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Church Turnaround: Perspectives, Principles, and Practices

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**CHURCH TURNAROUND: PERSPECTIVES, PRINCIPLES,
AND PRACTICES**

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Kenneth E. Priddy

abstract

Prominent church analysts agree that over 80% of American Protestant churches are in plateau and decline and that the growth of the church is not keeping pace with the growth of the population. Sacrifice on the part of church leaders and congregants is sorely needed but strongly resisted, as congregations tend to prefer stability and familiarity above risk and change. This paper presents insights into the origin of plateau and decline and offers perspectives, principles, and practices that when properly and faithfully applied, generate health, growth, and multiplication in churches that commit to sustainable church turnaround.

church turnaround: perspectives, principles, and practices

spiritual renewal with strategic initiative

Effective church turnaround stands on two cooperating platforms—Spiritual Renewal with Strategic Initiative. The tendency of most church leaders is to embrace one or the other in an attempt to revitalize a church, but either without the other is incomplete and insufficient. Leaders that take the path of spiritual

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renewal alone evoke what might be characterized as a spiritual pep rally that provides momentary enthusiasm and inspiration. Without adding strategic initiative, however, nothing sustainable in the way of church health, growth, and multiplication will follow. Leaders that take the path of strategic initiative alone employ a current methodology that might create a momentary statistical spiking, but without adding spiritual renewal, again nothing of substance will be sustainable.

The first chapter of the book of Nehemiah provides a foundation for a biblical model of revitalizing the people of God. In the opening three verses, Nehemiah receives a report or analysis concerning the state of the Israelites who had returned to Jerusalem from the exile.

And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in trouble and great shame. The wall of Jerusalem is down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.” Nehemiah 1:3 ESV

162 This is an apt picture of a church that is in long-term plateau or decline, a church that is in need of turnaround.

It is instructive to note Nehemiah’s response to this assessment. We learn in verse four that Nehemiah wept and mourned for days and that during these days, he continually fasted and prayed. Nehemiah’s heart was broken at learning of the condition of God’s people in Jerusalem, and he immersed himself in seeking spiritual renewal. This is the beginning and the very heart of turnaround.

As we read on in this first chapter, the text gives us insight into the nature and content of Nehemiah’s prayers. He acknowledges that God is the keeper of the covenant, implying that wherever the covenant has been breached, it has been on the part of the people, not God. He confesses and intercedes, apparently realizing the connection between the sin of the people, including his family and Nehemiah himself, and the state of affairs in Jerusalem. He reminds God of His promise to dwell with His people in Jerusalem if they return to Him. One wonders whether Nehemiah is reminding God or himself of this promise.

In reaching the final verse of chapter one, Nehemiah delivers a closing supplication with a surprising twist.

O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. Now I was cupbearer to the king. Nehemiah 1:11 ESV

The opening phrases of this verse continue the tone of Nehemiah’s prayer and are virtually formulaic in nature, typical of a Hebrew entreaty. The tone and content dramatically change, however, as Nehemiah speaks of success and of mercy in the

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sight of a man. Instead of an Amen, the recorded prayer ends with an entry from Nehemiah's résumé, that of being the king's cupbearer.

With these final words, Nehemiah has shifted from spiritual renewal to strategic initiative. Apparently during these days of weeping, mourning, fasting, and praying, a strategic plan began to form in the heart and mind of Nehemiah. He must have realized that someone needed to go to Jerusalem in the name of God to turn the situation around, and he must have realized that this someone who needed to go was himself. However, as the valued cupbearer to the pagan King Artaxerxes, he had neither the freedom nor the means to respond to such a calling. This strategic plan would need and would receive divine intervention as God moved in this pagan king to provide all that Nehemiah would need to complete His mission. The story of Nehemiah's spiritual and strategic leadership unfolds in the following chapters of the book of Nehemiah, noting in Nehemiah 6:15 that the wall was rebuilt. This extraordinary man of God led the people of God toward revitalization through spiritual renewal, working in tandem with strategic initiative—the twin forces of turnaround.

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where do long-term plateau and decline originate?

Church leaders must come to grips with the Away Syndrome. Over time everyone who is involved with a church at a given time will pass away, move away, or simply go away. If a picture were taken at any given moment of everyone involved in a church, a time will come when every single person in that photograph is gone. Given this reality, for any church to have a future, it must continuously reach new people—a strategic reality that perfectly connects with the mission of the church to go and make disciples. This is God's economy; the very thing that sustains the longevity of a church also fulfills the purpose of the church. However, church leaders rarely think in these terms. By their actions they suggest that they believe that a current congregation will stay forever, seeing no need to reach others. Though this would not likely be admitted, ministry behaviors and resource allocation that are predominantly inward focused reveal that inward focus among church leaders is indeed the default position.

Another default position often taken by church leaders is a refusal to take responsibility for the decline of their churches. Cited as reasons for decline are external issues such as a changing community, a changing culture, or a new church nearby that is siphoning off members. Rather than blame a new church in the community, leaders need to ask themselves what their church is doing that is so compelling that no one would consider leaving. Internal reasons cited include congregational faithfulness (decline is due to a lack of compromising with culture),

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God's having the church in a season that lacks numerical growth (it is God's fault), and taking on the identity of a discipling church (other churches evangelize, but we grow people to maturity). One leader of such a church informed that his church was not an "entry level" church. Additionally is the claim that no one in the church has the gift of evangelism, freeing that church from any evangelistic responsibility.

Denial provides a particularly destructive challenge, taking on two dominant forms. First, leaders deny that the church has problems, noting that decline in attendance, giving, energy, enthusiasm, and a scaling back of ministries, among other issues, are not problematic but simply the way things are in the current season. Second, leaders acknowledge that the church has problems, but that none of these problems is self-induced. Rather, they are inflicted on the church by outside forces and, as such, demand no changes or adjustments from the inside.

164 In truth, the primary reason that churches lapse into long-term plateau and decline is because they are self-focused; its people are ministering to themselves. Coupled with this self-destructive self-focus is the debilitating reality that leaders and their congregations are gripped by *evangophobia*, the fear of evangelizing. Consequently, lost people remain lost, and churches continue in a downward spiral toward decline.

how do churches get turned around?

The majority of churches in long-term plateau or decline do not turn around; rather, they intensify their self-focus, causing conditions to get worse instead of better. Once aware of the declining trend in the church, most leaders default to an intuitive contingency that seems logical, but that will exacerbate the toxicity that is driving the church downward. Since problems and issues in the church need to be faced, leaders reason that the starting place for solutions is to deal with these problems one by one until everything is corrected on the inside. They assume that once these matters are favorably resolved, the congregation can be brought on board with new outreach vision and that the church can then begin to reach the community and grow. The contingency that seems to be in place informs leaders that if they can get the congregation healed and on board, then the church can reach its community. If this contingency is allowed to prevail, the church will never get to the community. This is because all internal issues and problems will never be resolved, and the congregation will never get on board.

One contingency must be recognized and leveraged. It is a surprising contingency, the opposite of what church leaders assume. If church leaders will lead the church into reaching out to the community as its primary focus, this shifting of ministry emphasis will result in the influx of newcomers. Some will

Priddy: Church Turnaround: Perspectives, Principles, and Practices connect with the church, and some will make professions of faith, often the first professions of faith that a declining church has seen in years. New life will come to the church bringing energy, hope, and expectation. Ironically, many of the internal issues and problems will self-correct or disappear altogether. The surprising contingency is that once a church begins to reach its community, the congregation will get on board. The solution to the problem of self-focus is not more focus on self. Rather, it is a shift to focus on the community, aligning the church with the Great Commission and producing health, healing, and growth. The turnaround solution, then, is moving the church from an inward focus to an outward focus on the community, and shifting significant church resources from self-preservation to outreach and evangelism.

a church's choice

Each church in long-term plateau or decline has a choice either to withdraw or to be sent, to remain focused on internal ministry or to shift the focus to external ministry. The words of Jesus recorded in Scripture overwhelmingly call the church to be a body that is sent. Consider these words of Jesus:

“The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” Luke 19:10 ESV

“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well for I was sent for this purpose.” Luke 4:43 ESV

“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”
John 20:21 ESV

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Matthew 9:37–38 ESV

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 28:19 ESV

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8 ESV

God is a sending God, and the church is the people of God, the body of Christ, sent into the world to gather the saints. In evangelical circles, however, teaching and preaching are given the highest priority. Seminary training centers on preparing ministers for preaching and teaching with a curriculum that is weighted with courses on biblical languages, Old Testament, New Testament, hermeneutics, exegesis, theology, and sermon preparation and delivery. Little to no training is

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given to sending or being sent, even though sending is clearly the biblical high
point of ministry.

For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” . . . So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. Romans 10:13–15, 17 ESV

Evangelicals are committed to the authority of Scripture, and preaching and teaching the Word of God stands at the epicenter of evangelical ministry. This is understandable but utterly missing the point. The central spiritual and strategic question is, “Who is listening?” Without the sending, evangelicals are talking to themselves, preaching a liberating Gospel to those who are already liberated. The proclamation of the Good News of the Gospel can only be effective when the message reaches the ears of the lost. For a church to experience turnaround, that church must recognize that it is a church that is sent into the harvest to be a church that sends others into the harvest. Then, and only then, will a church turn around; then, and only then, will a church fulfill its true biblical purpose.

The Pastor Survey (Excerpted from a spring 2011 survey by K. Priddy of 92 Evangelical Pastors)

Section 1—The Facts: The following questions require a single numeric answer. Please answer as accurately as you are able. This section of the survey is designed to acquire foundational data that can easily be measured.

How many adults were added to your congregation in the past year by way of transfer?

Range: 0–80 Churches with 0 = 19.5%
Average: 8.0 Churches with 1 = 6.5%
 Churches with 2 = 13%
 Total Church with 0–2 = 39%

How many adults were added to your congregation in the past year by way of profession of faith?

Range: 0–35 Churches with 0 = 28%
Average: 5.5 Churches with 1 = 14%
 Churches with 2 = 10%
 Total Church with 0–2 = 52%

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What percentage of your current church's budget is allocated for local outreach and evangelism?

Range: 0–34% Churches with 0–5% = 65%

Average: 6.7% Church with 6–10% = 16%

Churches with 10% or less = 81%

Key Observations:

1. 39% of churches reported 0–2 transfers in the past year.
2. 52% of churches reported 0–2 professions of faith in the past year.
3. 81% of churches reported 10% or less of its current budget allocated for local outreach and evangelism.

Section 2—Levels of Agreement: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following ten statements. This section of the survey is designed to indicate your growth preferences and perspectives. (Note: Choices for each statement were Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. For this presentation Strongly Agree and Agree are combined and Disagree and Strongly Disagree are combined.)

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I am personally committed to the numerical growth of my congregation.

Strongly Agree/Agree = 94%

Disagree/Strongly Disagree = 6%

The numerical growth of my congregation is not a biblical mandate.

Strongly Agree/Agree = 36%

Disagree/Strongly Disagree = 64%

Transfer growth is an indicator of positive congregational health.

Strongly Agree/Agree = 48%

Disagree/Strongly Disagree = 52%

The proper preaching of the Word is of greater importance than outreach and evangelism.

Strongly Agree/Agree = 53%

Disagree/Strongly Disagree = 47%

The emergence of mega churches in the United States has been a positive influence for the cause of Christ.

Strongly Agree/Agree = 41%

Disagree/Strongly Disagree = 59%

1. 94% of pastors strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, “I am personally committed to the numerical growth of my congregation,” yet 36% of pastors strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, “The numerical growth of my congregation is not a biblical mandate.”
2. Pastors were virtually evenly split regarding the statements, “Transfer growth is an indicator of positive congregational health,” and, “The proper preaching of the Word is of greater importance than outreach and evangelism.”
3. The majority of pastors disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “The emergence of mega churches in the United States has been a positive influence for the cause of Christ.”

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Section 3—Ministry Categories: On a scale of 1–10 (1 = least; 10 = most), indicate the importance of the following ten ministry categories from your perspective. This section of the survey is designed to reveal the value you place on various ministry priorities.

Summary of Ministry Categories:

Category	Range	Variance	Score
1. Preaching of the Word	8–10	2	9.8
2. Christ-Centered Worship	8–10	2	9.7
3. Personal and Corporate Prayer	4–10	6	8.8
4. Shepherding the Congregation	2–10	8	8.6
5. Evangelizing the Local Community	3–10	7	8.5
6. Outreach to the Local Community	2–10	8	8.5
7. Financial Stewardship	4–10	6	8.4
8. Supporting Foreign Missions	3–10	7	8.3
9. Growing Numerically by Conversion	1–10	10	8.0
10. Supporting Domestic Missions	2–10	8	7.8

Key Observations:

1. Preaching, Worship, and Prayer recorded the highest scores.
2. Only two points separate the top and bottom scores.
3. The variance in individual scoring of Preaching and Worship is two.
4. The variance in individual scoring of Growing Numerically by Conversion is ten.

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Section 4—Bonus Round: Ministry Priorities: Please arrange the following ten ministry categories into their order of priority from your perspective. This section of the survey is designed to press you into making hard choices of one ministry over another. (Note: 78 Pastors Participating)

Ministry Priorities: The Ranking—Measured against a Maximum Score of 100%

1. Worship	84%
2. Preaching	81%
3. Prayer	79%
4. Evangelism	58%
5. Shepherding	54%
6. Outreach	53%
7. Growth by Conversion	34%
8. Foreign Missions	32%
9. Domestic Missions	30%
10. Stewardship	26%

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Key Observations:

1. Worship, Preaching, and Prayer are high priorities.
2. Growth by Conversion, Foreign Missions, and Domestic Missions are low priorities.

Section 5—Anonymous Comments from Participants:

1. “Thanks. Difficult to prioritize some of these issues, but great exercise.”
2. “Survey presented not hard choices but false dilemmas. And words such as ‘outreach,’ ‘evangelism,’ ‘domestic missions/foreign missions’ could be synonymous or interchangeable, with not much difference in nuance at all.”
3. “I’m afraid the prioritization section will produce misleading if not harmful results. Once again we have lies, damn lies, and statistics to deal with. I know these are ever-popular in academia and even useful for the church, but trying to rank one of the vital areas of ministry over another will only capture a snapshot of where they rank at this moment. It could change by this afternoon, depending on the situation the Lord presents.”
4. “Priorities are a constant concern in the church. If we aren’t careful, we will let circumstances dictate our priorities in the end. We will realize that we weren’t very careful about how we served the kingdom.”

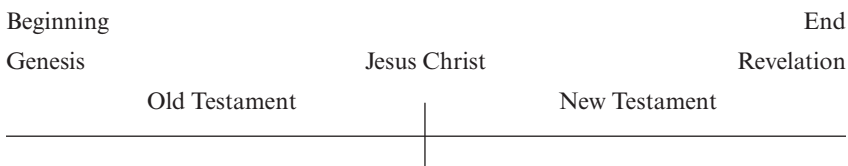
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5. "I don't agree with the breakdowns you have on ministry priorities or the idea of Shepherding vs. Growth by Conversion. All these are one in the spiritual work of discipleship, and ultimately God grows His church using us as He pleases."

Brief Analysis:

1. Pastors as a group are unable to differentiate common ministry terminology.
2. Pastors as a group operate without ministry priorities.
3. Pastors as a group struggle to give one ministry priority over another.
4. Pastors as a group resist assigning comparative value to ministries.
5. Pastors as a group value inward ministry over outward ministry.

nuts and bolts of church turnaround

170 The church that seeks to turn around should step back and consider God's big picture. What is God's vision for His kingdom, and how does a local church fit into that vision? Consider God's timeline:



Imagine a very large arena and that the thousands of cubic feet of space inside that arena represent eternity. Imagine a yard stick suspended inside that cavernous arena as a timeline that God has suspended inside of eternity. That timeline stretches from the beginning of time to the end of time—from Genesis to Revelation. What happens in between? In Genesis, God creates the heavens and the earth, and in Revelation we see the coming of a new heaven and a new earth. In the beginning, in Genesis, God establishes His covenant to be fruitful and multiply, and at the end, in Revelation, we find a multitude so numerous that it cannot be counted, from every people group that has ever inhabited the planet.

In short, the timeline represents redemptive history. God has established time, created the world, and inhabited that world so that He can gather an eternal family that will live with Him forever. That is the point of time, and that is the point of the church. The question church leaders must ask is, "How is our church playing a role in the unfolding of redemptive history?" It seems that most churches these days are observers, historians, or critics of redemptive history, experiencing little to no fruit in terms of conversion growth. Their commitment is to their existing

Priddy: Church Turnaround: Perspectives, Principles, and Practices congregations, focusing on programming that features worship, preaching, prayer, Bible study, and fellowship. These are all valuable and important elements of ministry, but they are falling well short of fulfilling the Great Commandment or the Great Commission.

Consider that before time, a book was written—the Lamb’s Book of Life. Scripture informs that this book, written before the foundation of the world, contains the names of all those who will be redeemed. Consider how many names must be in that book, and consider that at this very moment, people are going about their everyday lives whose names are recorded in the Book of Life who have not yet come to faith. They are lost. They are future brothers and sisters in Christ who are not where they are supposed to be; they are not yet folded into the family of God. In our culture today, when a family member goes missing, an Amber Alert is issued. People drop everything to find the one who is missing, the one who is lost. When will an Amber Alert go out from the church?

Time is a tool that God uses for gathering the saints, for unfolding redemptive history until the full number comes in. Numerical growth in the church, then, is not about numbers, but it is about names—many, many names that are recorded in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

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the church lifecycle: incline—recline—decline

An understanding of the church lifecycle adds perspective to turnaround. In a broad sense, the church lifecycle can be divided into three stages—Incline, Recline, and Decline. Incline is the stage of church life when the church is expanding its ministry capacity, establishing more and better ministry over time. During Recline, ministry capacity levels off as the church simply repeats the same ministry over and over for weeks, months, years, even decades. Decline is the stage of church life when ministry capacity declines at an ever-increasing rate as lessening ministry is provided over time, and the quality of that ministry steadily deteriorates.

Church Lifecycle Distinctive Characteristics

INCLINE	RECLINE	DECLINE
Future-Oriented	Present-Oriented	Past-Oriented
Vision-Driven	Program-Driven	Structure-Driven
Community-Focused	Congregation-Focused	Core-Focused
Grows by Conversion	Grows by Transfer	Does Not Grow

The Inclining church is future-oriented, always looking ahead toward a desired ministry destination and making decisions in the present in terms of how they will

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affect the future. Reclining churches are present-oriented, investing themselves in the current moment and trying, in essence, to freeze time, hoping that each Sunday will be a repeat of last Sunday. Declining churches are past-oriented, longing for the proverbial good old days and glossing over past conflicts and problems with a selective nostalgia-coated memory.

The Inclining church is vision-driven, having discerned a clear, godly vision and focusing all efforts and resources on the fulfillment of that vision. Reclining churches are program-driven, convinced that whatever success is currently being realized is the result of its compelling menu of programs featuring something for everyone in the family. Declining churches are structure-driven, laden with organizational charts, policies, and procedures formulated during past eras of the church that simply handcuff the church from moving forward.

172 The Inclining church is community-focused, giving the people who live outside the church in the immediate neighborhoods its first priority. Reclining churches are congregation-focused, giving the population inside the church their first priority. This is not an either/or proposition, as a healthy church will focus on both congregation and community. In the typical church, the voice that is mostly heard is the in-reach voice, wanting or demanding the full attention of leadership. Outreach has no voice of its own but relies on the advocacy of a Great Commission vision and the intentional focus of leadership. Declining churches are core-focused, giving its attention to the core or remnant that stays with the church throughout its plateau and decline. As the congregation gets smaller and smaller, the core becomes more and more prominent, displaying attributes that are antithetical to turnaround.

Finally, the Inclining church grows by conversion as its future-oriented, vision-driven, community-focused ministry makes reaching the lost its primary emphasis. Reclining churches grow by transfer as already Christian people respond to its present-oriented, program-driven, congregation-focused ministry. The goal of the Reclining church, as evidenced by leadership behaviors, is to gain a higher market share of the already Christian population, presenting a more appealing program menu than competing churches. By definition, Declining churches do not grow.

It should be noted that the majority of Christian churches, even church plants, strive to be Reclining churches. They seek the comfort and stability that characterize early Recline over the risk and uncertainty of Incline. Recline is the bulls eye for most church leaders. Sadly, hitting this bulls eye is to miss the Great Commission target altogether.

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One principle should be noted. Turnaround ranges from moderate to severe depending on the lifecycle stage. Churches that consider turnaround while on the Incline warrant a moderate treatment, making small and subtle adjustments. However, churches that wait until they are on the backside of the lifecycle in long-term plateau or decline face severe turnaround that requires major shifts and changes.

four disciplines of effective turnaround

Four disciplines are particularly significant in providing a quick start and in building momentum for effective turnaround—Preemptive Prayer, Basic Bible, Cost Commitment, and Missional Multiplication. These should be embraced individually by members of the congregation and corporately by the church at large.

Preemptive Prayer recognizes the power of prayer and prompts leaders and congregants to pray in advance of all initiatives and in anticipation of what God will do as He provides for a church's turnaround for His own glory. Basic Bible acknowledges the fact that the level of biblical illiteracy in today's church is quite high and that leaders and congregants alike must be grounded in the basic fundamentals of Bible knowledge and application.

Cost Commitment makes the point of informing professed followers of Christ that to follow Him is to embark on a suicide mission, dying to self in order to live in, through, and for Him. A tendency in many churches today is to dilute the cost of following Jesus in an effort to make the church more appealing. However, presenting a low-cost Gospel is to present no Gospel at all. Expecting high commitment fosters high commitment as the Holy Spirit moves in a believer's heart and mind.

Living in the disciplines of Preemptive Prayer, Basic Bible, and Cost Commitment feeds a final key discipline—Missional Multiplication. The Great Commission calls the church to go and make disciples and to be fruitful and multiply, and missional multiplication is one way of describing that process. For a church to be missional, its ministry must be shaped by the priority of outreach and evangelism. Its leaders and congregants must be actively engaged in connecting with the lost and sharing their faith, trusting that as the Spirit of God moves in the lives of the lost, many will come to faith and perhaps come to that church as it grows by conversion.

Of course, numerous additional spiritual disciplines abound, but these four in particular cooperate to spark, establish, and sustain church turnaround.

	MINISTRY 1	MINISTRY 2	MINISTRY 3	MINISTRY 4
Discipleship ↑ DISCIPLES	Strategy 1	Strategy 1	Strategy 1	Strategy 1
	Strategy 2	Strategy 2	Strategy 2	Strategy 2
	Strategy 3	Strategy 3	Strategy 3	Strategy 3
Evangelism ↑ MAKE	Strategy 1	Strategy 1	Strategy 1	Strategy 1
	Strategy 2	Strategy 2	Strategy 2	Strategy 2
	Strategy 3	Strategy 3	Strategy 3	Strategy 3
Outreach ↑ GO	Strategy 1	Strategy 1	Strategy 1	Strategy 1
	Strategy 2	Strategy 2	Strategy 2	Strategy 2
	Strategy 3	Strategy 3	Strategy 3	Strategy 3
↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ Matthew 28:18-20 Reaching the Community that Surrounds the Church				

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A final strategic perspective on church turnaround is the Great Commission Matrix. This matrix provides a tool for strategically organizing the ministries of the church for effectively applying the Great Commission through every ministry of the church.

A distinction between outreach and evangelism needs to be made. Outreach occurs when people inside the church connect with people outside the church through outsider needs and interests. The goal is the building of relationships in anticipation of the deepening of those relationships to provide opportunities to evangelize. Evangelism occurs when people outside of the Christian faith are presented with the crystal clear Gospel message. If the Gospel message has not been clearly articulated, evangelism has not taken place. This distinction has been increasingly important in recent years as the outreach efforts of many churches have increased significantly, while no corresponding increase in professions of faith is seen. The problem is that many in the church are mistaking outreach for evangelism, assuming that outreach and evangelism are synonymous. They are not.

The Great Commission Matrix recognizes the distinction between outreach and evangelism and realizes that outreach strategies and evangelism strategies are both necessary. Evangelism needs outreach to create opportunities to evangelize, but outreach and evangelism are separate initiatives that need separate but complementary strategies.

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Activating the Great Commission Matrix begins at the bottom of the grid with

Outreach and works its way upward through Evangelism to Discipleship. The ministries of the church are listed across the top of the grid, represented by Ministry 1, Ministry 2, etc. For example, consider that Ministry 3 might be youth ministry. Starting at the bottom tier, the GO box, the question is asked, “What strategies can be deployed to reach out to the youth of the community through the youth ministry of our congregation?” This stands in stark contrast to the typical question, “How do we minister to the youth of our church?” Moving up to the MAKE box, the question is asked, “Now that we have connected with youth in the community through outreach, what strategies can be deployed to evangelize these youth through the youth ministry of our church?” Strategies might vary church to church as one size does not fit all. As a church grows in its understanding of its ministry context, though, effective strategies will rise to the top through ministry experimentation. Over time, leaders will become more effective at recognizing strategies that will bear fruit as trial and error lessens and skill increases.

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With GO and MAKE activated, we move up to the DISCIPLE box driven by the question, “What strategies should be deployed to grow youth from the community who have responded to outreach and evangelism, as well as the youth of our congregation, to full maturity through youth ministry discipleship?” Discipleship should be weighted toward disciplined, sacrificial Christian living with an emphasis on training for outreach and evangelism. An upward spiral is created when unbelieving youth from the community are reached through youth ministry, respond to evangelism offered through youth ministry, grow in their faith through youth ministry, and begin to reach out to others in the community through youth ministry.

Envision a church in which every key ministry area has activated the Great Commission Matrix, able to reach out, evangelize, and disciple within the context of its own ministry. Every ministry becomes an open door to the church and to the faith, every member of the church is on the outreach team, every member is on the evangelism team, and every member is engaged in community-focused discipleship.

Organizing and deploying strategies in every key ministry area of the church through the grid of the Great Commission Matrix dramatically increases outreach and evangelism and positions a church for significant turnaround.

church turnaround summary

To experience church turnaround, commit to spiritual renewal with strategic initiative.

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To experience church turnaround, get past self-focus and minister through the congregation, not just to the congregation.
- To experience church turnaround, get past *evangophobia* and develop a heart for the lost and the skill of evangelism.
- To experience church turnaround, embrace the calling of being sent by God to send people into the harvest.
- To experience church turnaround, find both vision and strategy in the Great Commission.
- To experience church turnaround, commit to the disciplines of Preemptive Prayer, Basic Bible, Cost Commitment, and Missional Multiplication.
- To experience church turnaround, organize and deploy strategic ministry through the grid of the Great Commission Matrix.
- Growing numerically by conversion is not about numbers. It is about names—many, many, many names. The harvest is plentiful.

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Dr. Ken Priddy is a seasoned ministry development practitioner, trainer, and consultant that currently serves as president of the Ken Priddy Group, Inc. and KPG Ministries, based in Richmond, Virginia.

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