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Book Review: A Guide to Church Revitalization edited by Albert R. Mohler, Jr.

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BOOK REVIEW

A Guide to Church Revitalization.

By Mohler, Albert, R., Jr., Ed.

Louisville, KY: SBTS Press, 2015.

88pp.

US\$4.99.

Reviewed by Dustin Slaton, Campus Pastor at Green Acres Baptist Church—South in Flint, TX and a PhD student at Southwestern Seminary in Ft. Worth, TX. He lives in Flint with his wife and four children.

A Guide to Church Revitalization is number five in a series of “guidebooks” published by SBTS Press. The volume in question is edited by SBTS’s President, Albert R. Mohler, Jr., who also penned the opening chapter. The book’s chapters are each written by different authors moving systematically from defining the problems to providing solutions and plans for church revitalization.

Mohler begins the book with a general overview of the need for church revitalization. Mohler paints a grim picture of the reality of the church in America. As most churches are plateaued or declining, he implores men and churches to commit themselves to the task of revitalizing dying churches. His hope is to see a passionate “Generation Replant” among church leaders and seminary students, who can revive churches to God’s glory.

Kevin Ezell, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's North American Mission Board, describes the resources available through NAMB. He lists church decline issues and explains three ways NAMB comes alongside churches and church leaders to help bring about revitalization: one-day conferences for training pastors in assessing and preparing for revitalization; tools and resources for churches which are geared toward their specific situation; and work with churches, called "legacy churches" to help hand off their resources to a church or group who can develop a healthy church which can move forward in their location.

Dan Dumas, currently a leadership and organizational consultant, writes about the type of person capable and called to revitalization. This chapter gives a brief exposition of the biblical qualifications of a pastor/elder found in 1 Timothy 3. Dumas expounds on the qualifications and points out how they specifically apply to the revitalizing pastor.

Chapter four is by Brian Croft, the Senior Pastor of Auburndale Baptist Church in Louisville, KY. Croft instructs the revitalizer in how to prepare the church for revitalization through assessment. He lists five critical areas to assess. First, the church must discover who truly holds the power in the church. Second, the true leaders of the church must also be identified, to find who the church members will follow. Third, the church must discover its true process for membership so that a better definition of membership can be established. Fourth, the church must assess its willingness to be unified across all demographics so that one group does not control the direction of the church and ostracize others. Finally, the church must determine what the priorities are in worship. If the priorities are personal tastes above the worship of God, changes must be made.

David Prince, pastor of Ashland Avenue Baptist Church in Lexington, Kentucky, makes the case that preaching which elevates, exalts, and expounds the Word of God is central to the task of revitalization. All other strategies will fall short without the clear teaching of God's Word because that Word, the Gospel, is the foundation of the church.

Donald S. Whitney, Professor of Biblical Spirituality at SBTS, focuses on a revival of interpersonal disciplines which will bring spiritual renewal and unity to the congregation. These congregational disciplines include hearing the word, corporate worship, evangelism, serving, giving, fellowship, and prayer.

Tim Beougher, Professor of Evangelism and Church Growth at SBTS and Brian Croft together describe a “road map” to revitalization. They say the two essential keys to this roadmap are faithfulness and survival on the part of the pastor. In order to be faithful to God, the church, and the process, pastors must trust the word, shepherd the people, love all people, pray hard, and celebrate older members of the church. In order to survive the rigorous process of revitalization, pastors must be patient, expect suffering, pick battles wisely, love difficult people, and trust the chief shepherd.

Eric Bancroft, the Pastor of Grace Church in Miami, FL provides the revitalizing pastor with some indicators of success. He says to look for a renewed appetite for the Word of God throughout the church, a culture of discipleship in the church, a passion for evangelism, and unity among the leaders. These elements are rarely seen in a declining church, so their presence will indicate revitalization is taking place.

The book concludes with three chapters of interviews with three pastors, Mark Devers, Brian Croft, and Andrew Davis, who have all led their churches in revitalization. These chapters give the reader an inside look at the process and how it has been different for each congregation. It also provides some insights for pastors who see similarities between their situation and those these pastors experienced.

A Guide to Church Revitalization is an interesting title for this book. In one sense, it is accurate. The book does give basic guidelines and principles for how revitalization can take place in a church. On the other hand, it is not a guidebook at all if the reader is looking for a step-by-step, how-to guide to revitalization. The book, in essence, is a curated selection of key topics essential for church revitalization, gathered for the goal of introducing the topic to a wide range of audiences.

This book succeeds in its goal of *introducing*. Students of the subject of church revitalization will find nothing new in this book, and pastors of healthy churches will find little use or new information in its pages. This book will be most beneficial for those who are helping leaders discover hope for their church. It is a great resource for denominational leaders to provide to pastors and leaders of struggling churches. It is a great book for pastors of struggling churches to give to their leaders so they can begin their own assessment of their church and its future.

As this book is an introductory volume, the best resource in the entire book may be the list of recommended readings on page 84.