
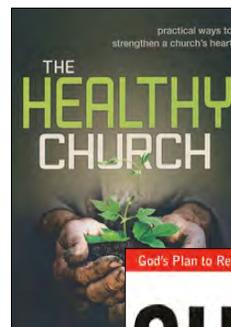
**BOB SMIETANA (@BobSmietana)** is former senior writer for Facts & Trends.

## DIG DEEPER

- *The Healthy Church* by Bob Whitesel
- *Cure for the Common Church* by Bob Whitesel
- *Can These Bones Live?* (June 2015) by Bill Henard

**“God is writing a new chapter for your church. Tell that story.”**

— *Bob Whitesel*



## The joy of church

# REVITALIZ

*By Ron Edmondson*

**W**hen someone from the search committee at Immanuel Baptist Church in Lexington, Kentucky, first approached me about being their pastor, I resisted. Cheryl and I begged God not to bring us here.

The 100-year-old church had recently gone through a couple of very hard years. Attendance had declined considerably. There were financial concerns. On top of all that, the expectation of some members was that I would wear a tie and be at every hospital bed. That was totally different from my previous experience in ministry.

I came into vocational ministry later in life. For many years, I resisted what others (including my wife) saw in my life. I felt my calling was to make money to support the church, not lead a church as a pastor.

After entering ministry, I was a part of two successful church plants. Church planting suited my entrepreneurial spirit well. I love the excitement of starting something new.

I never imagined taking what many considered a step backward in my career to serve in an established church. I'm a doer. I like progress. I like action and change. I'm not afraid to push the boundaries. Those qualities don't always fit well in some established churches.

Still, I love Genesis 6:22: "Noah did everything just as the Lord commanded him."

When I surrendered to ministry I told God that would be me. I would be obedient. And obedience, by definition, is never partial. As God made it clear that coming to Immanuel was our next assignment, ever so reluctantly, we surrendered to His call.



# ATION



*Photo of Immanuel Church, Lexington, Kentucky. Provided by Ron Edmondson.*

## 7 principles for church revitalization

**Don't hijack the church.** You can change a church without taking away its DNA. That means you may not be able to make every change you want to make. And you may move slower than you want to at times. But the general culture of the church—at least the one that has lasted for generations—should not be on the table. For example, if the church has a history of loving big events, don't kill all of them—find a way to make them work for kingdom growth. (If the culture is destructive to the future vitality of the church, then it needs to be changed.)

**Rediscover more than you reinvent.** Help the church rediscover the heartbeat of the times people loved—when things were healthy, lives were changing, and kingdom growth was occurring. Build momentum as you celebrate the emotions and passions from the good days of their heritage. Lead people to rediscover the joy they once had for the mission.

**It will take longer than you think it will.** To members of the church, it might feel like you're changing at a rocket's pace, but to you it will feel like you're moving at a snail's pace. In church planting, you can change in a week. That's usually not the case in revitalization. Take time to bring people along who have invested years in building the church. Over time, when trust is developed, it will get easier, and you'll be able to move more quickly.

**Celebrate the history while shaping the future.** Don't think everything old is bad. It's not. It's what has helped the church survive as long as it has. It may not be working as well right now, and there will likely need to be changes, but some of the old things were and still are good things in principle. Recognize that, acknowledge it, and people will be more likely to go along with the new changes you're proposing.

**Recognize the sense of loss in change.** It's the number one reason change is resisted. Don't ignore or underestimate how difficult change is for some people. Be humble, considerate, and compassionate. That doesn't mean don't change. It does mean don't change assuming it's "no big deal." It is.

**Don't let a few critics determine your self-worth.** Make no mistake about it, you'll have critics. You'll be making changes that impact people (as all changes do)—people who have been at the church for years. You know the changes are needed. They may even realize the changes are needed. But there will be resistance. And there will be angry people. And when people are angry, they say and do things they may not do otherwise. But, if God called you to it, you can be assured there are usually more supporters than detractors, even if the detractors seem more vocal.

**Love the people even when you don't love everything about the church.** You may not like some of the structures of the church or the process you have to go through to make changes. But you must love the people. Loving the people will help you lead the transitions you need to make. Years ago, God convicted me that if I focus most on loving Him, loving people in any church, any city, or any setting will be much easier for me. ■

Cheryl and I know now that God knew what He was doing. Had we not been obedient to this call, we would have missed some of the most rewarding days in ministry and in life.

We have seen a declining church come alive and grow again. We have seen young families come back to the church. We have seen older members serve in new ways. We know what it's like to see an intergenerational church thrive. We have witnessed the difference an established church can make in a community when it fully embraces its mission. But it hasn't been easy.

Church revitalization is harder work than we experienced in church planting—and church planting is hard. Immanuel is one of the friendliest churches we've ever experienced, but there have been days when I seem to have more critics than supporters. Navigating change is never easy.

I'm often asked what I've learned in the revitalization process. There are so many things, but the one that sticks out to me most is this: Don't reinvent. Rediscover.

I've found people are less resistant to change when it doesn't take away their identity. Every church has a history and a heritage in which it is proud. There were once monumental leaps of faith to start the church. And there have been special days and seasons when the church especially saw God at work. The church has had to overcome challenges, but has survived them. Part of church revitalization is to rediscover those parts of the church's history and use them to rekindle the momentum to grow again.

Shortly after I arrived at Immanuel, I spent considerable time in our history room and talking to those who knew the church's history. I learned a couple facts that proved to be monumental building blocks. First, the church sat idle for several years during World



War I. It held no services at all until a group decided to reenergize the church. Second, the church was a pioneer in television. Immanuel was one of the first churches in the state to launch this still vital ministry.

I have been able to use this information to better connect with the church and encourage new innovation. I can encourage people that Immanuel is an overcoming church, not afraid to lead into uncharted territory in following the leading of God. Everything may not look the same, but we have stayed true to the core DNA of Immanuel.

We're rediscovering what it means to be Immanuel—a church that after 105 years is still alive, vibrant, growing, and obedient. And we're leading the church to survive and

thrive through its next 100 years. Sure there have been a few bumps along the way, but God has shown up time and time again.

Bringing new life to a struggling church doesn't always conjure images of excitement, clarity, or joy. But seeing a church turn around to become a healthy, growing community is rewarding in so many ways. We have seen God do some amazing things in our church the last three years. I'm humbled and honored to be a part of its history, and look forward to our future, celebrating what I believe could be the best years yet to come. ■

**RON EDMONDSON (@RonEdmondson)** is a pastor at Immanuel Baptist Church and church growth expert in Lexington, Kentucky. Learn more from Ron about church revitalization at [RonEdmondson.com](http://RonEdmondson.com).

**“Don't reinvent.  
Rediscover.”**

— Ron Edmondson



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# Say A-h-h-h

## How to assess your church's well-being

By Micah Fries

*The road to church health may be a matter of asking the right questions.*

**S**cared to death. That's how I felt sitting in a small office in Burkina Faso, West Africa, where my wife and I were serving as new missionaries.

I hadn't felt well for a few weeks, but had put off going to the doctor. We lived out in the bush—so a simple checkup meant a five-hour drive to the nearest doctor.

Finally, during a trip to the capital city, I stopped by a doctor's office. I ran through my symptoms—a slight fever each day for the last three weeks; zero energy; and I was sleeping a lot. He ran some blood tests.

The diagnosis: Malaria. And not just any Malaria, but the most dangerous strain.

The doctor told me I was fortunate to be alive. The only remedy was to treat my condition immediately and aggressively.

If it weren't for that doctor's visit and diagnosis, who knows what would have happened to me.

Unfortunately, many churches in the United States are facing the same predicament I faced in that doctor's office. They've been sick for a while, but have put off doing anything to address their illness.

But what seemed like nominal pain and marginal problems are in

“Not only do churches struggle with appropriate assessments, churches are also often weak at celebrating what God is doing in their midst.”

— Micah Fries

fact, signs of a life-threatening condition. Churches often face problems that are much deeper and much more systemic than they realize or want to admit.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF ASSESSMENT

Like the doctor and medical exam that pointed me to the right diagnosis and treatment, the church today needs an evaluation and an appropriate plan of action.

Church leaders are masters of measurements—attendance, baptisms, finances, and more. But sick churches can occasionally score well on these assessments. What’s more, none of these assessments do anything to help assess the one thing Jesus commanded us to do—make disciples. Church leaders need a different scorecard for that.

The Transformational Church Assessment Tool (TCAT) takes a comprehensive look at a church’s structures and systems, indentifying not only weaknesses, but also clarifying strengths.

### ESSENTIALS FOR TRUE CHURCH HEALTH

While this new scorecard measures the tangible—leadership training, worship attendance, and group Bible study attendance—it also measures some of the intangible elements of church life.

The TCAT helps churches honestly evaluate how their members perceive they are doing in relation to spiritual transformation. The results provide them with a snapshot of perceived strengths and perceived challenges based on the seven elements of a healthy, transformational church:

**Missionary mentality.** Transformational churches understand the cultural context surrounding the

church. And they strive for everything they do to be in the language and culture of the people they are trying to reach. Transformational churches know, understand, and are deeply engaged with their cities, communities, and people. Are your church members passionate about the people and community where God has placed them?

**Vibrant leadership.** Transformational leaders are focused on the mission of God for their church, are tenacious about the vision, and are people focused. Vibrant leaders lead their people to worship, live in community, and live on mission. They promote a culture of we instead of me. They expect, encourage, equip, and empower members to serve.

**Relational intentionality.** People find and follow Jesus through relationships. Transformational churches use systems and processes designed to provide and promote relationship development—for first time guests, new members, and long-term members.

**Prayerful dependence.** In transformational churches, spontaneous prayer is normal in the life of the church. Prayer is not a program, yet it undergirds everything the church does. Prayer has always held a significant role in the church, and this is especially true in times of revitalization. Is it normal to see people praying together at your church?

**Worship.** Transformational churches place worship at the center of their efforts. They know worship is a way of living, not an aspect of church programming. They expect God’s presence to be real and transformative in their worship experience. Do your worship leaders value participation over performance?

**Community.** Transformational churches place a premium on involving

#### ACTION ITEM:

Visit [tcat.lifeway.com](http://tcat.lifeway.com) to find out more about assessing your church’s health.



people in small group communities within the congregation. They place heavy emphasis on getting new members immediately involved in Sunday School classes, small groups, or discipleship classes. Does your church have groups where nonbelievers feel comfortable asking hard questions and where believers can find encouragement?

**Mission.** Transformational churches have consciously decided that their existence is directly related to the mission of seeing people reconciled to God through Christ. Evangelism is a natural part of life for their members. Does your church challenge members to build significant relationships with people who are non-Christian? Does your church provide service opportunities for your people to be engaged with the unchurched in your local city or community?

### CELEBRATE AND CALIBRATE

Not only do churches struggle with appropriate assessments, they're often weak at celebrating what God is doing in their midst.

I recently consulted with a church that took the TCAT. I helped the leaders see how they could take their top two scores and celebrate what God is doing. This encourages the church and strengthens belief in the direction of the leaders, as well as recognizes God's work among them.

I then showed them how they could turn their bottom two areas into strategic goals for the coming year. After a year of focusing on those areas of weakness, they'll find they've made progress making disciples, in substantive and measurable ways.

A church that takes seriously Christ's command to be and make disciples, and that invests in the necessary tools to evaluate its effectiveness, is far more likely to be a church where people are experiencing the gospel and where

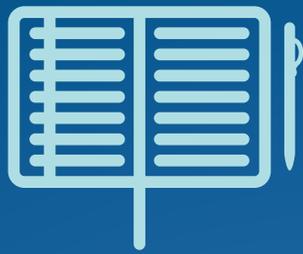
lives are being changed. Churches that don't take this seriously are more likely to find themselves lying on the proverbial hospital bed, struggling to survive, and wondering if the doctor's diagnosis has come too late.

Don't let that happen to your church. Take seriously the call to assess your church's health and effectiveness as you make disciples, and watch God help your church thrive. ■

**MICAH FRIES (@MicahFries)** is director of ministry development for LifeWay.

## 5 questions to assess your church's health

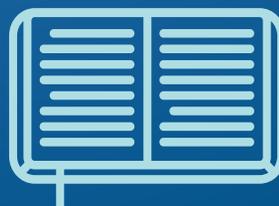
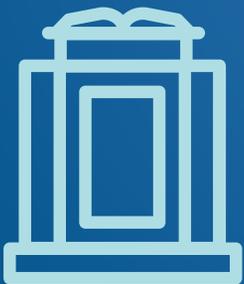
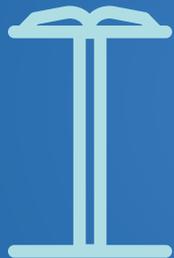
- 1. Is the ratio of worship attenders to conversions/baptisms growing or declining?** If the ratio of worship attenders to conversions/baptisms is growing higher, your church may be unhealthy.
- 2. Is the percentage of worship attenders who also attend Sunday School/Small Groups growing or declining?** In a healthy church, an increasingly higher percentage of worship attenders will be seeking community through your Sunday School/Small Group ministry.
- 3. Do you have a clearly defined disciple-making strategy? And is the average worship attender familiar enough with the strategy to repeat it, if asked?** Unhealthy churches lack clarity about their discipleship pathway, and the attenders in their church will struggle to identify it.
- 4. Are you multiplying leadership?** Unhealthy churches rest on the backs of one leader or a small group of leaders. Healthy churches multiply leaders and hand off leadership.
- 5. Have you become an internally focused church?** People are like cars out of alignment. Left to ourselves, we turn inward. Healthy churches intentionally point their people outside the church, to the lost.



# Who owns a pastor's sermon?

The answer may not be clear-cut

*By Bob Smeitana*



**T**here's a long history of pastors turning their sermons into books. Charles Spurgeon did it. So did Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, Dwight Moody and Charles Wesley, and a host of pastors since.

All hoped to get their message out of the church and into the world. Most made a bit of extra income along the way.

"They made money on books—but it was certainly not lifestyle changing money," says Alan Phillips, associate general counsel for LifeWay Christian Resources. "That's not the case now."

The success of sermon-inspired books like *The Purpose Driven Life*—which sold more than 30 million copies—has turned sermons into potentially valuable commodities, says Philips.

That may be good for the publishing business and authors, but it raises a complex and sometimes uncomfortable legal question: Who owns a pastor's sermon?

In the United States, that question is complicated by a section of the 1976 copyright law that deals with "work for hire."

According to the copyright act, work for hire is defined as "a work prepared by an employee within the scope of his or her employment."

That section of the law applies to newspaper reporters and writers at ad agencies, or curriculum writers for publishers like LifeWay. The copyright to their work belongs to the company that hired them.

A growing number of legal experts believe the "work-for-hire" rule also applies to a pastor's sermons.

If writing sermons is part of a pastor's job description, and they write the sermons while at the church

office, then the copyright act likely applies, argues Richard Hammar, author of the *Essential Guide to Copyright Law for Churches*.

"Most clergy would be shocked to learn their sermons are works made for hire that are owned by their employing church," Hammar writes.

In at least one high-profile case, a dispute over who owns the rights to a pastor's sermons ended up in court. After leaving the Crystal Cathedral, Robert Schuller sued the church for \$5 million for—among other things—the use of his past sermons. A bankruptcy court eventually awarded \$600,000 to Schuller, according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

And it's not only the pastor's sermons that are affected by copyright. If a church's music director or worship leader writes a song or new hymn as part of their job duties, that too may be considered work for hire.

Any books written by church staff also may be covered by the copyright act, if the writing was done as part of their job duties.

According to section 201(b) of the copyright law, all work for hire belongs to the employer "unless the parties have expressly agreed otherwise in a written instrument signed by them."

Not all legal experts agree sermons are work for hire.

Some argue that pastors are hired to teach and give spiritual guidance to their churches, not to write sermon manuscripts. And many pastors preach from notes, so there's no written sermon to copyright.

And what happens when a pastor changes churches or preaches the same sermon in more than one place? Do they need to get copyright permission from the church in those cases?

"Most clergy would be shocked to learn their sermons are works made for hire that are owned by their employing church."

— Richard Hammar

“The best way to deal with the issue of sermon copyrights is to address them ahead of time. The longer you wait, the more expensive it gets.”

— Frank Sommerville

Advocates for pastors owning their own sermons point to the example of university professors. Most colleges have written policies allowing professors to hold the copyright to their lecture notes and books based off of their research and teaching, according to the American Association of University professors.

The issue of copyrights for sermons is rarely raised until a pastor becomes famous and the sermons become valuable property. That’s when things can get ugly, says Frank Sommerville, a Dallas-based attorney who specializes in copyright law.

The best way to deal with the issue of sermon copyrights, Sommerville advises, is to address them ahead of time.

“This is not a problem that gets easier to solve if you ignore it,” he says. “The longer you wait, the more expensive it gets.”

## GETTING IT RIGHT

There are several options available to church leaders when it comes to copyrights.

### Assign all copyrights to the church.

A church can adopt what’s known as an “intellectual property” policy, which covers sermons or other written materials developed by church staff while on the job. The

policy can make it clear those materials are work for hire and belong to the church. In some cases, congregations have given pastors or church staff a bonus if their work is published outside the church.

**Assign all copyrights to pastors.** A church can draft a written agreement that specifically assigns all copyrights of sermons to a pastor. This approach is similar to the one taken by colleges, which often allow professors to retain the copyright of their lecture notes.

**Have pastors write their sermons at home.** In this approach, pastors do all their writing on their personal computer, using their own software, in their spare time. If no church resources are used, then it is more likely the copyright belongs to the pastor. This approach can be used for church staff as well.

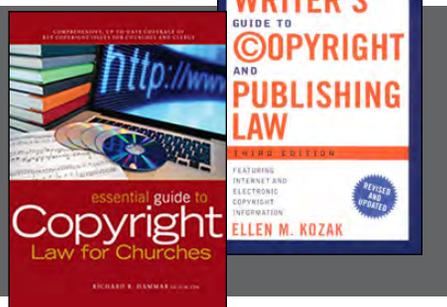
**Give the copyright to a separate, nonprofit ministry.** Pastors who have outside speaking engagements or who write books often set up a nonprofit ministry to handle income or copyrights. This approach is used by a number of well-known authors, such as Chuck Swindoll and Max Lucado. The issue of sermon copyrights is often raised by publishing houses and is a standard question at B&H Publishing, says Alan Phillips. He’s developed a form to help pastors assign sermon copyrights to a nonprofit ministry, if that’s the route they choose.

When it comes to copyrights, he says, publishers want to make sure they’re doing business with the right person. “We want to pay whoever holds the copyright.” ■

**BOB SMJETANA** is former senior writer for Facts & Trends.

## DIG DEEPER

- *Essential Guide to Copyright Law for Churches* by Richard Hammer (Your Church Resources)
- *Every Writer’s Guide to Copyright Law* by Ellen Kozak (Henry Holt and Company)





## How Can I Help You Today?

By Jeffrey Melvin

**M**any churches have ideal signage, a flashy website, ample volunteers, and matching lanyards, but they are forgetting the one key component in creating a lasting first impression with visitors. *Paying attention to the people who walk through the door.*

The key component to creating an attractive and inviting culture is to meet the needs of people. They are the ones who decide whether or not to return.

People decide if they feel welcome and loved. People decide if their needs have been met when they leave.

It is all about people. Signage, free coffee, and comfortable environments are important, but they can only do so much. You have to take the time and energy to meet the needs of the people coming to your church.

A few weeks ago, I had a family approach me in the lobby in between services. For anyone who oversees the First Impressions or greeter ministry in your church, you know this is usually the busiest time of the day.

I sped past this family and gave them my fake “Welcome, but I’m really busy smile” and kept going. Ironically, the lanyard I was so proudly wearing that day said, “How Can I Help You Today?”

At that moment, I felt God was telling me to go back and talk to them. I wrestled with God internally. I tried to convince Him I had a lot to get done within the next three minutes before we opened the doors for the service.

But God didn’t seem to care what I had to say in that moment.

I turned around, walked over to the family, and introduced myself. They had a lonely and helpless look in their eyes. I leaned in close and asked if I

could help them with anything.

The grandmother said, “We’re hungry and we were just checking to see if you had any food.” As my heart dropped into my stomach, I can imagine God saying, “Next time *please* pay more attention.”

We were able to give them two boxes of food from our food pantry and offered to hold on to it while they went into the service. They didn’t take us up on our offer. Instead, they took their food and left. But here is the best part: they have been back several times since and have heard a clear presentation of the gospel.

That family did not need signage, flashy nametag stations, or any of the typical things we tend to focus on. They simply needed food.

What are you doing in your ministry to meet the needs of people? How are you coaching your teams to be on the lookout for ways to engage and connect with everyone who walks in your front door? Remind them weekly that making a lasting first impression always begins with meeting the needs of *people*. ■

**JEFFREY MELVIN (@JeffMelvin123)** is First Impressions pastor at Mountain Lake Church in Cumming, Georgia.



# BRAIN BARRIERS



# 8 reasons church change is so difficult

by Charles Stone

**H**ealthy change is essential for any church or ministry to thrive. Lasting change requires individuals to change first before an organization will change. The changes won't last or will disrupt your church unless those on your team personally embrace them, at least at some level. So it's vital we understand why most people initially resist change.

Brain insight helps us understand the hidden processes around which we can design our change initiatives. Being aware of how the brain responds to change can help you craft lasting change and overcome barriers that stifle healthy change.

Here are eight reasons why change is hard:

- 1. People naturally assume the worst.** Our brain is wired to pick up threats. Two-thirds of the brain cells in the flight-or-fight part of our brain, the amygdala, are wired to pick up on the negative. Most people's initial response to change comes from these emotional centers rather than from rational thinking.
- 2. People usually fill in knowledge gaps with fear instead of faith.** Uncertainty about the future (and change) breeds this fear. The less information and the more holes people have to fill in the knowledge gaps, the greater the fear and resistance to change. To avoid fear of the unknown, communicate as much and as early as possible about changes.
- 3. We don't have a second chance to make a good first impression.** That's not simply a quaint saying. Neuroscientists have shown it to be true. Starting off on the wrong foot when introducing change makes it harder for it to stick.
- 4. Emotions influence receptivity to change.** Presenting facts without engaging positive and hopeful emotions

will seldom move people forward. Although we may prefer it not to be so, most people make decisions based on emotion. Help church members focus on opportunities rather than problems.

**5. The brain can only handle so much change at once.** Creating too much change too quickly can engage the brain's fear center and cause people to resist, thus hindering change. Consider making major changes in phases to give people time to adjust.

**6. Old habits die hard.** The longer a habit or tradition has been practiced, the harder it is to change. It's like a

**“TO AVOID FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN, COMMUNICATE AS MUCH AND AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE ABOUT CHANGES.”**

— Charles Stone

river that for many years has cut a deep gorge in the earth. It would be hard to change its course. It's like a tug-of-war between the familiar and easy — what we're used to — and the unfamiliar and difficult.

**7. Resistance to change often increases the closer you get to the change.** People's response to change adjusts over time. Let's say you announce plans to add an early service within the next year. Initially, your staff and church leaders will see the benefits an early service can provide, such as more space and more service options. The negatives such as more work, recruiting more volunteers, and a longer day won't loom very large at this point. Neuroscientists have discovered when the change is far away, the positives usually outweigh

the negatives.

However, as the change gets closer, the more fearful people tend to become. Suddenly the implications of the change, such as “Now, I have to arrive at church two hours earlier each Sunday,” become reality. The cost becomes more concrete and the benefits seem less substantial. The closer your church gets to beginning the new service, the more it can feel like a threat as uninformed optimism gives way to informed pessimism. Help your team focus on the benefits and the vision for starting the new service as you make the transition.

**8. The brain often interprets change as a threat, which in turn creates resistance.** The brain is organized around a fundamental principle: minimize threat/maximize reward. This results in either resistance or openness. Change seems like a threat, which often breeds resistance from others. Change brings uncertainty and the brain doesn't like uncertainty. You can alleviate fears by setting realistic, yet hopeful, expectations for staff and church members. Invite people to give input into how the change will look. Regularly include conversations about change into staff meetings, retreats, and leadership training. And celebrate small wins along the way. All of these actions will allow people to take ownership of the changes and will help create lasting change.

The next time you begin to think about change, keep these brain insights in mind as you craft your plan. ■

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**CHARLES STONE (@CharlesStone)** is the author of *People Pleasing Pastors: Avoiding the Pitfalls of Approval-Motivated Leadership*. His new book, *Brain-Savvy Leaders: The Science of Significant Ministry* released in April, 2015. Adapted from an article at [CharlesStone.com](http://CharlesStone.com).

*Leave room for*

# GREY

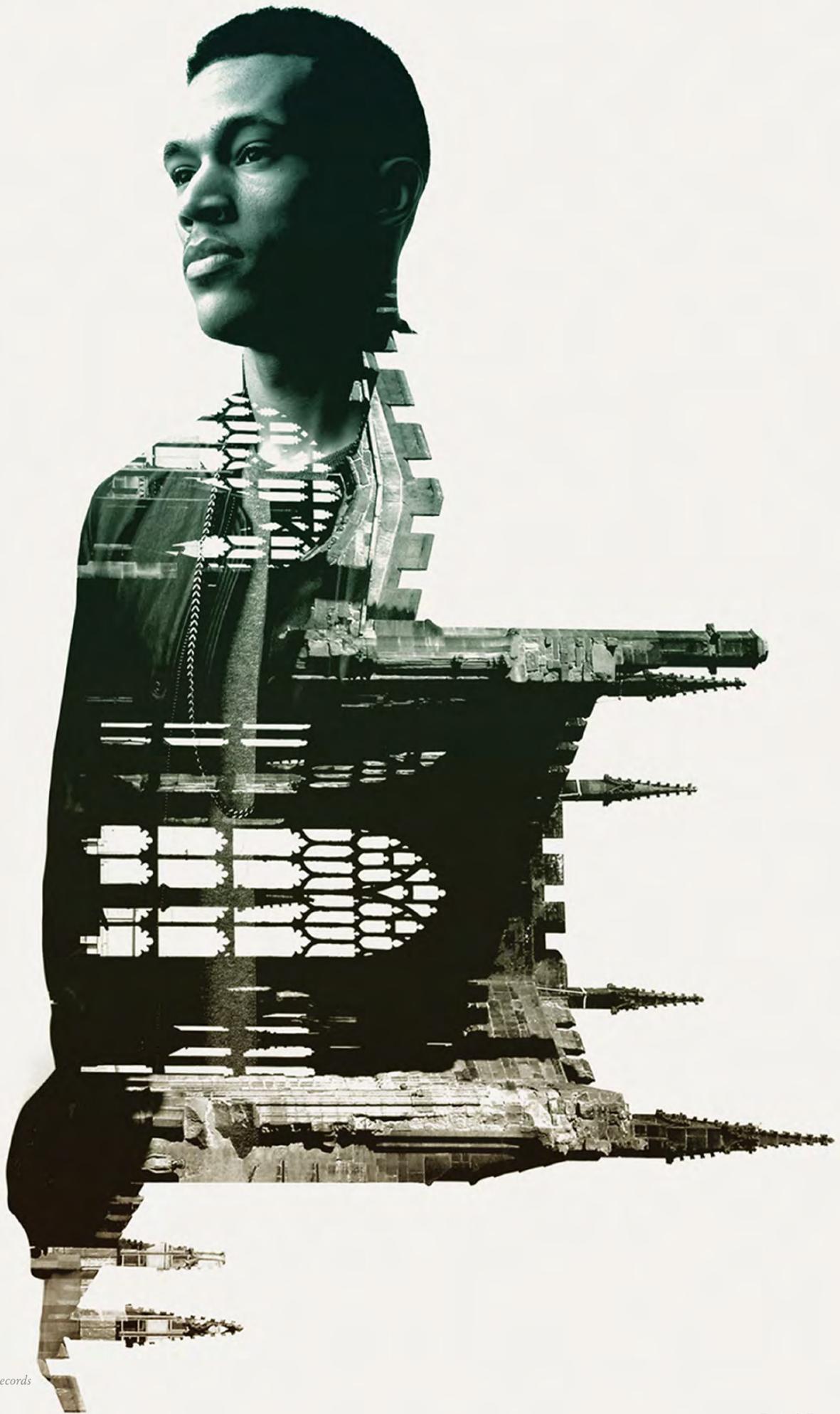
## HOW TO ENGAGE TODAY'S MEDIA WITHOUT LOSING YOUR SOUL

*By Trip Lee*

**T**here are many moral issues that are black and white. Preaching the gospel is good, and punching little old ladies is bad. But there are many other areas that aren't so straightforward. We sometimes call them grey areas. How do we make decisions in areas where there's no explicit biblical command? Paul didn't instruct the Corinthians about so-called "secular" music, so what do I do?

I want to tell you about a simple rule I try to follow in these so-called "grey" areas. I call it "the grey rule." It's nothing monumental or even original. In fact, I first heard it years ago in a sermon, and I've heard a few people say similar things over the years. But just because something's simple doesn't mean it's not helpful.

Here's the grey rule: embrace things that lead you closer to Jesus, and reject things that lead you away from Jesus. Pretty simple, right? As an example, let's think about how it applies to media: music, TV, movies, video games, social media, magazines, etc.



*Trip Lee, image provided by Reach Records*

**“Grey areas don’t mean free-for-all; they mean navigating a more complex road.”**

— Trip Lee

## **MEDIA IS GOOD**

I’ll start by reminding you that media is good. It’s not inherently bad or even neutral; it’s good. It can be tempting to condemn media as a product of the evil one because of the ways it’s often used, but we should be careful not to give the evil one too much credit. Paul warned Timothy about those that “forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good” (1 Timothy 4:3–4). It’s not holy to call good things evil.

God created all things, including communication. He also created sound, vision, and beauty. Media is what happens when human beings, created in God’s image, reshape and reimagine the beautiful gifts God has given us to make something new. When we communicate and create, we imitate our Creator and hold up a faint picture of Him for the world to see.

Rejecting media altogether is essentially turning up our noses when He offers us a merciful gift, and it robs Him of the glory He deserves. Media, in itself, is a good thing, and we should be careful about calling things evil when God has already called them good.

We confuse the issue when we attack good things instead of the real enemy. Hip-hop is not the problem, and neither is that new video game console. Sin is the problem, and it always has been. Media is often foul, but not because media was created by Satan. It’s because people are fallen, and this is what happens when you place good gifts into the hands of sinful people.

Imagine me letting my 2-year-old son play with my iPhone. Say he accidentally calls 911 repeatedly for 15 minutes straight. When the cops show up at my door, it would be foolish for me to exclaim, “That stupid iPhone!” The problem wasn’t the phone, it was the person

holding it. The same principle applies with media. Let’s make sure we point the blame in the right direction.

With that in mind, how can we enjoy the good gift of media without being corrupted by it in the process? Scripture doesn’t give us a list of acceptable media, thus it’s a grey area. That means we have to ask ourselves, how can we approach media consumption in a way that honors God? Grey doesn’t mean “do what you want”; it means apply biblical principles to the situation. And with those biblical principles, we can think about what draws us to Jesus and what pushes us away.

## **FIVE PRINCIPLES**

I’m not going to give you a list of what rating is permissible or which genres of music are acceptable, because that’s neither helpful nor biblical. Instead, I’m going to give you five principles.

## **BE ACTIVE, NOT PASSIVE**

We shouldn’t just let media wash over us; otherwise we may be swept away with the tide. We should engage with it. We should ask questions about it and engage with the content. As you enjoy it, treat it like a discussion. In his book *Popologetics*, Ted Turnau gives some helpful questions:

1. What’s the story?
2. Where am I (in the world of the text)?
3. What’s good and true and beautiful about it?
4. What’s false and ugly and perverse about it (and how do I subvert that)?
5. How does the gospel apply here?

Media most definitely influences how we see the world and awakens desires that lurk in our souls. We have to actively engage with what we’re taking in—even when we’re taking in “Christian” media. Sometimes movies claim to teach Christian themes, but instead are nothing more than sanitized versions of worldly messages. “Believe in yourself” and “Be a self-made man” are not in the Bible. So engage with the content.

## KNOW YOURSELF

This will be scandalous for some and mundane for others, but these days I do listen to some secular music, if by secular you mean music that doesn't talk about Jesus. I feel no conviction when I listen to Stevie Wonder, who's written some of the best love songs of all time. I enjoy listening to rappers voice their worldviews, while I mentally engage with their arguments.

Additionally, I know what kind of music encourages me, and I intentionally listen to that. Sometimes I want to hear biblical truth, so I'll put on some doctrine-heavy hip-hop (or watch some sermons). Other times, I'll search the charts and explore some new stuff I've never heard before.

No matter what I'm listening to, however, I proceed with caution. I will not take in media that causes me to stumble. That's transgressing the grey rule. I know myself well enough to know what I can and cannot listen to.

## KEEP WATCH OVER YOUR SOUL

Sin is nothing to play with, so if certain media causes you to sin, get away from it! Some of us need to get rid of some of our apps and erase some of our music. There is too much at stake! Our eternities are not worth entertainment or cultural awareness. There is no amount of connectivity or relevance that is worth the health of your soul.

## USE MEDIA IN MODERATION

We can't allow our every second to be dominated by media of different kinds. I've noticed the first thing I do when I have a free second is check my phone. I could think or go over the Scripture I've been memorizing, but instead I read a list about "Fifteen things that remind you of the nineties." Oversaturating ourselves with social media can lead to a lack of solitude and deep thought. It's good to unplug sometimes for the sake of your soul. This is part of thinking about what brings you closer to Jesus.

## RECEIVE MEDIA WITH THANKSGIVING

In every expression of creativity, there is a faint picture of our Creator on display. As those who know this God, we recognize Him when we see Him. We can praise God for His creativity and thank Him for His mercy in sharing it with us.

If we simply retreat from everything instead of taking the time to navigate it, we'll be missing out on beautiful gifts from our Lord. Not only that, but pop culture can be a huge factor in our engagement with others. After all, media is both an influencer and a mirror; it affects attitudes and reflects them. Again, we should proceed with caution, but we should partake and enjoy to the glory of God.

## LOOKING BACK

Teenage me would probably rebuke present-day me. I would probably call present-day me worldly and compromising, but that's my past immaturity speaking. Don't be like I was. Accept the grey. And when others disagree with you or decide to partake where you abstain, don't condemn them. Share concerns where you have them and be gracious with them. God has been more than gracious with us.

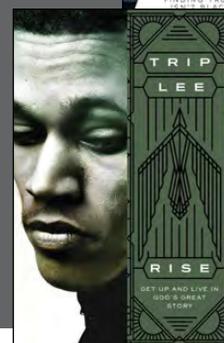
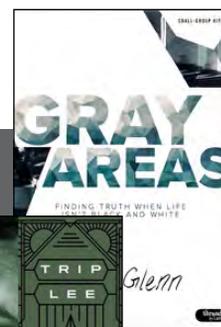
The Bible has given us more than enough principles to work with. Grey areas don't mean free-for-all; they mean navigating a more complex road. The mature Christian doesn't just ask, "What can I do?" but "What can I do to glorify God?" even when it's not so black and white. ■

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**TRIP LEE (@TripLee)** is author of *RISE* from which this article is excerpted. Used with permission from Thomas Nelson, 2014.

## DIG DEEPER

- *Gray Areas: Finding Truth when Life Isn't Black and White* LifeWay Bible study by Mike Glenn
- *Rise* by Trip Lee (Thomas Nelson)



# LET FORM FOLLOW FAITH

*By Gary Nicholson*

# Designing a worship environment that fits

**B**uilding sacred space is a spiritual endeavor. A church building is often where people meet God, learn about the Bible, and grow in relationships with other believers. The environment you create shapes the way people engage God and interact with one another.

Before your church decides on a design for a new building, ask a few important questions. What makes your church different from the church down the street? What does your church do that no other church in the community does? What do you do better than any other congregation?

Unfortunately, most churches skip those questions and instead try to copy

what other churches have done. Of course, there are things you can learn from other congregations and their facilities, but that's not as important as having a clear and concise view of who you are as a congregation and the type of ministries that make you unique.

Modernist design says form follows function. But for churches, why not let form follow faith? In other words, let your church building tell the story of who you are and what you are about. The space you design should reflect the ideas your church embodies. Your faith should shape the immersive experiences your people inhabit.

Does your church major on celebration in light of forgiveness, or



quiet contemplation of the wonder of God's grace? Is your church known as a healing place, a shelter from the storm? Is it a crossroads where people from all walks of life intersect and share God's truth, or a prophetic post where God's truth confronts the darkness of this fallen world? Hundreds of metaphors could describe the place where we gather as a church. All of them might be biblical, but not all fit your church's DNA.

Each church, based on its unique, Christ-centered calling, should build a facility that emphasizes its strengths and addresses needs specific to its people and community. A good designer will tell your story and create the right environment that fits your DNA with lighting, sound, materials, textures, and other tools at his or her disposal while addressing the need for a certain number of seats in worship, the right amount of parking, etc.

Blindly imitating another church's facilities is like going to the store and

**“Blindly imitating another church's facilities is like going to the store and purchasing a pair of shoes because they look good, but never checking to see if they fit.”**

— Gary Nicholson

purchasing a pair of shoes because they look good, but never checking to see if they fit. You may spend millions on these shoes, and you will be stuck wearing them for a long, long time.

At stake is your church's ability to maximize its resources to influence the world for the gospel. No matter what you see in other designs, every church does not need a café that looks like Starbucks. I'm cautious when asked a question like, “What trends do you see in worship facilities?” Although there can be some value in knowing



these trends, there's also the danger of building a facility that fits the latest trends but doesn't meet the congregation's needs.

So, let your mission and unique purpose drive your design for worship instead of chasing trends, which change from year to year. Here are some guidelines to think through as you plan for your new facility.

- **Partner with a wise architect** who knows what worship is all about, and who can design not only for function, but also to tell your church's story and express who you are as a church.
- **Understand who you are**, then tailor the design for the intended audience.
- **Design for flexibility** in the way you worship—it will change.
- **Let technology enhance the environment**, but not dominate it.
- **Do not design in a vacuum.** Design in the context of a master plan for your property and facilities. This can

help avoid the unfortunate problem of designing too large or too small a space.

- **Design to help people**—individuals and families—feel comfortable as they arrive and are welcomed into the church. The effort to design for worship can be for naught if there is a bad experience before your guests ever get to the worship space. Excellent signage and an intuitive building layout are key to helping people feel comfortable in a new place.
- **Think about connections:** connecting people to God, connecting people to people, and connecting people to the various places they need to go in the building. ■

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**GARY NICHOLSON** is studio director for *Visioneering Studios @ LifeWay*. Learn more about church architecture and design at [LifeWay.com/Arch](http://LifeWay.com/Arch).





# How to make hires that stick

*By Jay Mitchell*



*Adapted from Shutterstock*

**H**iring a new team member is always a risk. There's a lot at stake, and it's critical to get it right. We've all heard stories or experienced a new hire who didn't work out.

Hiring the wrong person is costly, both in terms of money but also time, energy, and momentum. So how can we hire people who stick? Here are five ways to ensure your hires are as effective and long-term as possible.

**1. Be transparent in the interview process.**

Search teams need to wear two hats when interviewing candidates: The discernment hat ("Is this the right person for the job?") and the recruitment hat ("How do we convince them to come and join our team?").

Churches sometimes lose great candidates simply because they focus so much on the discernment hat that they forget the candidate has a choice to make as well. If the candidate doesn't feel wanted, they'll drop out of the process.

Sometimes the opposite is true as well. A church finds someone they want to hire, so they make every effort to impress and convince them to join their team. Often, churches present themselves and the job in a way they think the candidate wants to hear during the interviews. That sets the candidate up for disappointment when they learn the church and the expectations for their new role are completely different than what they were told.

If you want your new staff to stick, be transparent from the beginning. No church is perfect. Be honest with the candidate about the church's situation and the expectations of the role. What are the growth points for your church? What are the blind spots of your church or where things tend to fall flat? Have you provided a clear and accurate job description? Make sure to offer the candidate clear, measurable goals for success for the position.

Give references for your church. Churches always ask for references for the candidate, but what if the church provided some references of previous or current staff members who can talk to the candidate about what it's

really like to work there? Give them names of people to connect with to learn more about the heart of the church and team.

**2. Provide tangible support for their move.**

Don't underestimate how much it costs to move a family. Even the most inexpensive move will cost several thousand dollars. We've found churches don't always build this cost into their budget, and it can become a serious tension point in the hiring process and affect the candidate's decision to take the job or not. It's important to make the new hire and their family feel like you're taking care of them, and providing some financial help for the move can make a big difference.

**3. Connect your new staff to your community (and include their spouse).**

Have an on-boarding plan for your new hire and their family. Think of ways to connect them in the community during their first few weeks there. Take them out to lunch to celebrate their first day. Have staff members bring over dinners for the first week to both ease with the moving stress and begin to form friendships. Provide them with a guide to nearby restaurants, shopping centers, schools, and anything else that may be of interest to their family.

Also, find ways to help a new hire's spouse connect with their new community. Remember, your new staff member has built-in opportunities on the job to connect with people in the church, but their spouse may find themselves alone and isolated. Have someone in your church reach out and invite them to something. It's important the entire family, not just the candidate, feel warmly welcomed by your community.

**4. Have a growth track for the position and a plan for professional and personal development.**

High-capacity team members will focus on the task at hand for as long as they need to. However, if you want to keep them on your team for the long run, have a growth track in mind for how they might broaden and deepen their ministry as part of your team.

Might your student pastor one day become a regular part of your teaching team or a

future campus pastor? What would they need to experience or learn over the next few years to prepare them for that next step? What are some areas they need to work on or learn more about in order for them to be effective long-term? Give them opportunities for professional and personal development, training, conferences, etc. This shows you are invested in them and their potential, both professionally and personally.

**5. Give it time.** Getting a new staff member on board quickly is a great goal, and most of our clients tell us they want someone who can hit the ground running. That's understandable, but not always realistic.

While your new hire might have all the skills and experiences needed to perform the job and may match your culture and DNA perfectly, they still have to acclimate to their surroundings and get to know how you operate. They come into the church's culture without any firsthand knowledge of the key lay leaders they'll need to connect with and mobilize to be effective. They have to get to know the church's organizational personality and learn how decisions are made and implemented. And they'll likely have a family they need to pay attention to as they acclimate to their new surroundings. All of these things will take time.

Most of your new hires won't be effective and running at full speed until at least six months into their new position and sometimes longer than that. If you want to hold on to your staff, be patient with them.

All of the steps listed above can shorten the time it takes to get new staff to the place where they are effective in ministry and enjoying the process. But patience is key. ■

**JAY MITCHELL (@JayMitchellVSG)** is an executive search consultant at Vanderbloemen Search Group, an executive search firm dedicated to helping churches and ministries find their key staff. Visit [FindOurLeader.com](http://FindOurLeader.com) to learn more.

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## Why we gather

### Three points for small group success

By Robert Noland

**J**esus intentionally formed the very first “small group,” as we call them today in the church. He called 12 disciples—a tiny band of diverse and, frankly, unimpressive followers.

Why? Because He wasn't staging a coup or forming a cult. He was building a community. That was God's plan.

When the church forms small groups today, we are following the pattern given to us by Jesus for building His community.

The uniqueness of the Christian small group is found when we gather in Jesus' name. We must not gather for the sake of the church's programming success or our own reputations. We don't meet solely for social interaction or intellectual stimulation.

We gather for spiritual growth—vertical in our relationship with God and horizontal in our friendships with brothers and sisters in Christ. Small group success will be attained when this simple goal is met.

Here are three points to help set up and maintain a group being rooted in Christ:

#### 1. Engage

In today's individualistic culture, we must gently encourage people toward developing relationships with a purpose. Members must learn to trade their isolation for interaction, and their selfishness for serving one another.

#### 2. Exchange

Once members begin to meet and engage with one another, the next step toward building community is having an open exchange, where people can share their ideas and their struggles.

In decades past, the church was the



one place you should not—and could not—express any spiritual doubt. Today, small groups inside the church should be a safe place to voice and process doubts and fears. We all have them, and we must face them together if we're to grow in our faith and experience God's peace.

If a group can be honest about spiritual doubts and fears, the members are on their way to a great destination—depth. The shallowness of our society can be fought by sharing our struggles with one another. Christ's love allows us to live in honest and transparent community with other group members.

#### 3. Execute

Paul told us faith without works is dead. What good is meeting regularly

with a small group in Jesus' name if the world never sees the results of the members' growth?

Nothing will inspire and encourage us to pursue God's will for our lives, as well as God's plan for a lost world, more than the accountability and encouragement experienced in a healthy, mission-minded small group. The true purpose of a small group is the changed lives of its members, impacting the world for Christ through their individual callings and collectively as members of the body of Christ. ■

**ROBERT NOLAND** has been in ministry for more than 30 years. He is a freelance writer living in Franklin, Tennessee.

A night cityscape, likely New York City, with a full moon in a cloudy sky. A bright searchlight beam cuts through the clouds from the bottom right towards the top left. The city lights are reflected in the water in the foreground.

# SEARCHING FOR A SAVIOR

# How comic book movies can point to Christ

By Aaron Earls

**S**uperhero movies are leaping over the box office competition in a single bound these days. Four of the 10 highest-grossing movies in 2014 were based on comic books, and 2015 looks to be more of the same.

One reason superhero movies have found a wide audience is because people are naturally intrigued by the battle between good and evil. In this superhero-obsessed culture, the church has an opportunity to point to the grand story of One who came to rescue us and defeat the enemy—but not without a little bit of drama. As Uncle Ben told Peter Parker, Spider-Man’s alter ego, “With great power comes great responsibility.”

## MODERN-DAY HEROES

Hero movies, be they super or not, have been a Hollywood staple. “Stories about heroes have always worked,” explains *X-Men* producer Ralph Winter, “and we are in need of heroes today as much as ever.”

But 15 years ago, as *X-Men* was about to be released, no one had any idea Hollywood was on the precipice of a comic book movie explosion, says Winter. Before *X-Men*, the *Superman* films had come and gone and the latest *Batman* film had flopped. Moviegoers (and moviemakers) seemed turned off to comic adaptations.

“We were taking a giant risk with a \$75 million movie based on a comic book,” says Winter. “Nearly everything else had failed.”

Winter says *X-Men* director Bryan

Singer wanted to place the movie in the real world, our world. “They might be walking down the street in your metropolis,” Winter says. “That gave it urgency and credibility.”

The risk paid off, and *X-Men* was a hit. Other comic book movies followed suit. *Spider-Man* swung to the top of the box office. *Batman* was rebooted. And before you could say “kryptonite,” the movie theater looked more like a comic book store.

## GREAT POWER

Along with the newfound ability to relate to viewers, *X-Men* taught comic book movies that followed how to go beyond the surface. “The *X-Men* movies I worked on were always about great questions of life that continue to be asked no matter your age,” Winter explains. “Why are we here? What is my role? Do I fit in? Should I fit in?”

Sometimes superhero movies answer those questions in a way Christians can affirm, but regardless they ignite worthwhile explorations of what it means, ironically enough, to be human. As we struggle with how to respond to ISIS beheading Christians in the Middle East, Batman struggles to understand where justice ends and revenge begins. As we see our morality become increasingly counter cultural, the *X-Men* wrestle with being different in a world that values uniformity.

Sometimes we find it hard to understand what it means to love as Jesus loves, but we can see Superman touch on the ideas of self-sacrifice. We often ask how our careers and abilities play



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CULTURE.



into our Christian walk. And there is Spider-Man learning to use his gifts for the benefit of others.

But even beyond that, clear symbolism exists between the comic stories and the biblical story. Bible readers often see much in common when they pick up a comic.

“Superhuman powers, flawed heroes that overcome with supernatural assistance, dystopian societies, good versus evil—do any of these themes sound familiar to us regular readers of Scripture?” asks Art Ayris, publisher at Kingstone Comics.

The messianic overtones of Superman have been well known and even played up in the recent film adaptations.

Take this quote from *Superman Returns*: “Even though you’ve been raised as a human being, you are not one of them. ... I have sent them you, my only son.” Superman came to Earth to help us fight a battle we could not win on our own. No, Clark Kent’s alter ego is not Jesus, but there is a cultural bridge there we can use to address our fight with sin that remains hopeless apart from Christ.

Superhero films move an audience that may be uncomfortable speaking in terms of moral absolutes into a fictional world where there are good guys and bad guys. “Even in our relativistic age, there is such a thing as right and wrong,” says Paul Asay, associate editor of *PluggedIn*. “We see things worth fighting for. We see forces we must fight against.”

During times of conflict, superheroes emerge and captivate a culture confronting an enemy. The golden age of comics, which gave us Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Captain America and more, took place during World War II. Surrounding the Vietnam War, the silver age brought us Flash, Hulk, the Fantastic Four, Spider-Man,

and X-Men. Now in the midst of a global conflict with terrorism, superheroes have taken over the big screen.

“When soldiers are dying to defend freedoms, we search to find a higher purpose emerging from their sacrifices,” says Kevin Harvey, author of *The Bible in Pop Culture: Finding Our Creator in Superheroes, Prince Charming, and Other Modern Marvels*. “Many find comfort in God and the Bible, His message to us. Others perhaps resist this dependence on God, but still seek supernatural comfort in heroes created during times of crisis.”

## GREAT RESPONSIBILITY

It is this desire for supernatural comfort and the conquering of evil that can become either a tool for or a rival of the pastor seeking to communicate God’s truth to the person in the pew who recently watched *The Avengers: Age of Ultron*.

In Athens, Paul references the statues of the false gods and pagan poetry as a means to communicate the gospel. Drawing from Paul, theologians throughout the centuries have declared, “all truth is God’s truth.” If it is true, it comes from God, whether we find it in a theology book or a comic book.

Pastors can use these movies as illustrations to effectively communicate biblical truth. “If you want to be a hero and connect to the geeks in your congregation (trust me, they are there), throw in a comic book or movie illustration once in a blue moon,” says Ayris. “These books and movies are a dominant part of the cultural conversation, so it doesn’t make evangelistic sense to ignore it as a connectivity point.”

For Asay, God can work through these movies “to plant hints of His love, grace, and truth.” It wouldn’t even be the most surprising methodology God has used to deliver a message.

“If He can speak through a donkey or a burning bush,” he asks, “why not through movies—the most powerful storytelling medium we have?”

Of course, Christians should seek to be the best participants and influencers of culture as possible—carefully, discerningly, and lovingly participating in and challenging that culture. We should recognize when comic book movies need correction. When they become opposition to the gospel, the church must function as the corrective.

In *The Avengers*, Black Widow warns Captain America not to go after Loki and Thor, the battling gods from Asgard. Before ignoring her warning and jumping out of the plane, the patriotic superhero responds, “There’s only one God ma’am, and I’m pretty sure He doesn’t dress like that.”

With that, Captain America drew a line in the sand that many haven’t drawn themselves. These “gods” and their movies can come across as competition in the hearts and minds of moviegoers.

Alan Noble, managing editor and co-founder of *Christ and Pop Culture*, says there is value in pastors knowing these stories and being “better judges of our anthropology.” But he warns about the contribution these films make to a culture already swimming in distractions and frequently blinded by entertainment.

“I fear superhero movies often contribute to the ‘electronic buzz’ of the 21st century,” Noble says. “Part of the job of the church, then, is to help disrupt that buzz, to startle people to their own existence in God’s world.”

A reality in this world is that we are not in control of it. “We like to feel in control of our lives, but we’re at the mercy of quite a bit these days,” says Asay. “But superheroes, some of them control stuff we never could: X-Men’s Storm can control the weather, Profes-

sor Xavier can influence how people think, and Superman can taunt the very laws of physics.”

We must highlight the fact that we will never possess those levels of control, Noble says. Christianity must give people something different.

“We need to be reminded of our deep, paralyzing fear that the world we live in is out of our control and that there are no superheroes to swoop down and right injustices and stop tornados and prevent rapes,” he says. “What’s more, evil does not merely exist outside us, but is found in our own hearts. And God’s grace does not merely restrain evil. Christ’s work on the cross begins a work of deep reconciliation, justifying our existence and reorienting our world.”

In other words, we need the truth to set us free.

Superhero movies can be used to present truth, but they, like us, need to be redeemed. Using these stories, we can understand our neighbors and community, while recognizing how best to be salt and light in a superhero-obsessed culture. God has given us the ability to take part in these immensely popular stories. With that great power, we have a great responsibility to proclaim and live out the message of One who sacrificed Himself to save us and who will make everything right by the end. And that superhero story is much more powerful than a locomotive and able to change lives faster than a speeding bullet. ■

AARON EARLS (@WardrobeDoor) is online editor of *FactsAndTrends.net*.

## DIG DEEPER

- *God on the Streets of Gotham: What the Big Screen Batman Can Teach Us About God and Ourselves* by Paul Asay
- *The Bible in Pop Culture: Finding Our Creator in Superheroes, Prince Charming, and Other Modern Marvels* by Kevin Harvey
- *The Stories We Tell: How TV and Movies Long for and Echo the Truth* by Mike Cosper





# ON OUR RADAR

Practical resources for you and your church

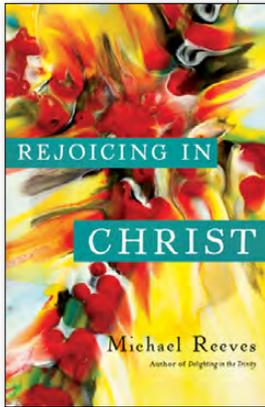
## Books & Bible Studies

### **Rejoicing in Christ**

By Michael Reeves (IVP)

In Jesus we see the true meaning of the love, power, wisdom, justice, peace, care, and majesty of God. Jesus didn't just bring us the good news; He is the good news.

*Rejoicing in Christ* helps us celebrate who Christ is, His work on earth, His death and resurrection, His anticipated return, and how we share in His life. It aims for something deeper than a new technique or a call to action. In an age that virtually compels us to look at ourselves, Michael Reeves calls us to look at Christ. As we focus our hearts on Him, we see how He is our life, our righteousness, our holiness, and our hope.

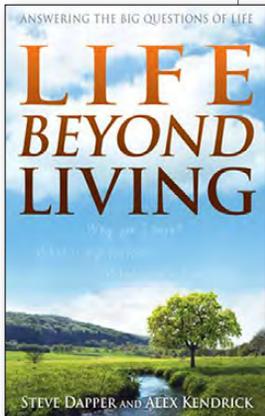


### **Life Beyond Living: Answering the Big Questions of Life**

By Steve Dapper and Alex Kendrick (B&H)

Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." Does the word *abundant* describe your life? Do you feel stuck in the rut of daily routines? Are you experiencing the abundance of joy, fulfillment, and purpose that the Bible says we should have? When you think of this verse, it may sound like it is meant for other people, but not for you. The truth is

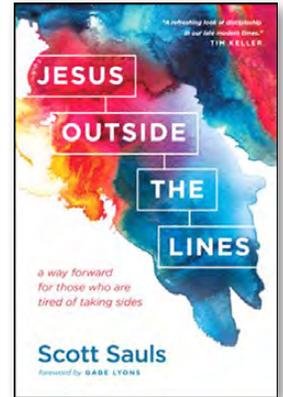
that it is meant for all believers and it's just as true today as it was when it came from the mouth of Christ. *Life Beyond Living* will take you on a journey to discover how the principles of Scripture can lead you to a life that is purposeful, meaningful, and beyond ordinary—a life beyond living.



### **Jesus Outside the Lines: A Way Forward for Those Tired of Taking Sides**

By Scott Sauls (Tyndale)

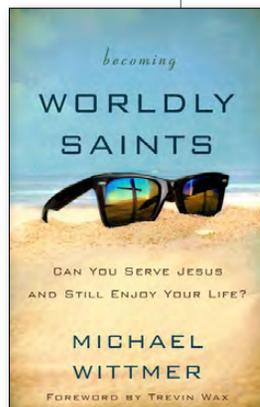
Whether the issue of the day on social media or TV is sexuality, political divides, or the perceived conflict between faith and science, today's media pushes us into a frustrating clash between two opposing sides. Polarizing, us-against-them discussions divide us and distract us from thinking clearly and communicating lovingly with others. Scott Sauls, like many of us, is weary of the bickering and is seeking a way of truth and beauty through the conflicts. Scott shows us how the words and actions of Jesus reveal a response that does not perpetuate the destructive fray. Jesus offers us a way forward—away from harshness, caricatures, and stereotypes.



### **Worldly Saints: Can You Serve Jesus and Still Enjoy Your Life?**

By Michael Wittmer (Zondervan)

Many Christians sense a tension between their desire to enjoy life in this world—the beauty of God's creation, the rich love of deep relationships with others—and the reality that this world is fallen and broken, in need of redemption. How can we embrace and thrive in the tension between enjoying creation and promoting redemption? By living out our God-given purpose. As "worldly saints," created in the image of God, we are natural creatures



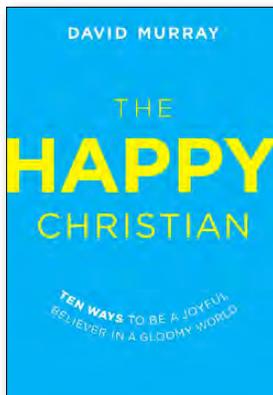
with a supernatural purpose—to know and love God. Because we live in a world stained by the curse of sin, we must learn to embrace our nature as creatures created in the image of God while recognizing our desperate need for the grace God offers to us in the gospel.

### ***The Happy Christian: Ten Ways to be a Joyful Believer in a Gloomy World***

By David Murray (Thomas Nelson)

Hopelessness has invaded much of our culture, even reaching deep into the church. But while the world is awash in negativity, Christians have resources to live differently. In *The Happy Christian*, professor and pastor

David Murray blends the best of modern science and psychology with the timeless truths of Scripture to create a solid, credible guide to positivity. Murray exposes modern negativity's roots and presents 10 perspective-changing ways to remain optimistic in a world that keeps trying to drag us down. *The Happy Christian* invites readers to shed negativity and become countercultural missionaries by demonstrating the positive power of the gospel in their lives.



*A look inside:*

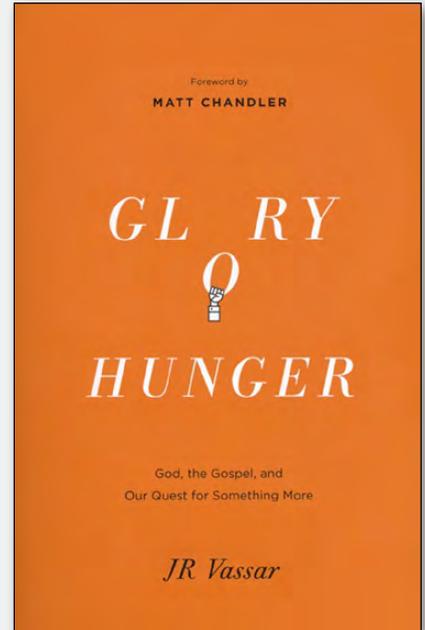
## **The War for Glory**

**L**ife is a war for glory. Even those of us who have rested in Jesus to bring an end to our battle for glory still fight skirmishes in which we feel our reputations are at risk. We live on a battlefield where we strive to attain glory and put it on display. We measure ourselves against others to see how we are stacking up. Are we advancing in our careers fast enough? Is our romantic life lagging behind? Are our finances lagging behind? Are our gifted and talented children in all the right activities? Are we spiritual standouts? We become slaves to our image and the glory that comes from being extraordinary. With every victory the glory counter goes up, and with every failure and folly the glory counter is reset, and we strive to recapture that lost glory.

The gospel has the power to liberate us from that because Jesus won ultimate glory for us. In Him we are given the unchanging status of justified and adopted children of God. We are fully known and fully loved. God's image is being restored in us, and we will one day "shine like the sun" (Matthew 13:43). What people say about us, what we say about ourselves, and what people do to us is trumped by what God has said about us and done for us in the gospel. But the skirmishes rage on, and we still fight for the glory that comes from men.

When it comes to the issue of idolatry, pastors and theologians often refer to "near" and "far" idols, or "source" and "surface" idols. Far idols, or source idols, are the few deep idols that rule our hearts, those we seek to secure for our identity and joy. These far idols consist of control, power, approval, and comfort. Near idols, or surface idols, are those we use in an attempt to secure our far idols. For example, if our far idol is comfort, we might use a near idol such as food or pornography as an escape, a way to secure that comfort. If our far idol is power, we might use the near idol of money to give us a sense of power.

As we think through the issue of glory hunger and our desire for honor and recognition, we are dealing with the far idol of approval. What we want more than anything is to have a sense of importance, significance, and worth, and it is possible that we treat Jesus and his gospel as a near idol to secure that far idol for us. Jesus's death and resurrection bestow on us glory and honor from the Father—absolutely. It is possible, though, that what we really want is not Jesus and God the Father but a sense of glory and honor that come to us from them in the gospel. Our hearts are so inclined to self that we can use the gospel of Jesus as an attempt to make ourselves indispensable to God. The gospel says something wonderful about us, but it primarily says something wonderful about God. ■



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# ON OUR RADAR

*Practical resources for you and your church*

## Conferences & Events



### dotMOM Conference

September 25–26, 2015, Brentwood, Tennessee

Speakers: Karen Kingsbury, Sherry Surratt, Rebekah Lyons, Christy Nockels, Melanie Shankle, Sophie Hudson

dotMOM encourages and equips moms as they raise their kids to know and love Christ. It's a time for all moms to come together for spiritual refreshment and fun. The conference includes keynote sessions from prominent Bible teachers and parenting experts, as well as a broad range of breakouts. dotMom is for moms of all ages with kids of all ages.

[LifeWay.com/dotMom](http://LifeWay.com/dotMom)



### National Worship Leader Conference

September 30–October 2, 2015, Dallas, Texas

Speakers/Artists: Dr. Ronald B. Allen, Dr. Reggie Kidd, Buddy Owens, Dr. Chuck Fromm, Dr. Marva Dawn, Dr. Amos Young, Dr. Leonard Sweet, Pete Briscoe, Ray Jones, Meredith Andrews, The Digital Age, Zealand, Israel Houghton, Charles Billingsley, The Brilliance

The National Worship Leader Conference trains and equips worship leaders to engage their communities. With over 80 workshops featuring some of the country's most popular worship artists and Bible teachers, the conference is for not only worship pastors but bands, vocalists, visual arts, tech specialists, and the entire choir.

[nwlconf.com](http://nwlconf.com)



### Catalyst Conference

October 7–9, 2015, Atlanta, Georgia

Since inception, more than 100,000 leaders have made the annual trek to Atlanta to participate in the Catalyst Conference, and this October, once again 12,000 young leaders will gather. Catalyst seeks to unify change makers—equipping them with impactful content and experiences that transform thinking, provoke action, and cultivate community.

[CatalystConference.com/Atlanta](http://CatalystConference.com/Atlanta)

### Kids Ministry Conference

October 19–21, 2015, Nashville, Tennessee

Speakers: Eric Mason, Kelly Minter, Ryan O'Quinn, Tommy Politz, Sherry Surratt, Jeffrey Reed

LifeWay's Kids Ministry Conference is designed to instruct and encourage children's pastors, leaders, teachers, and volunteers. Participants will leave refocused, refreshed, and full of ideas to take your church's kids to the next level.



[KidsMinistryConference.com](http://KidsMinistryConference.com)

# Digital

## Smallgroup.com

Smallgroup.com is an online tool for creating and distributing custom Bible studies in minutes. SmallGroup.com has a library of more than 1,200 studies (with up to 50 more added each week) from all 66 books of the Bible. It also features more than 200 topics.

At smallgroup.com, church leaders can log in, create a church profile, change the look and feel of the study template, and then begin to plan a teaching series. Once leaders choose the study that fits their text or topic, they can further customize it with specific teaching points, language, and illustrations. Smallgroup.com is great for churches that write their own small group guides to go with the pastor's sermon series. Sunday School teachers and small group leaders can create studies based on any topic or text and make it their own.

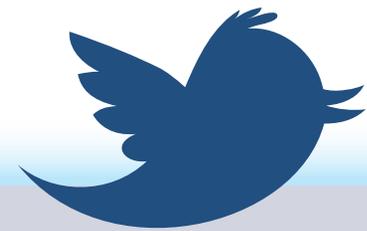
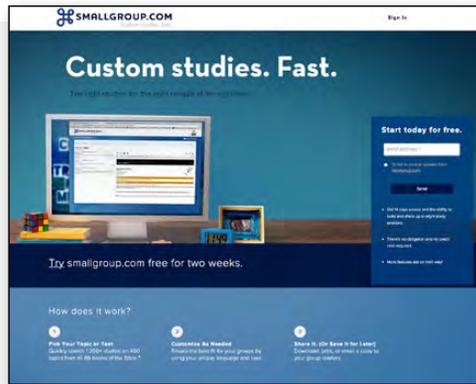
If a Bible study on a specific text or topic is not currently available, users can request a study as part of their subscription. The SmallGroup.com team will write a study and upload it to the site.

[smallgroup.com](http://smallgroup.com)

## Kingdom People Blog

Managing editor of *The Gospel Project*, Trevin Wax, writes regularly about theology, spiritual growth, church trends, and more at his popular blog "Kingdom People: Living on Earth as Citizens of Heaven." In addition to a daily post on theology, spiritual growth, etc., the blog often includes a "Worth a Look" post, compiling interesting links from around the Web. We think it's one of the best Christian blogs out there.

[thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax)



## FOLKS WE'RE FOLLOWING

**Living faithfully in light of the gospel is the expression of utter authenticity as a creature made in God's image.**

*@GloriaFurman, writer in Dubai, UAE*

**In every era of history certain Christian teachings become more prominent. In this age, the image of God in humanity must be highlighted.**

*@JemaTisby, co-founder of @RAANetwork and co-host of @\_PassTheMic*

**When it comes to discerning God's will, God is much more interested in forming your heart than informing your mind.**

*@TrevinWax, managing editor of The Gospel Project at LifeWay*



# Leadership challenges in revitalization

**I fell in love with church revitalization early in my ministry when I led a church of 35 senior adults during a brief stint teaching at a seminary.**

The median age of the people was 68. It seemed like there was an oxygen tank or a walker at the end of most pews. They came to me and said, “Dr. Stetzer, help us reach the young people.”

Leading a church in revitalization has taught me some invaluable lessons. While the process is often difficult and slow moving, if approached correctly it can reinvigorate and empower God’s people to produce lasting fruit.

## YOU WILL MEET RESISTANCE

Leadership, especially with church revitalization, is a long and slow labor of love in the face of resistance. Not every member will be on your side during revitalization.

No matter how difficult, look past the resistance remembering that revitalization is like basic physics. Momentum results from movement against the inertia.

## LOVE YOUR PEOPLE

In revitalization, you need to love, not drive people. Talk to them. Listen to them. Get them excited about God’s mission for their life and their church. Love your people, and not just as a means of getting them to do what you want.

When I set out to love and empower a group of 34 mostly senior adults (one left soon after we started our journey), they became excited and ready to go on mission. They wanted to love their neighbors and engage the community around them. And that all-white congregation got out from

behind their church walls and began effectively reaching their multi-cultural, lower-middle to poor working-class neighborhood.

## MESSY HAPPENS

On my last day at the church, Harold, the over 80-year-old deacon chairman poked me in the chest, and said, “Preacher, I still don’t like the music. And the kids are breaking everything.”

And he was right. The more activity you have in a church, the more likely things are going to be broken.

**“CHURCH REVITALIZATION IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEAD GOD’S PEOPLE TO A RENEWED FOCUS ON GOD’S MISSION.”**

—ED STETZER

Any disconnected church that seeks to reengage with their community will find the experience to be messy. There may be mud on the carpet, smudges on the walls, dirty bathrooms, or broken vases. The way of church life to which your people had grown accustomed will suddenly change.

So there we were, Harold with his finger in my chest and me looking at him trying to figure out this confrontation. Still making eye contact, he teared up and said, “I still don’t like the music, and the kids are breaking everything, but it was worth it all.”

In revitalization, it’s hard to transition

to a missional mindset. Kids will break things. Life will change. But in the end, it’s worth it all.

## CHANGED CHURCHES

During our two years together, we saw the church grow from 34 to 175 people in weekly attendance. Neighborhood people were now coming to the church. We were serving the poor. We had begun a program for single moms. We repaired their rarely used baptistry. These changes represented lasting fruit.

Church revitalization is an opportunity to lead God’s people to a renewed focus on God’s mission. Such an endeavor will undoubtedly change lives, communities, and have a gospel impact on generations to come.

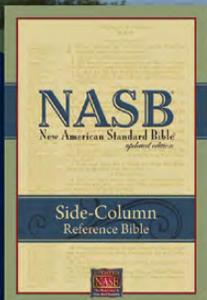
In that first experience, I fell in love with church revitalization. The church recalibrated its sense of mission and reengaged in the growingly diverse community.

I also learned that strong leadership was not driving but loving and empowering my people to make the necessary decisions to live on mission in their community.

Revitalization may be difficult, but Harold said it best—it’s worth it all. ■

**ED STETZER (@EdStetzer)** is executive director of LifeWay Research. For more visit [EdStetzer.com](http://EdStetzer.com)

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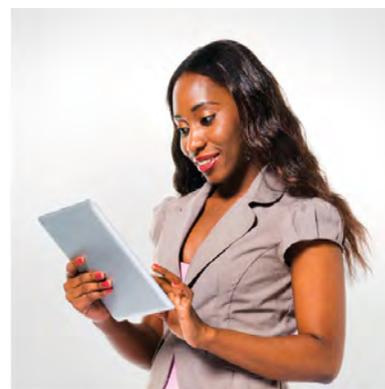
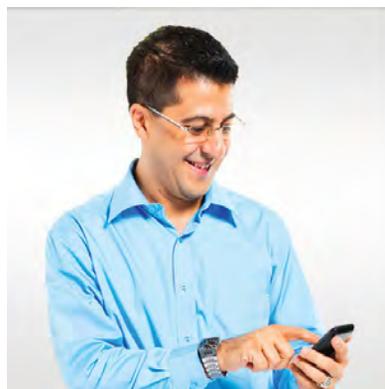
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# *"Pastor, what is my next step?"*

Now you can have a better answer.

**The question comes in many forms:** What does God want from me? What is God's will for my life? How do I get closer to God? Essentially, they all point to the desire to be a better disciple.

These are not easy questions to answer. But we can help. Just have your congregation take the Transformational Discipleship Assessment (TDA). This simple questionnaire (based on 8 attributes of discipleship that consistently show up in the life of a maturing believer) reveals the specific strengths and weaknesses of your congregation. Individual reports help each person focus on specific areas that need improvement. The group report will help you plan sermons that address the needs that many share in your church.



**Transformational**  
Discipleship Assessment

Learn more at [www.LifeWay.com/TDA](http://www.LifeWay.com/TDA)

