

mission:**world**

Hope for the American Church



July - August 2019 ::: The Great Commission Magazine of the BMA



Hope for the American Church

BY: Dr. John David Smith
BMA Missions
bmamissions.org

We know that it is possible to make statistics say just about anything. The facts about the current condition of American churches has been debated over and over with differing conclusions. One fact that seems to be true is that the United States of America is the only country in the world where Christianity is not growing on a percentage basis. This is bad news overall. However, the other side of that fact is that in 1940 a Gallup poll indicated that 37 percent of Americans attended church each week; in 2015, 36 percent of Americans said they attended at least once a week. So, while it is not growing on a percentage basis, the bottom has not dropped out either. There are some clear trends in American church reality such as: mainline denominations are in full decline while the non-denominational conservative evangelical churches are showing the greatest growth. Along with this shift, there is also cause for concern

about the number of college and post-college aged Americans leaving the faith of their upbringing.

In the Baptist Missionary Association (BMA) of America we have our own trends that are concerning. The average attendance in a BMA church is 71, which is actually almost spot on with the national average of Baptist churches. However, the median attendance is closer to 42. Certainly the biblical marks of a New Testament church need to guide the process for revitalization in many of our churches. Activate, which is based on twelve biblical principles, is the church revitalization initiative of BMA Missions. We are thankful for Larry Barker and his leadership of Activate, along with Heidi Sorrells, who provides another set of hands and feet for the ministry. This issue is dedicated to church revitalization...there is "Hope for the American Church."

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- 4 ACTIVATING GOD'S CHURCH, GOD'S WAY**
BMA Missions Director of Church Planting, Larry Barker, explains that church health and church planting skill sets, systems, and competencies are needed to accomplish both!
- 8 CASTING A MEDIA NET**
Lifeword is using the media language of America to reach people for Christ.
- 14 A REALISTIC BUT HOPEFUL VIEW OF CHURCH REVITALIZATION**
What does a lack of growth tell us about a church? Church Consultant, Sam Rainer, gives insight.
- 18 ACTIVATING CHURCHES IN TEXAS!**
BMA Texas Director of Missions, Heath Mitchell, shares how Activate is making a difference in the churches he works with in Texas.
- 22 MOTORCYCLE AND ACTIVATE**
Arkansas Church Planter, John Travis, explains how activate is helping form the concept and vision of his new church plant.
- 24 WE NEED TO CHANGE, BUT NOT JUST YET**
Bi-vocational Pastor, James Dorman, explains how Activate changed the direction and trajectory of one Texas church.

ACTIVATING GOD'S CHURCH, GOD'S WAY



BY: Larry Barker
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The burden, heart, and plan for a church health initiative (Activate) began about ten years ago when Donny Parrish threw a book on my desk entitled *Comeback Churches* by Ed Stetzer and Mike Dotson. He simply asked me, “What are we going to do about this?” and the journey began with a passion to help our churches thrive the way God intended. We are convinced that God desires more for your church and my church than we do. He actually desires exceedingly abundantly more and has promised to be with us, “to the end of the age.”

Ephesians 3:10 tells us, “This is so God’s multi-faceted wisdom may now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the

heavens.” Every local church is to glorify God and make His name famous among all the nations by carrying out the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. The church is not an end in itself but a means to an end. You see it is not so much that your church has a mission to carry out but rather that the mission of God has churches to advance His kingdom agenda.

Does church health and church planting go together? Yes, they do, because so many of the same skill sets, systems, competencies, and focus needed are the same. While there certainly is a big difference in starting with nothing and beginning with a congregation, the burden and laser focus of living on mission is identical. Mark Clifton states his vision statement like this, “We are committed to decreasing the death rate of existing churches while simultaneously increasing the birth rate of new churches!” Activate is committed to helping church plants and existing churches to achieve spiritual vitality and strategic initiative.

There is a need for collaboration and cooperation on church planting, church health, church revitalization, and church replanting. The foundation must remain fulfilling the Great

Commission and asking, “How does God want to express Himself through our church in our community at this time?” Maybe your church simply needs to improve and refocus in some areas by asking, what can we do better? Or maybe your church needs to be revitalized because there are things that must be “fixed” and you are asking, “what’s wrong and what can we do about it?”

In a partnership with Steve Ogne we worked hard at putting together a “Church Toolkit” for churches to begin the process of Activate. We believed then and we still believe that we are to be advancing His church forward. The plan was to develop a coach driven process in three phases: health, mission, and multiplication. Out of this partnership we now have a “Church Lifecycle” that helps you to determine whether your church is inclining (healthy and growing), reclining (plateaued and holding your own), or declining (your ministry capacity is steadily decreasing).

This Activate tool gives you the characteristics of these three stages (incline, recline, and decline) in nine different categories that include attitude, focus, faith, and leadership. It helps you to determine, for example, in the area of drive is your church vision-

ACTIVATE IS MORE THAN A CHURCH HEALTH MINISTRY. WE MAKE SUGGESTIONS. PASTORS CHOOSE WHAT THEY NEED.

PASTOR HUDDLES	CHURCH HEALTH	PASTOR HEALTH	ADDITIONAL TOOLS
<p>Pastors understand pastors best:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Join a group of pastors nearby or online for encouragement and prayer. • Be disciplined, held accountable, and sharpened. • Get Support as you work Activate levels. • Dream together. • Receive bonus materials and trainings only available through your huddle. 	<p>Every church has something to work on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form an Activate Team and allow the congregation ownership in forward momentum. • Foster unity and a climate of prayer. • Do a church assessment and discover strengths and areas of challenge. • Work through biblical church tools to discover God’s plan for what’s next. 	<p>Healthy churches start with healthy pastors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We minister to your unique situation including: the bi-vocational pastor and church planter. • Attend huddles, retreats and trainings. • Complete a pastor health assessment. • Burn-Out prevention tools. • Digital trainings to train yourself or train your team. • Coaching calls if you get stuck. 	<p>Evaluate ministries of your choice and form effective strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayer • Outreach • Discipleship • Assimilation • Ministry Placement • Finance • Worship • Conflict Resolution • Time Management • Leader Health • And More!



driven, program-driven, or structure-driven? In the area of orientation is your church future-oriented, present-oriented, or past-oriented? In the area of faith is your church exercising high-risk faith, low-risk faith, or no-risk faith? Remember, without faith it is impossible to please God!

The kit provides direction for your church with these additional tools: Prayer Strategy, Church History and Timeline, Spiritual Health Questionnaire, Ministry versus Mission Chart, Major Ministries Score Card, and more. Dr. Ken Priddy, who developed and wrote the Church Lifecycle tool, says that this process will help you to “maximize your Great Commission vitality through spiritual renewal with strategic initiative.” The reality with every church is that vitality naturally decreases over time while the severity of your need for revitalization will continue to increase.

In *Made for More* (The Resource Kit) it says, “The role of the local church is to be the mobilizing home



base. This empowers all disciples to discover their personal calling and then deploy them to express the fullness of Jesus into every corner of culture and every sphere of society!" All too often we are in a holding pattern! Christ has not called us to this "fortress-like" lifestyle! He does not commit us to a cloistered cell and He has not commissioned us to a fixed position! This process is meant to help any and every church to, "Activate God's Church, God's Way!"

A healthy church is actually not the ultimate goal. The glory of God is our primary purpose. What does the condition of our church and ministry in a community say about who He is? In the city you minister you must realize that your church is the greatest expression of and tool for building His kingdom and bringing Him glory. Are you willing to honestly ask how you are doing in that area? Are you willing to invest in a process that will cause you to remember, repent, and recommit the same way the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2 was challenged?

Activate's overarching focus is discipleship. Our core identity, as spelled out clearly in the Scriptures, is to be His disciples, followers of Christ. Our core mission is also stated clearly as making disciples. Evangelism is inviting people to believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Discipleship is investing in those who chose to believe. A clear discipleship pathway helps them develop character and experience life transformation while a leadership pipeline develops competencies and skill sets. Is your church actively helping people to find and follow Jesus?

Daniel Im in *No Silver Bullets* says, "Using an analogy, if your church were a car that had to get to a particular endpoint, which would be the vision, the discipleship pathway would be the fuel, and the leadership pipeline would be the engine. Both are equally important and have to rely on each other if the car is going to experience any movement." Does your church have a clear discipleship pathway that is helping to *form* missionary disciples? Does your church have a leadership system in place that is equipping your disciples to *live* as missionary disciples?

The reality is that 85 percent of all churches are either plateaued or on the decline. Many of these

churches desperately need revitalization. The word revitalization simply means, "to make live again." Churches desire to be vibrant and thriving once again but the reality is that the longer a church has been in decline (spiritually unhealthy) the longer the process will be for recovery. The church has been described as, "The people of God, saved by the power of God, for the purposes of God." Are you fulfilling His purposes? Are you actively obeying His commands?

Whether your church needs to tweak a ministry, refocus in some area, or needs to seek revitalization, maybe the Activate process can help? Contact us and take a look at the many resources we have developed that could help your church implement systems that would help you to sustain the relational capital you have worked so hard to build. Jeff Christopherson in *Kingdom Matrix* says, "Just because I claim to be a reborn child of God does not mean that I automatically advance the Kingdom of God. Just because my church claims to be a community of Christ does not automatically mean that it is advancing the cause of Christ."

Let us Activate God's church, God's way!



CASTING A MEDIA NET

BY: Donny Parrish
Lifeword
lifeword.org

If you are a typical American looking for information about a news event, where would you go to find it?

A new study from the Pew Research Center shows that over two thirds of U.S. adults (68 percent) get their news on social media. Out of that population, just under half say Facebook is their source.

Like it or hate it, social media has become part of the fabric of American society. The most recent estimate is that 79 percent of the U.S. population had a social networking profile: 244 million social

media users in 2018 and a possible 257 million by 2023.

According to MarketWatch, “Americans spend more time than ever watching videos, browsing social media and swiping their lives away on their tablets and smartphones. American adults spend more than eleven hours per day watching, reading, listening to or simply interacting with media...and three hours and 48 minutes a day on computers, tablets and smartphones.”



Lori Cline, "The Lori Cline Show"

My Dad loved to fish. Some of my fondest memories of childhood center on sitting in a boat on False River or Lake Verret, south of Pierre Part, part of the Atchafalaya River Basin in south Louisiana.

Dad wasn't much on sitting in one spot for very long if the fish weren't biting. If we tried using different bait or fishing at different depths with no success, my brother and I knew what Dad's solution was going to be. He would take his cigar out of his mouth, pull up the anchor on the boat and say, "Boys, we fishin' in the wrong spot. There's no fish in here. Let's move." Dad would crank up the boat and off we would go, looking for the fish.

That's not an unprecedented fishing strategy. Jesus told the disciples in John 21:6, "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find some. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes."

Obedience to the Master demands that we fish where he leads.

Lifeword is determined to follow the Master's leading. In America and most of the world, the people we're fishing for are living on the Internet. For the majority of their day, they are looking at smartphone screens for information and entertainment.

If that's where the fish are, that's where Lifeword wants to anchor, drop our nets, and fish.

Director of Internet Broadcasting and Digital Strategy Jon Dodson

The Internet turned a very young 30 years old in March of 2019. With a global population of 7.6 billion people, 3.2 billion of them are actively using social media, an increase of thirteen percent from 2018.

The Internet is the biggest communication shift in 500 years, and it is where people are. For Lifeword to be effective we must communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ where the people are...online in social media.

In September 2018 the Lifeword Cloud was launched to digitally engage the culture with the good news of the gospel at Lifeword.org.

From June 1, 2018, to January 31, 2019, Lifeword.org received 36,331 visitors compared to 6,841 for the same timeframe in 2018. That is a 433 percent increase in unique visitors. January of 2019 also set a new record of 9,000 website visitors for one month.

The more content and traffic channels we implement, the more unique visitors we have to Lifeword.org, and the more people there are to consume and share in the ministry of Lifeword. The English "Jesus to You" web page had 1,347 views

while the Spanish “Jesus to You” web page had 1,033 views. Eighty-two percent of all traffic to Lifeword.org has come from mobile devices.

From June 1, 2018, to January 31, 2019, social media traffic alone accounted for 70 percent of all traffic to Lifeword.org.

In Facebook, almost 20 million people had the opportunity to see our videos: *Day By Day* (with Pastor Cliff Johnson), *Lori Cline* (with her decades of Christian broadcasting relationships and on-air radio hosting experience), and *Lifeword en Espanol* (with Director of Operations Luis Ortega). That is incredible exposure to groups of people totally unaware of Lifeword’s evangelistic ministry.

Lifeword was able to reach 5,349,926 unique people/Facebook accounts during this timeframe. We also received 13,558,117 video plays across those three productions. Finally, the Instagram account (@lifewordmedia) is fast approaching 11,000 followers and growing daily.

Podcasting (on-demand, on-line radio show) continues to gain popularity, and Lifeword will begin producing one by the end of summer 2019. Finally, with the focus on college students and millennials, the pilot for an Instagram video series has already been shot and will launch in 2019.

This year has already brought many new opportunities, and we look forward to many more as God leads.

Director of Church Connections Holly Meriweather

Web plus log equals weblog... which, back in 1999, became the word we know today as *blog*, a short little word with a huge impact that is as American as apple pie!

“Logging the web” was the term mid-westerner Jorn Barger used in 1997 as he created a constantly updated list of “interesting” information discovered while browsing this new thing called “the world wide web.”

Shortened to *blog* by a California web developer in 1999, the term has come to mean any online journal, informational website, or platform for writers to share their views or promote something.

More importantly, it is a way to speak directly to people in a timely and personal way. It is a phenomenon that has become a website requirement, especially for a ministry like Lifeword.

As Director of Church Connections, I do a lot of writing. When Donny asked me to consider managing print content, I didn’t have to pray about it, which is the same reaction I received from the writers and bloggers I asked to be a part of our writing team.

During my research I learned that the Baptist Missionary Association (BMA) has talented people.

Some are pastors. Some are pastors’ wives.

Some are friends. Some were strangers.

Some are church planters. Some are missionaries.

Some are laymen. Some are laywomen.

Some have been part of the blogosphere for decades. Some have only recently felt God’s call to write.

Some have agreed to write “on demand.” Some have allowed us to “scrape” articles from their blog sites.

All are talented writers.

All are biblically and doctrinally sound.



Dr. Clif Johnson, “Day by Day”

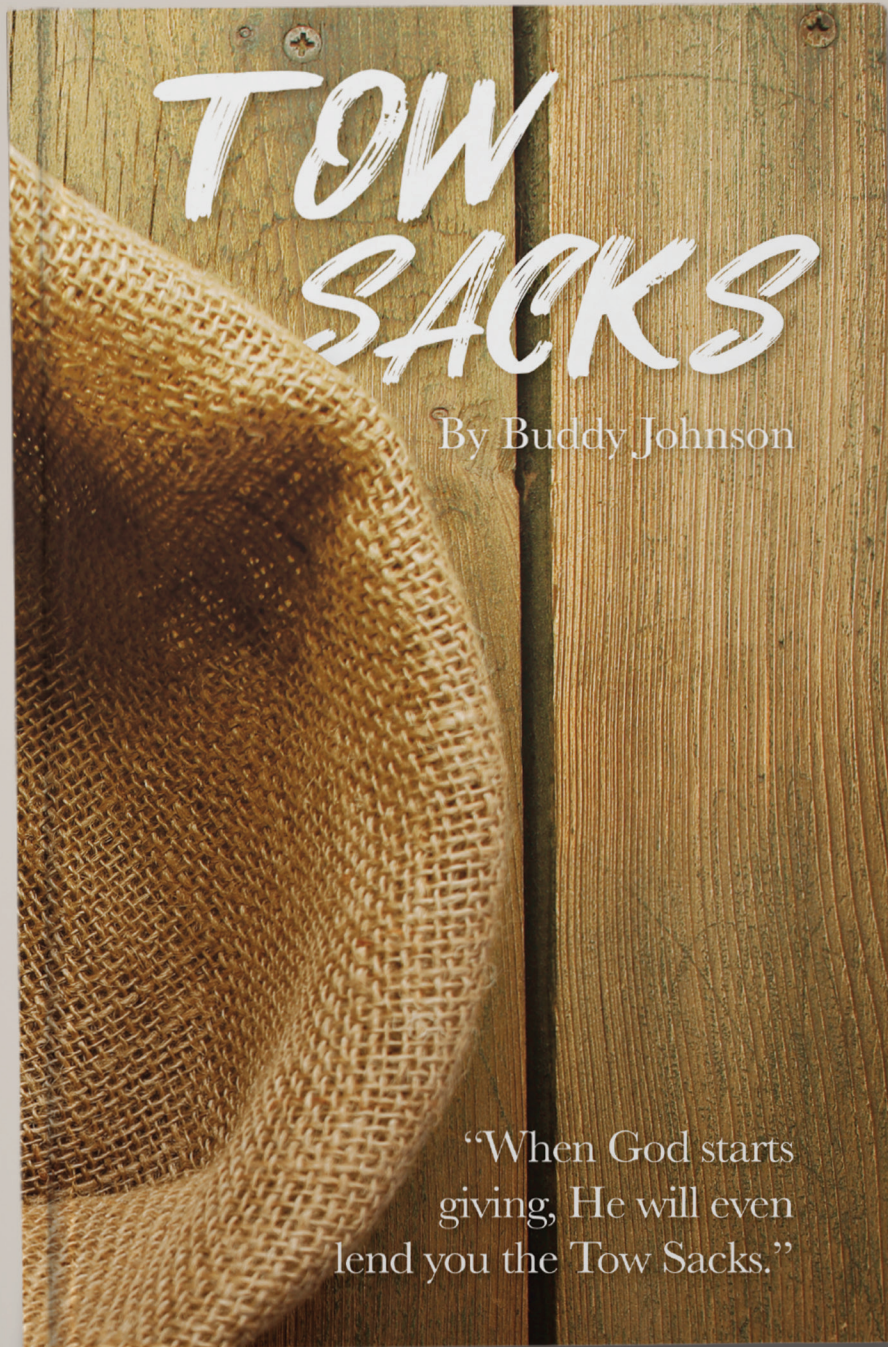
When I contacted the following writers, they all felt honored to help Lifeword with print content, and all of them have appreciated the opportunity to share their writing, and often their very personal stories, with the world...all for the sake of introducing people to Jesus and making disciples:

- **Toya Aultman:** A pastor's wife and mother of two, Toya has written personal blogs, devotionals, and discipleship materials for more than twenty years. Read her blogs at <https://preacherswifelifeinaglasshouse.wordpress.com>.
- **Stephen Castleberry:** Experienced pastor at Antioch Georgetown (Texas), he and his wife Ashley are raising two boys. His blogsite is <https://www.stephencastleberry.com>.
- **Lori Cline:** Host of Lifeword's *Lori Cline* show, she is a pastor's wife (Drew at South City Church, Little Rock, AR) and mother of two girls. Lori has an extensive background in radio and Christian artist promotions.
- **Andy Comer:** Pastor of Antioch Georgetown (Texas), Andy and his wife Erin are raising three girls. Read his personal, leadership, and church blogs at <https://www.andycomer.org/blog/>.
- **Brandon Cox:** Pastor (Grace Hills, Rogers, AR), husband, author, and father of three, he and his wife Angie are raising three children. A prolific blogger, his website is <https://brandonacox.com>.
- **Jesse Hales:** Former missionary to Dominican Republic, Jesse and his wife Rebecca have three children, and they are currently in the Austin, Texas area preparing to plant a church.
- **Yalanda Merrell:** A pre-health professions recruiter for UAMS, she and her husband Shaun live in northeast Arkansas. In 2012 she began writing daily Facebook devotionals beginning with Genesis. As of this writing, she was in Matthew.
- **Nafisa Morris:** Widow of former missionary and pastor Trevor Morris, she began writing a blog for young widows after realizing that they were an under-served community. In addition to on-demand writing, she writes about grief and raising four children by herself at <https://rekindlingjoy.com>.
- **Jeff Swart:** Pastor, father, husband, and grandfather, Jeff is currently a pastor in Kansas with plans to retire in August. He has been writing sermons, articles, Bible studies, and other publications for over four decades. Some of his writings are at <http://www.jeffswart.com>.
- **Jake Tyson:** A recent college graduate and engaged to Jessica, he was a Lifeword intern before joining us as a contract worker in meta-tagging audio and video content for the website.
- **Paige West:** A pastor's wife, she and her husband Todd are raising twin girls. Paige has been writing for Lifeword on a variety of topics recently.

You can be part of the Lifeword team by praying for us, reading our blogs, watching our videos, and sharing them on your own social media...you never know who you will catch when you cast your net!



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A Realistic but
Hopeful View of
Church Revitalization



BY: Sam Rainer
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No church should die. Ever. Perhaps a church is far gone, deep into a toxic state of disunity. Perhaps a church has decades of declines. Perhaps a church has veered far from doctrinal convictions. Would the death of these churches advance the kingdom? Would their death glorify God?

No.

If God can save any person, then He can save any church. If we believe in redemption for people (anyone!), then we must also believe the same for churches. A lot of doom and gloom statistics exist. Close to seven out of ten churches are on a growth plateau or in decline. The *majority* of established churches could use some degree of revitalization.

Most Established Churches Need Revitalization

A need for revitalization does not necessarily mean an entire church is unhealthy. Even the healthiest of established churches have at least one area requiring work, if not several. Sometimes the entire church needs revitalization. In other cases, a particular area of the church needs revitalization.

Granted, a lack of growth does not mean the entire church is failing, but it does indicate something is missing—somewhere the church is deficient.

What happens to cause this problem? The reasons are numerous, and each church's story is different. However, one key theme is simply the patterns a church develops over time. Established churches have established patterns. These congregations have a consistent (or established) schedule. They keep doing the same established programs year after year. Annual events become embedded into the culture. Such is the nature of an established church. But these patterns can create either a healthy movement or an unhealthy movement in the church.

Healthy established patterns create healthy churches. Unhealthy established patterns create unhealthy churches. Clearly, more churches have unhealthy patterns as compared with healthy patterns. The stats are undeniable. But I'll dig deeper. There is more beneath the surface. Numerical declines are merely a symptom, not the root problem.

Pastors become comfortable. Status quo pastors have status quo churches. Once a church has accepted a pastor, it's easy for that pastor to cruise. Change always comes with a level of risk. Shepherding is impossible detached from risk-taking. When pastors stop taking risks, churches become complacent.

Budgets get messy. Churches can go years without a budget strategy, creating a jumbled mess of operating line items and an endless list of designated accounts. I recently saw a church budget with a designated account for a cassette tape ministry. Church budgets are often the most common area in need of revitalization.

Ministries linger without purpose. Established patterns of programs are wonderful, until they stop working. Unfortunately, churches are guilty of hanging on to programs instead of desiring the fruit they produce. When the program itself is more important than the results, a church loses the purpose of ministry.

Facilities become cluttered and dated. Deferred maintenance has killed numerous ministers with good intentions. Neglected facilities become an albatross around the neck of many pastors. Even the best-established churches often have closets full of junk—old trophies, dusty puppets, and binders of music from the 1970s. In severe cases the entire campus has not been touched in decades.

Technology outpaces staff. When a church has established patterns and rhythms, the temptation is to neglect technology. In a lot of churches, a decade can pass before it becomes necessary to adopt new technology. Unfortunately, by then it's often too late and staff are too far behind.

A church needing revitalization in one of these areas is not necessarily unhealthy. However, most established churches need help with at least one. When multiple areas of the church fall behind, the effects are compounded.

Three Catalysts for Change in Most Churches

The term “revitalize” has several implications, especially when applied to the church. The prefix implies a revitalized church is one that went through a cycle: vital, not vital, and vital again. This cycle demonstrates that the church had a period of stagnation or decline. It also means the church changed, if not to a great degree. This change means the church made a decision (most likely intentional) to get unstuck.

What if an established church is stuck now? What will help with future revitalization? Every church is a unique body in a unique context. However, established churches typically share three things: resources, stability, and member loyalty. While any number of changes may be needed for revitalization, leaders maximizing these three realities will have an easier road towards revitalization.

Resources. Most established churches have a building, land, and an established pattern of giving. Church planters dream of the day when these things are present in their churches. Good leaders leverage resources to achieve the goal of revitalization. Don't view the building as an obstacle; view it as an asset. It may need renovating, but at least it exists.

Stability. Established churches typically have people that operate in a routine. Leverage this routine. If possible, don't fight against the pattern in which people operate. Use the pattern and routine to maximize the effort of your congregation. Go with the flow as a leader because people are more likely to gradually shift direction than they are turn on a dime.

Member loyalty. We've all heard people say it: “I was here before you arrived, and I'll be here long after you leave.” You can view this statement negatively, assuming the person is obstinate. Or you can view the statement through the lens of loyalty. Assume the best of people, and they will be more likely to assume to best of your leadership. A poor leader defaults to negative assumptions. Good leaders default to positive assumptions.

Three Must Haves for Revitalization

Regardless of the amount of work required, whether it's one ministry area or the entire congregation, there are three must haves of every church revitalization. These three must haves apply to churches of any size or denominational background. Most churches will require more work beyond these three items, but the vast majority of revitalizations will include them.

Proper expectations. Congregants must have a realistic view of the future. The glory days may not return, at least in the way people remember them. Poor attitudes often arise when unrealistic expectations are present. One of the main responsibilities of those leading the revitalization effort is to align the expectations of the church with a realistic objective for the next five years

Outward focus. A stationary church is a disobedient church. No church can be revitalized without reclaiming an outward focus. An inward focus almost always produces disunity. An outward focus always produces unity. All successful church revitalizations involve an intentional, ongoing effort to reach and minister to those beyond the physical walls of the facility. In almost every case, the outward focus begins with the lead pastor. Evangelistic churches have evangelistic pastors.

Relational skills. Church revitalization often fails because the pastor has poor relational skills. The converse is true as well. Successful revitalization is often led by a church leader with good relational skills. Poor relational skills are driven by either an unwillingness to be held accountable or a lack of self-awareness, or both. A pastor lacking in relational skills will not foster the culture necessary for revitalization.

These three realities are the must haves of revitalization. Without them, revitalization efforts will likely fizzle.

Your Church Can Thrive Again

What year was your church founded? My church was born in 1957. What God began in 1957 off 43rd Street W in Bradenton, Florida is not supposed to stop until Christ returns. I believe the same for your church. What began in the year your church was founded should continue until the trumpet sounds. This conviction is driving the launch of Revitalize Network, a non-profit national organization I started with my father. We have the single purpose of revitalizing churches.

We are praying God begins a movement among stagnant and dying churches. What if half of the struggling churches in your community had a turnaround? Likely, it would produce an unstoppable gospel movement. When churches are revitalized, communities are revitalized.

No church should die. Any church can thrive again. Every church deserves the opportunity to be revitalized.



ACTIVATING CHURCHES IN TEXAS

Church planting and established churches, when healthy, have everything in common! That's been the biggest discovery as my focus has transitioned over the last four years from the world of established church to the world of church planting. I didn't see that coming. I always saw church planting as something else. Something foreign and mysterious. The reality is, both a church and a church plant must submit to the same head (Christ) and be about the same mission. They both are to make disciples by sharing Jesus within their culture, in this generation, and to equip them for the work of ministry. They must be taught to walk with God, function in the body, and be equipped and released to engage their relationships as missionaries. See, no difference!

The existing church gets in trouble when they get caught up in other agendas—or just get wrapped up

in their weekly, monthly, and annual schedule. They coast awhile until Christ's mission is no longer their central mission that permeates everything they do. This church is now sick. If it remains here, Christ will be dethroned, and death is coming. The beauty is, no church has to stay here or even get here. We serve the God of second chances...and third, fourth. He is the God of restoration, revival, and revitalization.

This is why I am passionate about Activate. This is why the Baptist Missionary Association (BMA) of Texas Missions helps fund Activate. This is why I'm an Activate huddle leader. This is why Activate is making a difference in the churches that are connected and walking faithfully through the system. It is only a tool, but a good tool that is friendly to BMA life and culture. Activate equips a pastor and church to step off the hamster wheel



BY: Heath Mitchell
BMA Texas
bmatexasmissions.org

of busy and really evaluate where they are. It helps them to reengage the Great Commission assignment in their community now.

I have witnessed the positive healthy effect of this on churches of all kinds. Urban and rural, large and small, and churches that are five years old and one hundred and fifty years old. Every church benefits when it takes occasional breaks from the work of ministry to work on their ministry engagement. We may want to argue that this isn't necessary, but we all will acknowledge the absurdity of driving while never looking up. We might get somewhere, while having accidents, but will it be the right somewhere. We only get one lifetime of service and we only get one chance to make disciples of this generation. We must be good stewards of the opportunity we have.

I know that many pastors are nervous of outside help. It does take faith and courage to admit that there's work to be done and then to lead in the process. Activate is not focused on style, methods, preferences, and taste. It focuses squarely on mission and the systems necessary for its implementation. Activate provides tools that empower the pastor and church to discover and lead out in the process. It is only as scary or as messy as anything worthwhile in the kingdom of God. We are called to messy ministry, right?

You may ask, "Why does an organization like BMA Texas Missions with the responsibility of church planting invest in church revitalization?"

Texas has had the long belief that in order to see a New Testament type multiplication movement of disciples, leaders, and churches in our state, that we will need "healthy pastors, leading healthy churches, who start healthy churches." Our BMA Texas Missions constitution mandates that we invest in the health of our family churches. This is one of the ways we are doing this. I also see Activate as a critical tool to help a supported church plant transition to self-sustainability. This is a dangerous time in the life of a young church. It feels like an arrival moment. It's easy for this church to climb on the hamster wheel at this moment and stop the missional things that have helped them get there. The reality is that we are always church planting or dying, right? Until now this church has been carried along by the vision and leadership of the planter. It is critical that the church now own that vision. Activate helps this young church set the course for their next five years together.

I encourage you to give Activate a try. You have nothing to lose. You will control content and pace. Level one is a blessing to everyone that engages it. You will get the interaction of others on the same journey through the Activate huddle. Everyone in the huddle where I am a part will testify that the huddle is enough reason to be in Activate. I encourage you to prayerfully consider. If you have disengaged, come back. Activate is alive, well, and better than ever!

Activate Helped My Church!

BY: Mike Book
Prospect Baptist Church
prospectbaptist.org

There is a fact upon which every member of every local church can agree: Jesus wants His local visible bodies of believers to be healthy. Jesus desires every local church to correct her weaknesses and improve her strengths. Jesus sent a message to seven of His local churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 for just that purpose: so they could be healthy. Jesus sent a message to each church individually because each church was unique. Some of the churches were commended and reprimanded; some were just commended; and others were only reprimanded. Each church's message addressed the specific needs for that church; however, each message ended with this same command, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

Without question, it is the desire of every pastor to hear what the Holy Spirit wants to say to the church where he gets to pastor. At Prospect Missionary Baptist Church in Jonesboro, Arkansas, where I am blessed to pastor, we have a great group of members who love Jesus and love each other. It's a great place to pastor and I'm thankful Jesus saw fit to bring us together. However, just like the churches in Revelation (and yours too), we have a desperate need to "hear what the Spirit is saying..." to our church so we can correct our weaknesses and improve our strengths.

A few years ago, we came to understand that Prospect needed to become healthier. With unity and harmony, we had come through the process of selling a former building and property as well as a year-long transition to a new location and a new building, a blessing for which I will forever be grateful. However, after moving into the new building, we had become "comfortable." And while

"comfortable" IS comfortable, it doesn't lead to being healthy; it leads to being stagnant. We strived to "hear what the Spirit was saying," and it was to the end of becoming healthy that the Spirit led us to become involved with Activate.

Through tools and guidance provided by Activate, we assembled an Activate Team and began the process of doing a "check-up" on the health of Prospect. Our Activate Team consists of husband and wife pairs that are from a cross-section of Prospect's members. One couple has been at Prospect since the sixties, another since the seventies, while other couples on the team have been at Prospect only a few years. We felt this makeup would give the Activate Team a good representation of the overall body of believers in the church; plus the couples would be able to continue discussion and prayer about the Activate Team's current focus long after the meetings were over.

The initial focus of our Activate Team was dealing with change—not quarters and dimes (I'm sure we can all count money) but dealing with the changing circumstances life puts upon us. It was helpful that we had already come through much change with moving into a new place; but we still spent productive time reading articles and books about change and the need to change such as *Who Moved My Cheese* by Spencer Johnson as well as *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* by Thom Rainer. These articles and books helped our team understand the necessity for change even though change is uncomfortable.

Understanding the necessity of change is good; understanding what needs to be changed is essential. Our next step at Prospect was to come to grips with where we were as a church. As the Activate

ministry helped us to word it: What was Prospect's present reality? Activate helped us by providing access to the online Transformational Church Survey which enabled the members and regular attenders of Prospect to give their perspective on key components of Prospect such as prayer, worship, leadership, discipleship, and other vital components. We received detailed feedback from this survey which enabled us to identify some key weaknesses and strengths of Prospect.


Our Activate Team then examined the results and came to a conclusion: Prospect was reclining. Activate helped us to understand that a church is either inclining (moving up), reclining (staying the same), or declining (moving down). Our team determined Prospect was kicked back in the "recliner" and we were way too comfortable. Our Activate Team put together a presentation which we made to the church. This presentation celebrated our strengths from the survey, pointed out our weaknesses as indicated by the survey, and shared our current reality: we were reclined and needed to "put down the foot rest" and get to work.

Our Prospect team has since continued in our own way and at our own pace to pursue our preferred future. This one aspect of Activate of going our way and at our pace has greatly impressed us at Prospect and has gone a long way toward helping us become involved and stay involved in Activate. The Activate Team—Director of Church Solutions, Brother Larry Barker, and Pastor Advocate, Heidi Sorrells—at no time throughout this process has said to our church "this is what you **must** do." Instead the Activate Team has consistently said, "here are some things you **can** do and we are here to help." Prospect is currently exploring and establishing clear, core values, building systems that enable us to effectively function as a church; and, Lord willing, soon we will be completing multi-year plans that enable us to move from reclining to inclining, from being comfortably still in Jesus to being passionately moving with Jesus. We are looking forward to taking this journey with the Holy Spirit leading us and the Activate Team helping us every step of the way.

Activate also leads churches to be healthy by helping pastors to be healthy. A healthy pastor goes a long way toward making a healthy church.

Activate helps pastors be healthy by providing them an opportunity to participate in a Pastors' Huddle. The Pastors' Huddle I am part of began with two other pastors and myself meeting together with a mentor via a video link. However, after a few course corrections, we began having a Pastors' Huddle that typically meets monthly at different churches in Jonesboro. No two huddles will be the same, and ours may be different than most. We discuss some Activate topics; but mainly we meet to support each other as we pastor where Jesus has put us. Our huddle read a book together dealing with issues in ministry entitled *Dangerous Calling* by Paul David Tripp and discussed a chapter each time we met. We also watched sessions of Adrian Rogers' Pastors Institute to help us grow as husbands, fathers, and pastors. The books and videos may be unique for our huddle, but it was what we needed at the time—and I would encourage every huddle to have "an ear to hear what the Spirit says..." and make the huddle work to meet the needs of your specific huddle.

With the risk of being repetitive, I must say again that Activate has helped us at Prospect to see a clear path toward becoming a healthier church. Many churches are in the same place as Prospect: healthy improvement is needed but the pathway to that healthy future is not clear. The amount of church growth, church improvement, and church revitalization information available is abundant. A Google search for "church growth" returns 272 million hits, "church improvement" returns 204 million hits, and "church revitalization" returns over 6 million hits. This avalanche of information can be overwhelming; and it is difficult to know what is biblical or simply the latest fad. Activate has removed the overwhelming part by putting biblical, practical, and understandable truths into our hands. We need to "...hear what the Spirit says to the churches," and I believe one way the Spirit has spoken is by equipping and providing Activate to work alongside the Spirit to give hope and help to the churches of the Baptist Missionary Association (BMA) of America to become healthy servants of Jesus Christ. Call or email Heidi Sorrells. Get involved. Get Healthy. Do it for your church. Do it for Jesus. He is coming soon.



Church fundamentals and motorcycle basics are essentially the same thing. A friend encouraged me to take a motorcycle class when I bought my first bike. Learn from an expert, he said. My friend could teach me what he knew, but I would also be learning his bad habits. Starting with the correct fundamentals was a better choice.

When I surrendered to the ministry 17 years ago, my church ordained me, put a Nelson Study Bible in my hands, and told me to “preach the word.” I had graduated with a Graphic Design degree from Arkansas State University the year before, but the only Bible school that was to be in my future lasted for a week each summer and included crafts and costumes. Over the years, I’ve read books, sat in seminars, and talked to a lot of preachers. I have learned a lot of really helpful things, but also a few bad habits.

It’s a challenge to be a bi-vocational pastor during even ideal circumstances. I have always felt, and still feel, called to bi-vocational ministry. I knew that meant we would need serious help when God began calling our family to plant a church. Formal ministry training still doesn’t seem to be in my future, so we began by checking with people we knew who had planted a church.

First, we talked to Paul White. Paul is a friend who successfully planted a church in Highland, Arkansas, and is also the Arkansas Missions Director for the Baptist Missionary Association (BMA) of America. He gave us advice, prayed with us, and told us the BMA work had resources that might help us.

Next, we spoke with Anders Lee. Anders was the camp evangelist who had preached the night God confirmed in my heart and my wife’s heart that we were to plant a church. He invited us to visit his church plant in Southaven, Mississippi. The day we visited, Larry Barker was there. I shared our calling. We talked about systems, processes, tools, and resources. I didn’t realize it then, but that was our first introduction to Activate.

God galvanized the church-plant calling in my heart after a few more weeks of prayer. I had never planted a church or been part of a mission plant. I didn’t know where to start. Then Larry Barker and Heidi Sorrells stepped in with Activate. The material has been helpful; and one of my favorite aspects of the Activate training is the flexible schedule. Much of

BY: John Travis
Discover Church
discovermychurch.com

MOTORCYCLE & ACTIVATE

what we do in the BMA is organized around a full-time pastor's schedule. In my 17 years of ministry, I've never attended a BMA National or State meeting. I only get two weeks of vacation each year. I use one for church camp and the other for preaching funerals, personal business, and family time.

Most of Activate consists of online videos and accompanying material emailed from Heidi Sorrells. We've been able to work it around our work, church, and family commitments. Larry has organized meetings on a Friday evening/Saturday morning time frame, has driven to Jonesboro to meet with a group of us pastors after work, and has even video-conferenced with us. It is the most readily-available training in the BMA.

Our pastors' huddle has been a huge source of encouragement and support for us. It really is a true statement that no one except a pastor understands what it's like to be a pastor. Having a group of pastor-brothers with whom to share, pray, study, seek advice, and draw accountability is invaluable. It has been a game-changer for me.

Where did we go from there? Larry and Heidi suggested we start with Activate's prayer system. After working through it, we're grateful for their advice. Our prayer retreat was spiritually refreshing and set the stage for the rest of the material. Since then we have settled on our vision of "helping people find and follow Jesus." We've also developed our core values and a plan for personal Bible study. There's a plan for evangelism everyone can easily do and a method of one-on-one discipleship. We still have a lot to figure out, but we believe we already have a great start and a solid foundation.

Motorcycle classes might be a waste of time for you but Activate can help any church get back to the fundamentals.

WE NEED TO CHANGE, BUT NOT JUST YET

I walked out in shock. We had just had “that” conference. After two years as the bi-vocational pastor, our sweet and caring church had just erupted. We were making some adjustments to reach our community and fear took over. The most shocking comment of the night was, “I know we will need to change eventually, but just not yet.” To me, we were in a moment of crisis. As I looked ahead ten, fifteen, and twenty years, I began to see that if nothing changed, there was a high probability we wouldn’t be alive as we continued aging and continued failing to reach a new generation.

I first discovered Craft Baptist Church in ‘86 as a freshman at JBC. In the late ‘80’s, we were a vibrant church that reached all generations. Records show we were averaging over 100 in Sunday School and in the early ‘90’s we were close to 200.

Nearly thirty years went by as I served on staff at various churches. In 2014, after a message on LinkedIn, I learned that Craft was looking for a bi-vocational pastor. I replied that I was bi-vocational; and I was soon called as pastor.

I had slipped into bi-vocational ministry out of necessity at a former church. Since then, I have embraced it. Yes, there are many complications as my



time is divided between my family, ministry, and career. However, the blessings of being bi-vocational are also abundant. I have a natural way to make relationships in the community and the church readily does the work of the ministry. As a teacher, I have a greater

understanding of our community and its challenges.

The members were as caring as I remembered, and the building had been remodeled. However, there were less than fifty on most Sundays. In 30 years, we had half the attendance and were no longer a multi-generational

church. After the meeting I mentioned, I knew we needed help.

One month later, a deacon and I attended to a breakout session at the Baptist Missionary Association (BMA) of Texas state meeting. This breakout session was all about Activate. We knew we needed revitalization. We formed a team of members representing a cross-section of the church. They are invested in the process and all have a heart to see us return to health and growth.

The Activate process has been a perfect fit for our church. The flexible timeline guides us as we evaluate and plan while allowing us to move at our own pace. We have taken an honest look at where we are and what brought us here. We examined the events of the last thirty years of decline. We are hopeful as we

now begin to look to the future of our church. Our mistake before was focusing on what we thought needed to change. Now we are looking at why we need to change. This renewed focus on the Great Commission is leading us to be healthier.

Being bi-vocational, it is difficult to find time to fellowship with other pastors and continue to grow in ministry. This often leads to isolation. The pastors' huddle addresses this for all pastors. My huddle has been good to work around my schedule and Brother Larry has even met with me at an alternative time when necessary. Activate encouraged me to make fellowship with other pastors a priority. It has been a blessing to no longer feel like I'm alone.

I highly recommend that every church take the time to go through Activate. Bi-vocational

ministries can be especially helped from this process as it lifts our focus to farther down the road past the immediate needs pressing upon us.

I do not know what God has planned for us. Thankfully, we have already seen a renewed energy and effort from the church and have added new families. Whether we turn around and again incline or continue to decline is ultimately in the hands of the Lord. However, we want to be faithful. We can't just sit in comfort and watch things fade away while our community is filled with people who need the Lord. It is my prayer that all BMA churches be healthy and reach a new generation for Christ. We cannot sit still and expect something to happen. We must follow the Lord's commands and return to His stated goals for the churches.



The Activate process has been a perfect fit for our church.

BY: James Dorman
Craft Baptist Church
craftjacksonville.com



Craving Spiritual Health

I am a brand-new pastor! After just over twenty years in ministry, I can now introduce myself as the pastor of Antioch West Baptist Church. I'm loving every minute of it! But as I prepare to celebrate my first anniversary as "pastor," I must acknowledge that I need some help. I know I am not alone in that. Most churches can testify of times when attendance was up, ministries were growing, and more members were serving Christ. We find today that many churches are shrinking, as is their effectiveness in spreading the gospel. We know something must be done. Something must change. I believe the change we are looking for comes through spiritually healthy pastors who grow and thrive in their relationship with Christ; through robust preaching and teaching that digs deep into sound doctrine; and through strong churches that know, love, and serve Christ well. I am thankful that we

have resources within our association that aid us in developing these three qualities. Among these resources, Activate is available to help pastors and churches in their pursuit of spiritual health.

I've tried in the past to mimic other churches, only to find their style didn't work in the context of my church and community. I am tired of jumping on board the latest ministry gimmick bandwagon. I crave something genuine; I want true spiritual health, depth, and growth. Healthy living things grow in healthy ways, but I have a hard time determining the health of my church. I know their love astounds me on a regular basis, but I lack the tools to observe the "bigger picture" of church health. A first step in Activate is to utilize a series of assessments that help me know myself, my church, and my community better. Having that kind of information, my church can create our own

unique plan for our unique context. Our association rightfully upholds the autonomy of the local church. Activate comes alongside the local church to help us evaluate ourselves and our ministries, allowing us to determine the direction the Holy Spirit is moving us.

The BMA's strength is found in the way we choose to associate. Each autonomous church contributes to others in ways that make us stronger as a whole. One of the greatest strengths of Activate is the Pastors' Huddle. In the Pastors' Huddle there is opportunity to share victories and struggles, to encourage, and to be encouraged. Other pastors understand the challenges I face better than many church members. I've spent too much time playing the "Lone Ranger" of ministry, with too few men for me to lean on when the stress of that ministry threatened to overwhelm me. There is currently no Pastors' Huddle in Magnolia, but praise God I have

found a network of godly men I meet with regularly. These are the men with whom I can be real. I share my joys and sorrows with them, and they strengthen and encourage me. I am a better pastor because of them. I fear that many of my brothers in ministry do not have this kind of network in their lives. I have experienced how easy it is to become spiritually stagnant when you have very few people investing in your health. Once you are stagnant, what can you invest in others? If we are to grow in health, we are going to do it together.

I hope to lead my church to start Activate in the near future. I wanted to devote the first year to building relationships with my new church family; but I've had a desire to be involved in Activate for several years now. Many obstacles that prevented me from being involved have now disappeared, but the drive to the nearest Pastors' Huddle in my area is still a barrier to me. Time is a precious commodity

and we need more pastors willing to step into fellowship and community with each other in the towns and cities where they reside. I believe there are others in our association who would lead in cultivating these relationships. I would love to see new networks of ministers and churches built to encourage one another. I desire to grow in health. I insist on having a healthy pulpit. I crave a healthy, growing church. I believe these will lead to a truly healthy association. Will you join me?



BY: Aaron Middleton
Antioch West Baptist Church
awbcmagnolia.com

BiVocational Activate

BY: Steven Gunter
Rolling Hills Baptist Church
rollinghillsbaptistchurch.com

As the first bi-vocational pastor at our church in decades, it is often difficult to balance all that is required to provide full ministry to our congregation. The deeper I get into pastoral ministry, the more I realize how much I *don't* know and *do* need guidance. What I appreciate the most about Activate is that it centers on church health, biblical mission and values, and real collaboration. As a Baptist Missionary Association (BMA) church in Florida, we do not have many local churches with which to partner. Activate has allowed me to virtually collaborate with BMA pastors from all over who are going through the process. Through the program, we have been blessed to have developed a friendship

with Larry Barker, who has personally guided our congregation and Activate team. He has visited our church multiple times and has taught the leadership and congregation about the principles of a healthy church. The care we have received has been extraordinary and has shown our congregation that there are people rooting for our success, even from afar.

Since every congregation and church is different, Activate provides movement at the pace of the leadership team and the congregation. If there is a season of busyness, Activate allows you to slow down until you and the congregation are ready to move forward. If there is a specific area in your church that needs immediate attention

(e.g. first impressions), there are resources available to help guide that process from “the why” to the implementation. Activate is not just theoretical, it is practical and applicable for every church size. While it is best to go through the levels in order, you have the resources to jump ahead if the need arises. New levels and information are added consistently for the benefit of the churches.

Activate has helped Rolling Hills Baptist thus far primarily in the areas of ministry focus, awareness, and encouragement. It has helped us “own” our current status. The honesty of where our church is combined with the encouragement and vision of what it can be has been very beneficial. Activate does not give a “template” to change one or two things about the church with the promise of growth; instead it works from the inside out to empower the leadership and congregation to focus on what

is important—spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to our communities.

All pastors, if they are honest, would say they desire their church to grow and flourish not only numerically but also in health and mission. Activate will help guide this good desire in a Biblical way. I hope that all our churches and pastors will at least investigate Activate. Whether your church is a new plant or an established church, each church has areas that need work. Best of all the Activate program and its resources are free. Any specialized tools that have a cost are from Activate resource partners like LifeWay, and the cost is low enough that every church can invest in them. Activate is not a silver bullet, but it is a tremendous guide and gift to help your church and congregation move forward in the gospel.



Larry Barker, Activate



HELP IS ON THE WAY!

When I think about Activate, I am in awe of how God has moved and continues to move! When I started working with the Activate ministry in 2015, I didn't know the history of the Baptist Missionary Association (BMA), most pastors' names, or who was related to whom. Can you believe I didn't know who Jerry Kidd was? Somehow, God was able to use what I didn't have or didn't know to bring a refreshing newness to everything. Every pastor and church was framed by what God could do in them and through them. Nothing was stale or old. I found delight in learning who someone was and hearing their story. It was a privilege not only to begin working with Activate, but also to be on an Activate Team at an early pilot church. This gave me a new depth of insight I'm thankful to have in my current role as Pastor Advocate.

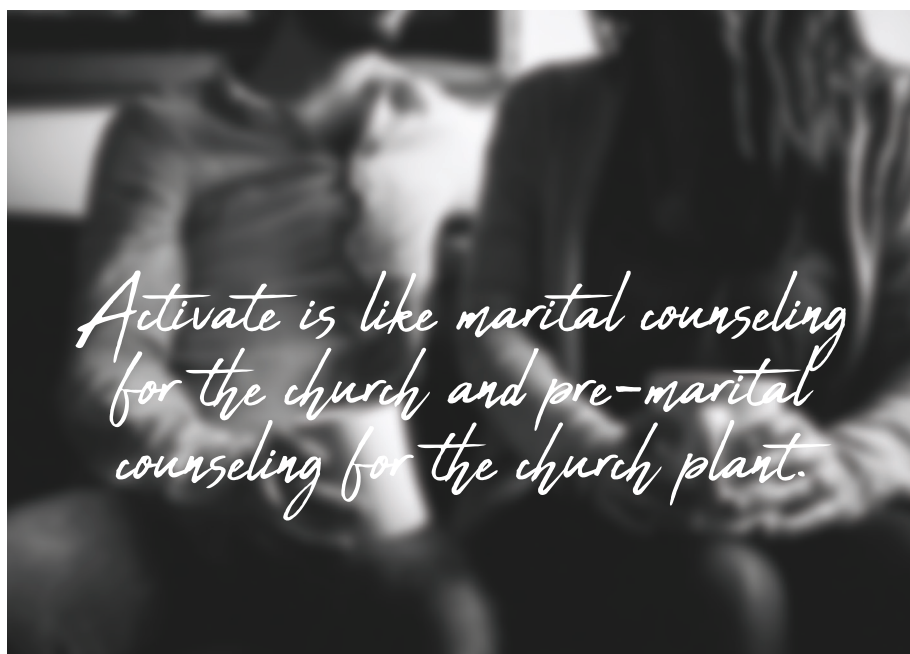
Although church decline is sometimes obvious, it is often hard to recognize. It can come disguised in quality programs and new additions, in filled seats and good preaching. Just as concerning, pastors are wearing thin and struggling to balance the demands of ministry, family, and sometimes full-time jobs. To those of us listening, there's a rumble of distress among pastors, a crying out for God to help in stuck places; there is also an uncertainty about where to start or what resources to use. I'm thankful to BMA leaders who saw this growing need; stepped up to take away some of the guesswork; provided a biblical place to start; and gave instruction to help pastors build a team with which to start and discover alongside.

We see pastors sacrificing to seek God's vision for their church. One pastor put retirement on hold and committed three years

BY: Heidi Sorrells
BMA Missions
bmamissions.org

to the Activate journey, believing in God for answers and next steps. That church is now unified as a body and sold out to the new vision God has given them. We hear about hard changes that turned out to reap amazing blessings, people stepping up to lead like never before, churches forming new discipleship initiatives, pastors opening up to other pastors about struggles, and outreach efforts being done with collectively changed hearts. Some of these faith stories include our Activate huddle leaders who are our heroes. They take time from their already busy pastor schedules to facilitate a regional or online pastor huddle for prayer, sharpening, and discipling. These huddles are open to pastors who aren't BMA affiliated, and we pray they will become a bridge to our association.

It shouldn't come as a surprise that this ministry has been targeted by the enemy. There have been obstacles along the way including serious health battles, lack of financial support, minimal man-power, changes in staffing, and heavy temptation to overload and out-pace ourselves. I joke sometimes that we just keep rowing the boat. In truth, God has kept this little ministry going in His goodness, for His purposes, even in the middle of seasons where we were still figuring things out or didn't know what the future would hold. It's been humbling to sit in acknowledgment that we've had deficits, that there were times when we got stuck and couldn't



deliver the next thing we'd been praying about, or that we tried something that didn't work. Ironically, God is helping us take Activate through Activate. We've gathered pastors, directors, and huddle leaders and have received feedback to evaluate our present reality. We've celebrated victories and given praise to the Lord. We've bent our knees, gotten real about our failures, and said so. We've re-visited God's vision for the ministry; and we've made sure that our values reflect greater humility, more balance, and a true heart of love for every single pastor and every single church that might seek resourcing. We never want to stop learning and applying God's wisdom.

As Pastor Advocate, my role is to listen to the needs of BMA pastors and churches, to coach through Activate materials, and to speak on their behalf. If we can help with an area of resourcing we don't currently have available, we want to know. We're mindful

of pastors and understand a bi-vocational pastor will have a different schedule and challenges. We recognize pastors know their church and community best and we give them freedom to adapt Activate tools to fit their environment. We encourage pastors to start with our prayer trainings believing prayer-positioned churches will make change that is Holy Spirit led.

Activate is like marital counseling for the church and pre-marital counseling for the church plant. It's a ministry using biblical tools to help discern what steps need to be taken for the relationship between Christ and His bride to be healthy and flourishing, whether brand new, or long into the journey. Activate doesn't pretend to have all the answers, but points to a God who does. Let's be a people that are humble about doing whatever it takes to be the bride we're called to be.



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BY: Clinton Everitt
Beacon Baptist Church
beaconbryan.com

FIRST STEP: ADMIT YOU NEED SOME HELP!

Church health is linked to pastoral health. If you're looking for a reason our churches are in decline or stagnate could it be because our pastors are too? We should acknowledge that most pastors in the Baptist Missionary Association (BMA) labor for their churches alone and for the most part in anonymity. In many churches, the pastor may be the only paid (full-time or part-time) ministry staff. For those without office help, they may be the only staff. This means there's no one with whom to work, bounce

ideas, share the load, or laugh/cry. Certainly there's no one besides his wife who knows firsthand what the pastor is facing on a daily basis both inside and outside the congregation; and who understands what the pastor is ultimately trying to achieve in the congregation? So where does the man of God turn when he needs someone to "spur" him on to love and good works?

From the context of the above reference one would think the church—but every pastor knows that's a dicey proposition. The

relationship between pastor and congregation is a paradox wrapped in an enigma. For example, the pastor is both elder and supervisor. Yet if he is the only full or part-time staff, he does none of the hiring and firing. The congregation does that, primarily in regard to him. These sheep he has been given charge to lead and feed can at any business meeting turn on their shepherd making short work of him and his family. No, that is not the place to go. But the need persists.

Perhaps the hardest thing for me and other pastors to admit is that we **need** something or someone outside ourselves to make it in ministry. I need close companions or friends who are pastors. I need someone who understands where I am because they are there too. Currently I'm blessed to have at least three individuals without whom I would be so much less. I eat lunch with one of them every few weeks and I never cease to be amazed at how much he remembers of Church History. But what I most enjoy and appreciate about him is that it is safe for me to challenge, question, or grow my understanding of even our most fundamental doctrines. By reminding me of a verse I've either overlooked or misunderstood, or by directing me to a trusted author (even one who writes fairly for the other side), he helps me find my way back to orthodoxy. The point is, who would I have told after thirty years removed from Bible college that I still don't get ___? My second pastoral companion calls me or drops by my office from time to time and is a wealth of encouragement and experience. Constantly giving me books from his library or old sermon series he developed years ago, he shares and pours himself into me. The first budget I presented to our church as a rookie pastor followed one he pulled from his file cabinet used by him years before in a church similar to mine.

From these friends in ministry I have two other needs met:



Clinton and his wife, T'Shana

encouragement and consolation. I'm reminded of the numerous times God told Joshua to fear not and to be of good courage. We're not told much about the relationship between Joshua and Caleb, but I think it's safe to say they shared much more in leadership between them than being the only two octogenarians among the tribes of Israel. When I'm lacking courage to face a difficult decision or when I need a push to follow through on a plan, these guys are where I turn. They're also there to console me as only one who has experienced the same hurts or has suffered the same setbacks can. There are so many aspects of ministry that are unknown and perhaps can't be known by a layman. Add to that there are so few people to whom a pastor can fully disclose the personal stress and strain of ministry. Even writing this I've had to edit and omit much of what was in my heart because of how it could be perceived by any number of people.

I'm sad to say that none of the friends I reference above pastor in my local association. This is not to say anything against my local association pastors;

they are all fine men and good pastors. Whether it's because we meet so infrequently, the distance between our churches, or the differences in the local contexts in which we serve, most have never crossed the line to genuine friendship. Because little relational communities take time to build, I'm encouraged to see the Baptist Missionary Association (BMA) of America, through the Activate program, make an intentional effort to encourage pastors to forge these types of friendships through Pastors' Huddles. Huddles are an integral part of the success of any church attempting to revitalize and rekindle the flame to fulfill the Great Commission. In fact, without the encouragement, insight, and support of my online Activate Huddle, especially during the first year of the process, we wouldn't have made it to the second phase. It's heartening that Activate is continuing to pursue avenues to provide resources for pastors that foster the encouragement all of us need.



Are **We Doing** What God Has **Called Us** To Do?

How does Activate help a church plant or a young church? I've been asked that many times. A church plants starts from God's calling into the lives of a church planter and the church plant team. When you start a church you study, pray, plan, and try to implement a church that is based on God's direction through Scripture. One thing that I've learned over and over is the vision that God has given me needs to be shared with our church. Many people look only at the church as a building or place they go to on a Sunday and Wednesday. I've learned that our congregation needs to feel ownership of

the church and the vision, and this is something Activate encourages. It's God's church, but God has called each of us to our particular church for a particular role.

As a pastor, I wanted our church members to feel the passion for our church that God had placed in my life. I wanted them to miss people when they were gone and to yearn for outsiders to be welcomed into our church. I wanted them to see people that were dying and going to hell find and experience the love of Christ. Simply put, I didn't want to be just another church that was not impacting lives



BY: Darren Lemons
The Refuge Church
gototherefuge.com

with the gospel. Driven by these convictions and concerns we decided to start Activate; and it has helped us look at our strengths and weaknesses as a church. Evaluation is something from which any church plant or young church can benefit. Through the Activate process we were able to go through our brief history and celebrate great seasons of ministry together, as well as mourn times that were not as fruitful. We were able to revisit our core beliefs and our vision. We started looking at our systems (or the ministries) at our church. Many people will not lead until they see the need. As God led us to evaluate, our people saw both the needs we had and the God-given gifts they possessed that could be used to help the church. They started leading. All these things we did had an impact, and could potentially help fortify a young church or build a healthy biblical foundation for a church plant.

Last year was tough! Our church was moving forward when our entire building got hit with a flood. We lost all our seating and carpet, and walls were cut out, as well as many other things. We were displaced from our building for two months. For

the most part ministry ceased, even though we continued to gather. When we got back into our building everyone was excited, but we had some new problems. We had stopped making disciples and our Activate team had not been meeting. The Activate team is the catalyst for spreading vision, evaluating, and implementing effective ministry.

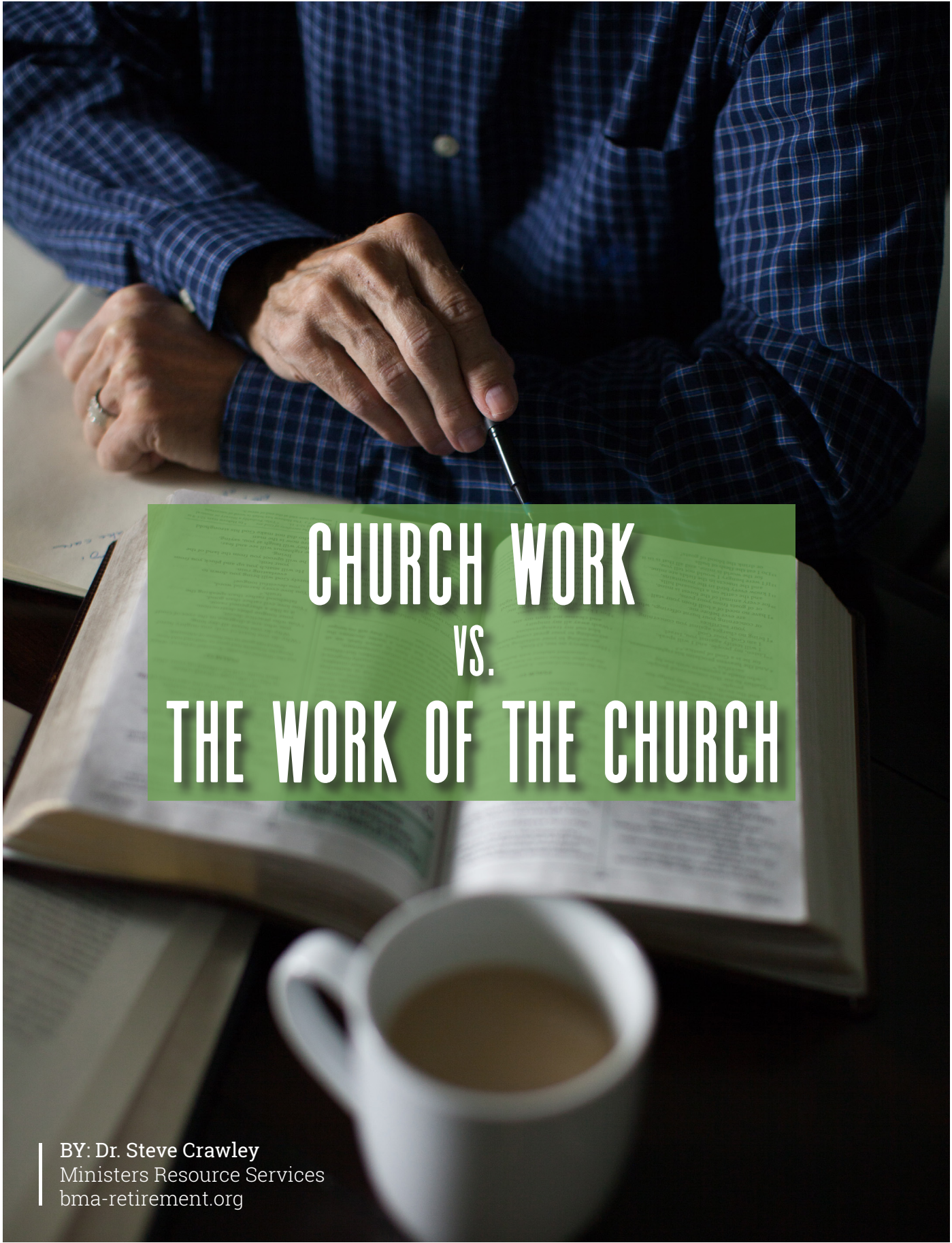
People lost their passion for the lost and their desire to do the best that God had called us to do. We also lost an amazing couple that led ministry in many ways for our church. Over Christmas, I evaluated the past year and realized that the one thing that hurt us most was that we stopped meeting with our Activate team. This affected our ministries, developing leaders, and true discipleship. Often, we get so busy doing ministry that we never take a step back and ask the questions, “Are we doing what God wants us to do? Is there a way to do this that

will impact the kingdom greater? Where should we be spending our time, money, and energy that is most beneficial to reach the lost?” I was guilty of doing ministry and not asking

This year we’ve started a **new Activate team**, people have **renewed excitement**, and they’re stepping up to **new leadership** roles.

these questions. Activate made us take a hard look at what we do and made us ask questions that will forever impact our church.

This year we’ve started a new Activate team, people have renewed excitement, and they’re stepping up to new leadership roles. We’re in a season of further evaluating our systems through Activate trainings and resources. We’ve recently evaluated discipleship and we’re implementing new ways to share the gospel. We’ve also looked at our prayer system and are formulating new prayer teams. There is still much to do but we’re doing it together as a congregation through prayer, examination, and biblical tools.



CHURCH WORK
VS.
THE WORK OF THE CHURCH

BY: Dr. Steve Crawley
Ministers Resource Services
bma-retirement.org

In 1949, Billy Graham preached his first crusade in Los Angeles. Originally scheduled for just three weeks, the tremendous response led to an eight-week revival meeting. Yet, Graham was not without his critics. Purportedly, one fellow evangelist accused Graham of setting religion back 100 years. Graham responded, “I did indeed want to set religion back, not just 100 years but 1,900 years to the book of Acts, when first-century followers of Christ were accused of turning the Roman Empire upside down.” How did the early church make such an impact on the world? According to Acts 5:42, “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”

Years ago, well-known and beloved Baptist Missionary Association (BMA) evangelist Harold Leytham shared about taking his son to fish on a pier in Mobile Bay. An African American man had taken his sons fishing at the pier as well, and Brother Leytham and the man struck up a conversation. After learning that Brother Leytham was in the ministry, the gentleman said, “Preacher, you know there are a lot of people in the congregation doing church work, but there are not many doing the work of the church!” This piercing indictment likely rings true in our day even more than then. What is the difference between church work and the work of the church?

Church work can take on many forms from administration to recreation and all in between. Without doubt, church work is important. Many believers are spiritually gifted and equipped to perform various services for the church, and we should express appreciation and gratitude for their service. Many serve behind the scenes unobserved by the common member; but if their services were not performed, the congregation would surely notice. Yet, as important as service work is for the body of Christ, it is not sufficient

alone; its purpose is to augment the work of the church. And the work of the church in its most succinct form is to bring glory to God and make disciples. If our focus is on church work versus the work of the church, we are only a couple of generations away from an empty church building.

In their book *The Trellis and the Vine*, Marshall and Payne use an analogy that illustrates this point quite well. A trellis is built for the sole purpose of growing the vine. A trellis without a vine is of little value. In a spiritual context, the trellis is church work and the vine is the work of the church. A poignant question for church leaders is to determine where this localized organization we call an organism maintains its focus. If we are to see revival in our land, we, like the disciples in the first century, must prioritize what’s most important. We must put first things first. In essence, we must strive to focus on growing the vine over maintaining the trellis.

While the church is blessed with many members wielding various gifts, every member should be encouraged to engage in the ministry of reconciliation. Certainly, methods change; however, our mission, that is the work of the church, is the same today as it was 2,000 years ago. As we look ahead in coming years seeking to revitalize our churches in North America, perhaps we should take a quick glance at the rear-view mirror and remember how the first century church exploded when its members went door to door doing the work of the church. May our prayer today be that God would convict us as leaders to focus on training our sheep to reproduce sheep. May our prayer as church members be to faithfully serve our local body using our spiritual gifts doing church work. More importantly may we pray that God will enable us daily to speak His word with boldness and do our part in fulfilling the work of the church.

The Sufficiency of God's Word!

BY: Dr. Charley Holmes
BMA Theological Seminary
bmats.edu

Consider the following hypothetical: How would you react if our Moral Action Agency, under Dr. John Adams, held a conference on family life using your offerings and invited a homosexual Anglican priest to be a key note speaker? How would you feel if Dr. Adams used your offerings to sponsor a conference to specifically raise money for scholarships based on racial preferences? How would you like Dr. John David Smith to include two Roman Catholic politicians as guest speakers in a missions conference? Would you be alarmed if the president of our national association, Brother Jeff Swart, began granting women the privilege to preach at his church and encouraged other churches to follow his example? What would be your reaction if he told our churches that they were in sin because they do not allow the practice of charismatic ecstatic speech? How would you feel if he dismissed Sunday services on New Year's Day because they were exhausted from producing a gigantic Christmas program the week before?

Thankfully, the preceding things did **not** happen in our association, but unfortunately, they did in another large group of Baptists. These kinds of things happen when you abandon the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. The Baptist Missionary Association (BMA) of America Doctrinal Statement includes the following:

II. THE SCRIPTURES

A. The Scriptures are God's inerrant revelation, complete in the Old and New Testaments, written by divinely inspired men as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (II Tim. 3:16; II Peter 1:21). Those men wrote not in words of human wisdom but in words taught by the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 2:13).

B. The Scriptures provide the standard for the believer's faith and practice (II Tim. 3:16, 17), reveal the principles by which God will judge all (Heb. 4:12; John 12:48), and express the true basis of Christian fellowship (Gal. 1:8, 9; II John 9-11).

Item A clearly states the principle of the inerrancy of Scripture with which most Baptists will agree. Item B states the theological consequence that the perfect, unerring Scripture regulates what we believe and how we live.

2 Timothy 3:15-17: ¹⁵ And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: ¹⁷ That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Verse 15 tells us the Scriptures are the means of our conversion. Verse 16 tells us that they expose wrong, explain what is right, and encourage us to act on them in an unerring manor. Verse 17 explains that, additionally, they give the elders everything they need to lead their church in worship and service to God.

The words *perfect/complete* and *all* are all-encompassing for the life of the church. We only do what the Scriptures command or logically and forcefully imply, and/or of which we are given a clear example. A specific application is that churches are autonomous in their authority to call and ordain pastors and deacons, accept and/or exclude members, practice the ordinances, and conduct worship without interference from the state or false ecclesiastical hierarchies.

Another application is in the area of autonomous churches fellowshiping and working with other scriptural churches. A few examples of churches working together, advising one another, providing benevolence when a church was in need, and jointly commissioning workers are provided in Acts 13:2-3, Romans 15:26, and II Corinthians 8:1-4.

BMA churches direct our association of churches; the association does not direct the churches (see *Autonomous but not Alone* part 1 in the March/April 2019 issue of *Mission:World*). We must be content not to go above what is written in I Corinthians 4. When we do so by mimicking and adopting secular or civic business jargon, planning models and structures, we question our own doctrinal statement on the sufficiency of Scripture. The illustrations mentioned in the opening paragraph are examples of where men and churches go when you go "beyond" the Scriptures—thinking that they are not sufficient to make leaders thoroughly equipped for every task in the churches. The practice of going "beyond" questions the wisdom of Christ—implying that He did not know what we would need to worship and serve Him properly until His return.

Deuteronomy 12—You didn't say I could not do it

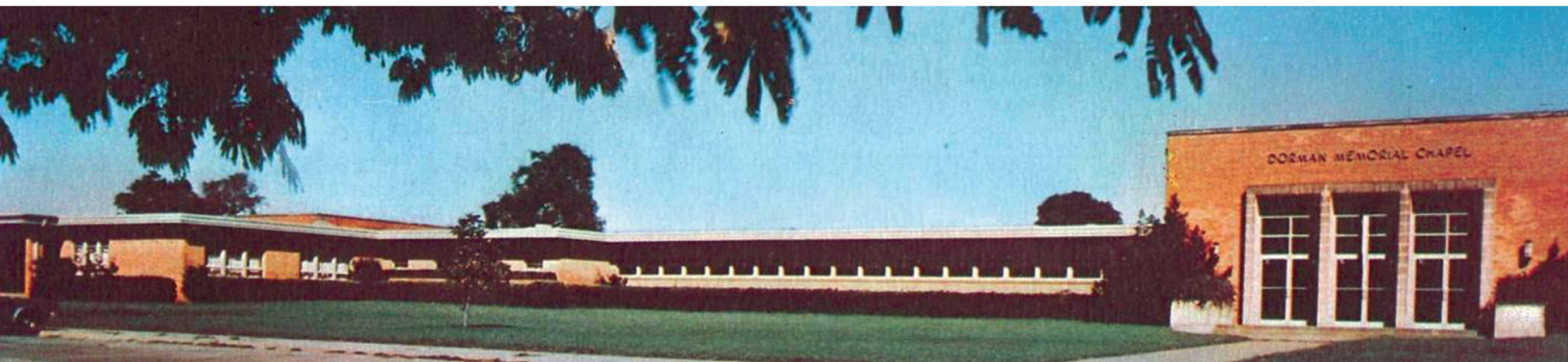
The alternative to accepting the sufficiency of the Scripture is the thinking of Catholics and Anglicans. They believe the doctrine that in matters of belief and practice, whatever is not specifically forbidden is allowable and that they are free to make up rituals and practices that are authoritative for their “churches.” Deuteronomy 12:29-32 describes the alternative philosophy of looking beyond God’s will as revealed by Himself. Deuteronomy is literally the second giving of the law. Students of the Bible know how miserably the Israelites failed after the first giving of the law recorded in Exodus. In Deuteronomy they are about to get their second chance after wandering in the wilderness for forty years. A superficial reading of the passage can lead to thinking that this is merely a repetition of the command not to worship other gods. A close reading reveals the real issue: observing the “way” they practice their pagan religion and transposing their practices onto the practices of true religion.

The specific command in verse 32 is frequently and broadly applied to adding to or taking away God’s words. While this is true, the specific application is in the area of serving God in a formal way. Similarly, we should not observe how the world worships their idols of entertainment, sports, politics, and business and impose their philosophies and practices on God’s people today.

If we need to see an illustration of the seriousness of going “beyond” what is written, all that is needed is to read the first two verses of Leviticus 10. The previous two chapters recorded the experiences of following God’s instructions for serving Him. When they organized, performed, and executed the service of God as He commanded, God made His presence known in a distinctly impressive manner. He displayed His approval and acceptance of the offering by consuming it with fire. At the beginning of chapter 10, we see the opposite. Two of Aaron’s sons decided to serve God with “strange” fire. The end of verse one defines what “strange” meant in Old English—religious service which was not specifically commanded. These two leaders experienced the hard way the consequence of going beyond what is written. Rather than their offering being accepted and consumed by God, God consumed *them*. They assumed, like some today, that God’s self-revelation in Scripture is not able to make the “man of God...complete, fully equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:17).

The trustees and faculty of BMA Seminary are committed to the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture, as well as that of its inerrancy. We train future pastors and missionaries for the BMA of America who will know better than to go beyond the Scriptures and who will plant and pastor churches which are autonomous, but not alone.

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Louisiana:Angel Colon

We are continuing the work at the Hispanic mission here in the city of Vidalia. It has been an arduous job because we do not have a large population of Hispanics here, but God has allowed us to have the opportunity to evangelize several families which after a while have moved to other states. In the same way, we are doing Bible studies and worship services in another mission that we have started in the town of Jackson, Louisiana. There, we have had the opportunity from our God to work with several families and we are helping them change their lives in favor of a life in Christ. We long for your prayers for my family in this missionary work. We have a variety of nationalities in our missions and this complicates the work a bit. We are thankful for your support and prayers.



Dominican Republic: Jesse Hales

Lord willing, by the time you read this we will have made our move from the Dominican Republic to Round Rock, Texas to start a new church plant in partnership with BMA Missions and the Texas BMA Missions Department. This is a big move for us! All three of the kids were born outside of the U.S. and have only been to the States for short trips. They will be facing as much culture shock moving to the U.S. as we first faced moving to Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic. We have spent most of our marriage in the Dominican Republic and have grown deep roots there. It is not easy to make this move and we ask you to be praying for us. With that said, we know this is God's will for us and we know He has great things in store for His kingdom in Round Rock. We will be focused on adjusting to our new home and becoming part of Round Rock over the next couple of months. Thank you for your prayers for us and this new ministry.



Philippines:Fil Kakilala

Please check out our ministry posts on Facebook, under Fil A Kakilala. Praise God, people are getting saved and baptized! My wife, Lisa Kakilala, also posts family updates and scriptural insights on Facebook. Did you catch the news about our fourth grandchild to arrive in September? This is my son Matthew's first baby, with his wife Elizabeth. Our 17-year-old daughter, Justine, enjoys working at Tropical Smoothie in Conway, Arkansas. She lives at home and is in college as a sophomore. Another update we shared was regarding my wife's health. After living in the Philippines, her neurologist has documented the risk for her to reside outside the U.S. The technology to adjust her specific brain shunt and to address head pressure emergencies is not available in the Philippines. She is now based in Conway, Arkansas, where her neurology team is just minutes away from our home. To accommodate our new situation, it has been decided

for me to transition out of the field, to develop local leadership to take over various mission points, and to spend alternating times between field and home in the next two to three years. In compliance, my salary and benefit package will be reduced to the 50/50 plan in the last half of this year, then down to the 40/60 plan. While Lisa and I are grateful for the grace being given to us, we need to retain our current supporters and enlist new ones in order to avoid gaps in our health care and salary, and pay for travel to the field. Please invite us for appointments soon.



Philippines: Doug Lee

There is a lot of activity going on at the Bible College as we prepare to start a new school year on August 6. We will start under our new CHED certification and we can hardly contain our excitement. New students will be coming in from all over the Philippines. Colossians 3:23 says, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.” Our emphasis is to teach our students to strive for excellence as they prepare themselves to carry the Great Commission to Asia and all the world. To God be the glory!



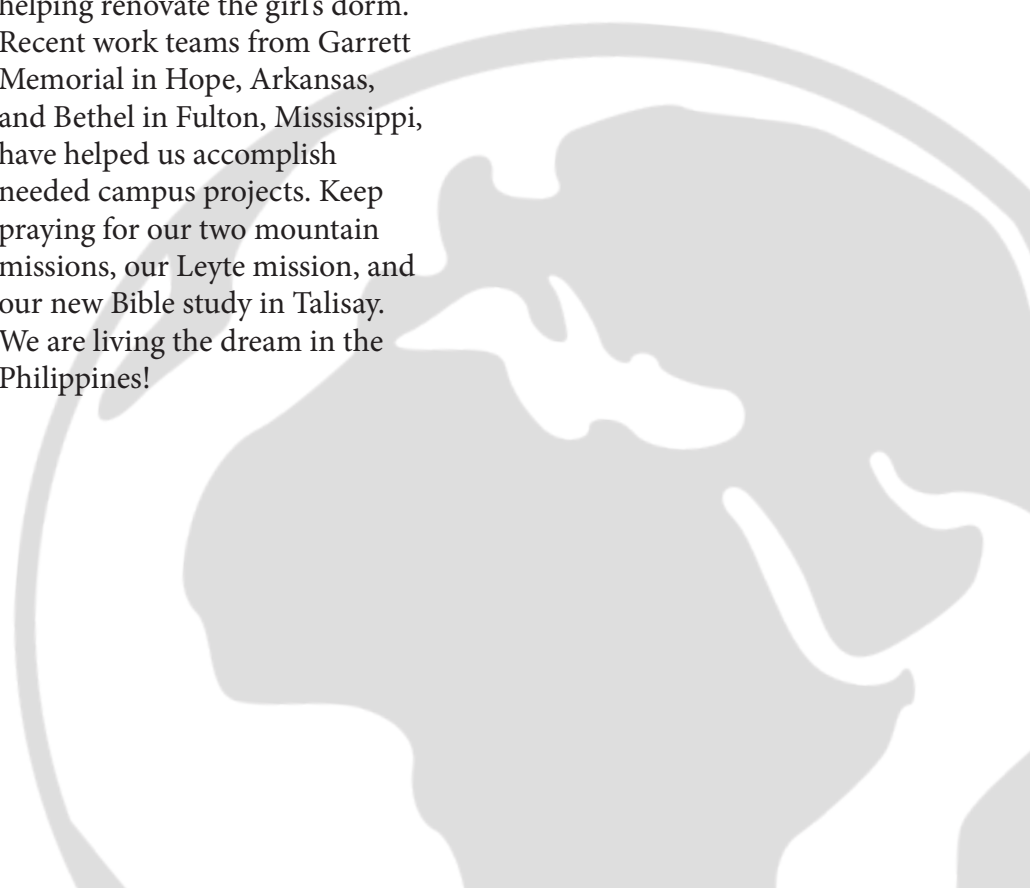
Philippines: Stan Scroggins

One hundred churches in ten Asian countries in ten years - This is our ambitious goal for church planting. Recent Baptist Medical Missions International (BMMI) trips found us making contacts in Laos as well as in six locations around Bacolod, Philippines. The training of pastors and missionaries at our Bible College is vital in helping fulfil this mission. We are thankful for First Baptist Church in Potosi, Missouri, First Baptist Church in Magnolia, Arkansas, and Mill Creek Baptist Church in Picayune, Mississippi, for helping renovate the girl’s dorm. Recent work teams from Garrett Memorial in Hope, Arkansas, and Bethel in Fulton, Mississippi, have helped us accomplish needed campus projects. Keep praying for our two mountain missions, our Leyte mission, and our new Bible study in Talisay. We are living the dream in the Philippines!



Mexico: Tommy Rose

We can’t thank you guys enough for your prayers and support. Your continued prayers for leaders and discipleship have produced much fruit in our ministry. Many have expressed a desire to be baptized and join the mission of our church here in Queretaro. We pray they continue to grow in the love of God and live it out day by day. They understand that if we are going to make any significant change in our world it will be one person at a time being changed from within by our Savior. Thank you and continue to pray for Mexico.



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COACHED by the Activate staff.

Activate has partnered with **Sam Rainer** and the **Revitalization Network** to offer church health and pastor health assessments, as well as percept reports for pastors interested. Activate will continue to develop and provide materials, grow pastor huddles, host trainings, and provide coaching. Activate pastors are given suggestions but never told what to do. Pastors are free to go at their own pace.

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