

## Barriers to Revitalization

I have worked with hundreds of pastors who have a passion to reach their community for Christ but cannot seem to get their church on board. Many of them have tried to implement changes in their church only to be slapped down, chewed up, and spit out.

As I have listened to their stories, I have found some common enemies to revitalization that have to be considered.

### 1. Polity

Somewhere along the way, many churches have adopted a form of government that they would swear comes right out of the Bible: congregational rule. Admittedly, there are examples of congregational rule in the Bible:

**Numbers 13** – Moses sends twelve spies to check out the promised land. When they return, Moses calls a business meeting. The Spy Committee gives their report. The majority on the committee recommend staying out of the Promised Land. Joshua and Caleb, a 17% minority, recommends trusting God. Someone then makes a motion to add an amendment to have Joshua and Caleb stoned. Thankfully, the amendment was rejected. The congregation votes in favor of the majority recommendation.

The vote carries and an entire generation of Israelites die a slow and painful death in the desert (much like the average American church).

**Luke 23** – Jesus is handed over to Pilate by the Heresy Committee. Pilate calls a business meeting and speaks out of order (as the moderator) telling them that he finds no fault with Jesus. After deliberation and discussion, someone calls for the vote. On the motion to have Jesus crucified, the congregation votes with an overwhelming majority.

The vote carries and Jesus is executed.

Of course, I'm being a little silly, but I'm trying to emphasize the insanity of a mob mentality.

One of the problems with congregational polity is that it only takes one or two toxic antagonists to sway the rest of the crowd. Case in point, **Numbers 16** and Korah's quorum.

Three men forced a special business meeting and called for a vote of no confidence against the presiding pastor, Moses. The results were less than positive, in fact, let's just say the antagonists "suddenly" left the meeting.

My point?

The church was designed to be leader-led, not congregation controlled. Paul writes, *"Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers [read LEADERS]. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ."* (Ephesians 4:11–12, NLT)

Churches are meant to be led by vision, not votes, and by pastors, not parliamentary procedure. If the church is going to experience revitalization, then the members must let the leaders lead.

## **2. Security**

When I first moved to my city, I noticed a beautiful church building downtown. When I asked about the church, I was told they only had three members and that they only met once a month if the weather holds. I said, "Holy smokes! How do they keep going?"

I was told, "Oh, that's not a problem. A former wealthy member died and left them a bundle. They could keep going on just the interest for another fifty years!" Unbelievable.

The sad truth is that this is the picture of thousands of already-deceased churches all over the country. They died years ago, but they are being artificially preserved with a trust fund or a fat bank account. Unbelievably sad when you consider what *could* be done with those resources.

**Question:** How does Jesus feel about things that are no longer fulfilling their purpose?

**Answer:** Matthew 21:18-22 & Mark 11:12-14 –**The cursing of the fig tree.**

Jesus was hungry and spied a fig tree. His first instinct was, "Oh good, there's something made to satisfy my hunger!" However, when Jesus bent down to get some fruit there was none. The fig tree failed to fulfill its purpose for being.

What did Jesus do? Did he say, "No worries little plant. You just keep using up that space."

Ehhh...WRONG!

Jesus cursed the planted and it died.

Sadly, there is a world of hungry people passing by barren buildings every day that have nothing to offer except a delayed death.

God help us.

These churches should surrender their buildings to fresh works of God and pour their resources back into the kingdom.

No one's going to heaven bragging how they "saved up" a lot of money. Paul said, *"Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to **use their money to do good**. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others."* (1 Timothy 6:17–18, NLT)

As John Ortberg has said, "When the game is over, it all goes back in the box."<sup>i</sup>

Churches are meant to be lighthouses not club houses.

### **3. Apathy**

Perhaps the saddest yet truest enemies of revitalization are dead disciples who have either lost their first love or never had it in the first place. You simply cannot say you love Jesus if you are not willing to do whatever it takes to reach the lost.

Jesus, in answer to the question, "What's the greatest commandment?" stated:

*“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.”*

*This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:37–39, NLT)*

In other words, love for God and love for people are inextricably intertwined. If you say you love God, but you don't love people, then you're just kidding yourself. If you truly love God then you *must* love what he loves, and he loves people.

The letters to the churches in the first chapters of Revelation are quite shocking. Jesus tells the church of Ephesus that if they do not renew their love for him then he'll remove his power and presence from their midst. The sad reality is that for many churches Jesus has left the building, and no one even noticed!

I have stated many times; some churches do not deserve a pastor. If the people are perfectly content with business as usual – no salvations, no baptisms, no changed lives, then I would not waste my time trying to raise the dead. As Jesus said, “Let the dead bury the dead.” Shake the dust off your feet and move on. (Matthew 10:14)

There's simply not enough time to waste just playing church. The people in our communities *need* the life-changing message of the gospel. Jesus gave his life for the church. I believe that the local church, when it is living out the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, is the hope of the world. Nothing better reflects the kingdom in heaven than when the church is fulfilling its mission on earth.

So, what do you say? Are you ready to see God do the miraculous in your church? Are you sick and tired of the same old same old year after year? Are you ready to dream big for God's glory in your church?

Then let's get started!

We are going to walk through the intensely practical steps and strategies for building a D.R.E.A.M. church. We will accomplish this by examining the acrostic D.R.E.A.M. one letter at a time and show you the systems and processes that support each of those strategies.

---

<sup>i</sup> Ortberg, John. *When the Game Is Over, It All Goes Back in the Box*. United States, Zondervan, 2008.