

The Anatomy of a Church in Decline

It is a sad fact that most churches in America are in decline and most don't know where to go or how to get help. It is our desire that the church will see their plight and make a clear decision to make the appropriate changes to turn around and become a healthy growing church again. This is an article that was inspired from Tony Morgan about a conversation he had with another leader concerning the attributes of a declining church.

Morgan said, "When I work with churches for the first time, sometimes they're frustrated with me because I'm not willing to help them fix something specific...churches can become convinced that they *know* why their church isn't growing." Morgan said these five foundational aspects have to come first:

- Lack of mission and vision clarity
- Failure to define a concise strategy to help newcomers become fully devoted followers of Christ
- A complex structure
- Inward-focus with little connection to the community
- Weak leadership, especially in the senior pastor role

Morgan also said he was surprised by the number of churches that "would rather close their doors than make the necessary changes" to avoid decline. He concluded by saying churches unwilling to address these elements will not shift their decline, no matter how hard they try.

The idea that a church would rather close its doors than to make the necessary changes to move from decline to growth is just selfish. The devil has many devices to hinder a church from growing and selfishness is one of the top things that he influences in the membership of a church. This comes from a universal sin called pride that Satan works into the life of a church to cause it to become selfish and which will produce strife and contentions among the membership. I agree that the steps that Bro. Morgan stated are good and can be of benefit to a church that is willing to put them into practice. Here are my thoughts on each one of his steps and what they mean to me and I hope that it will also help you as well.

1. Lack of mission and vision clarity – or

(Why is the church doing what it's doing and how do they do it.)

- Mission is what the church is to do. This is already clearly told to the church from our Lord in Matt. 28:19-20.
- Vision is what the church can fore see as their future by God's grace and help. This starts with the leadership of the church asking God for a fresh view for the future of the church. This is a step of faith and reasonable reality of where the church is and where God wants it to go.

2. Failure to define a concise strategy to help newcomers become fully devoted followers

of Christ – or

(The church has not been consistently with a plan of discipleship for its members.)

- There are many good discipleship courses that any church can use to help their members to grow in the knowledge of their Bible and how to apply that knowledge to their everyday life.
- Again this starts with the leadership of the church and should have the permission of the pastor for the church to use.
- Start a plan of discipleship and then work your plan in a way that best suits the church.

3. A complex structure – or

(Excessive rules and regulations with not enough people to work or fill them.)

- Try to keep the church structure as simple as possible in the working areas of the church – (Singing, choir, Sunday School, visitation, fellowships, ext.).
- Sometimes the constitutions and by-laws are not reasonable for the church to follow and should be made to fit the churches needs.

4. Inward-focus with little connection to the community - or

(The church has become maintenance minded (keepers of the fish bowl) and have lost their mission for a lost world.)

- Look (outside) the walls of the church building and start seeing the needs of a lost world going to hell for eternity.
- This also starts with the leadership of the church (pastor and staff, deacons) by asking God to renew their burden for the lost. The best way to get your burden for the lost to be saved back, is to just (go) to the lost with the gospel (soul-winning).
- Start visitations times at the church and be faithful to obey the command and leave the results to God.

5. Weak leadership, especially in the senior pastor role – or

(The church is lead by others than the voted leadership and the pastor is a follower instead of a leader).

- Strong does not imply being a dictator or mean spirited, but one that can by faith see the way that God is leading and then can lead others along with them.
- Pastors have different personalities but all pastors are called by God to take the leadership role of the church that He has placed them to shepherd.
- There are many ways to be the strong leader that God has called you to be such as – mentoring from an wise older pastor, books on leadership, training conferences and so on. Above all ask God for the wisdom and courage to be the leader and pastor you should be in the church He has sent you to minister to.

May the Lord help your church have an increase in the spiritual as well as the numerical growth of its membership. If we can be of any help just contact us by phone or email.

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