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DYING TO RESTART

**CHURCHES CHOOSING A STRATEGIC DEATH
FOR A MULTIPLYING LIFE**

GREG WIENS AND DAN TURNER

AN EXPONENTIAL RESOURCE

D Y I N G
T O
R E S T A R T

**CHURCHES CHOOSING A STRATEGIC DEATH
FOR A MULTIPLYING LIFE**

GREG WIENS & DAN TURNER

Dying to Restart: Churches Choosing a Strategic Death for a Multiplying Life
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Exponential is a growing movement of activists committed to the multiplication of healthy new churches. Exponential Resources spotlights actionable principles, ideas and solutions for the accelerated multiplication of healthy, reproducing faith communities. For more information, visit exponential.org.

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INSIDE

[Foreword](#)

Continuing the Conversation

[Introduction](#)

[CHAPTER 1](#)

Dying in the District

[CHAPTER 2](#)

A Season for Everything

[CHAPTER 3](#)

Three Ways to Die

[CHAPTER 4](#)

Is This Biblical?

[CHAPTER 5](#)

Do You Have What It Takes?

[CHAPTER 6](#)

Pain Now or Pain Later?

[CHAPTER 7](#)

Restarting With Missional DNA

[CHAPTER 8](#)

The Eye of the Storm

[CHAPTER 9](#)

Covering the Bases

[CHAPTER 10](#)

Resurrection Time!

[CHAPTER 11](#)

Life After Restarting

[CHAPTER 12](#)

Where Do We Go From Here?

[Endnotes](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[Resources to Get Started](#)

[About the Authors](#)

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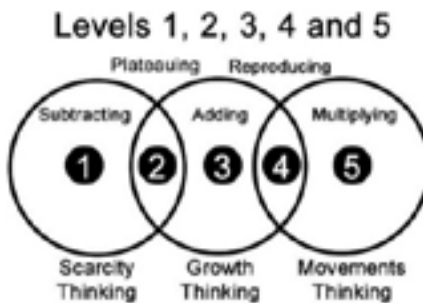
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Foreword

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION...



Exponential has a passion to help churches build and release disciples so churches are multiplying. To that end, they developed the Becoming 5 framework to help churches see both where they are (their current multiplication culture) and where they aspire to be. The framework looks at five levels of multiplication from Level 1 (a declining church with a subtraction or scarcity culture) all the way to a Level 5 (a church that's exponentially multiplying).

This project is specifically focused on helping declining churches (Level 1) become multiplying churches (Level 5). As you'll see from this book, moving from Level 1 to Level 5 is not a simple process. It isn't about learning a new outreach method or changing your music style or name. Instead, it requires a radically different operating system for the church. A Level 5 church exists for a totally different reason than does a Level 1 church. This new clarity, or DNA, gives direction to decisions made every day and in every way.

There are few resources to help churches understand what's involved in a restart process and even fewer resources to help guide them through the process. This book is intended to fill that need. Dan and I (Greg) are both practitioners and consultants in this process and have decades of successes and failures behind us. We write from a practitioner's perspective.

I have worked with Exponential and Todd Wilson on three assessments and several books. I can honestly say there are few organizations that are more willing to give to the church whatever is required to expand the Kingdom of God. So we are thrilled to work with Exponential on this project to help churches move from Level 1 to Level 5. This book was born out of a passion to encourage and guide churches that are struggling to be stable or fighting to even exist. We don't believe that God wants his Bride in either of these two predicaments. But most churches in America today are in this situation.

In the beginning chapters, we describe churches that would meet the definition of Level 1 or Level 2 (plateaued) churches. In Level 1 churches, the ultimate purpose is to prevail in keeping the doors open.

Other leaders attempt to keep their own church stable and steady. Of course, they want to grow, but most of their efforts to cause growth are done to compensate for the decline they are experiencing in other areas. They simply don't have the resources to release disciples to other ministries. These churches would be defined as a plateaued church or Level 2.

The primary thrust of this book is helping Level 1 churches (and possibly some Level 2 churches) to become churches that multiply. In their new DNA is a drive to multiply disciples who multiply disciples so the church becomes a sending and multiplying center for starting other churches who themselves start churches. These would be defined as a multiplying church or Level 5. This is the goal as defined in Chapter 7.

Introduction

Over the last decade, we've been encouraged by an increasing focus on church planting. It has been one of the few positive signs in a period when the local church has suffered severe decline in North America. Estimates vary, but of the 300,000 Protestant congregations in the United States, 240,000 to 270,000 of them have plateaued (Level 2) or are in attendance decline (Level 1).

This book dares to dream that God hasn't given up on those 270,000 Level 1 and Level 2 churches. We believe there is hope, but we're also quick to say that the pursuit of this hope will likely require great risk from both leaders and their churches.

We can all point to numerous books that help church leaders lead revitalization efforts or tweak what they're doing to stay healthy. The reality is, however, that numerous churches have tried everything these books suggest—and are still nearing death. As far as we can tell, this is the first comprehensive resource to help Level 1 churches process the idea of an actual death and restart.

Collectively, we bring to this project more than a few decades of relevant experience. I (Greg) have personally led a church through launching a new life cycle and then have worked with many church leaders to help churches launch a new life cycle. I (Dan) bring my experience in leading a restart and subsequently studying the process during my doctorate work. We hope this resource can serve the church by filling the information gap for churches that have been living on the edge of death for too long.

Dying to Restart

But before we go any further, we need to tell you what we mean when we talk about a “church restart.” A restart combines all of the approaches of church planting with the pastoral work of helping a congregation die with dignity. A restart is different from all other forms of church revitalization in that the existing church chooses a definitive ending characterized by a radical yielding of power and control to new guiding leadership. Churches in need of a restart would not be able to withstand the time and effort required for a drastic revitalization. In fact, most Level 1 or Level 2 churches ready for a restart have a long history of failed revitalization attempts.

For the purposes of this book, two things must be made clear at the outset: 1) What is the goal of a restart? and 2) What is the difference between a church restart and a church revitalization?

First, the goal of the restart is not to replace the old version with an updated newer version of the previous church. Rather, *the goal of a restart is to create a wholly different body with holy different DNA*. The church in longtime decline chooses a strategic death through giving up its resources to launch a new church in its place.

In this DNA or culture of the newly restarted church, the church will be healthy in all ways, including its ability to reproduce disciples within and without itself who multiply. In other words, as the church builds disciples and maintains healthy metrics of a body, it also multiplies itself in producing other disciple-making churches.

Second, *restarting* a church is qualitatively different from *revitalizing* a church. A church revitalization focuses on increasing the health of an existing church so that it can gain health to accomplish its mission. Churches that have effective leadership, congregational health, financial resources and community engagement should engage in a revitalization rather than restarting in order to bring renewed health and multiplication to the church (see Resources page). This book concentrates on restarting. Chapter 3 will look at how to know when it is time to restart.

We have packed this book with real stories of churches that chose a purposeful death to restart and experience new life. To make sure you came away with real-life insights from leaders, we conducted both formal and

Dying to Restart

informal interviews with two dozen pastors who have led restart efforts. We hope you'll be as inspired by their stories as we are. And we hope this book will not just inspire you to consider a restart process but will also empower and equip you to walk through that process. The following pages are full of ideas and best practices that we've learned from restart leaders and their congregations.

By picking up and reading this book, you've already demonstrated courage in just considering this radical step for your ministry. If you assigned it to your church board to read, then you're extremely courageous! We can assure you that there will be moments when you'll be tempted to discard this book as too extreme or foolhardy. We encourage you to keep reading. Remember English theologian Thomas Fuller's astute observation: "The darkest hour is often before the dawn."

Chapter 1

DYING IN THE DISTRICT

You are Peter, a rock. This is the rock on which I will put together my church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out.

—Matthew 16:18 (The Message)

One Sunday afternoon, we gathered in the church basement to talk about the future of our church. Twenty very tired and discouraged people expressed their frustrations and fears. Senior adults shared their worries that the church they had been part of all their lives wouldn't be there to bury them. A few middle-aged adults had one foot out the door. We sat on stained and torn carpet with mold hiding behind peeling paint—results of an ongoing drainage problem the church couldn't afford to fix. We rehearsed the stories of families and individuals that had visited but never returned. I (Dan) had grown used to the “deer in the headlights” look on the faces of guests that quietly questioned their decision to visit the church around the corner from home.

They wouldn't be back.

After services, the entire church practically mobbed these poor unsuspecting people with a welcome served with a side of desperation. It didn't matter. Guests could smell death.

New Pastor, Old Church

It was my first year at National Memorial Church of God in the heart of Washington, D.C. I faithfully followed the tried-and-true advice to spend a year before initiating any talk of change. After a year, I had successfully maintained the average attendance of thirty-two people that I started with! Throughout that first year, it became increasingly challenging to stand in front of a mostly empty sanctuary.

A Level 1 church in severe decline can get extremely creative in its efforts to survive.

During my first month in D.C., I discovered that the church treasurer had allowed the building insurance to lapse during the absence of a pastor. My second month, I had to deal with some conflict-of-interest issues with our board. My third month, I discovered that part of my job would be to vacuum up hundreds of gallons of water every time a storm dumped more than an inch of rain an hour (yes, I tracked it).

That first summer, I also discovered that to help the church stay afloat, I would have to continue the practice of hosting hundreds of students on mission who would pay to sleep on the floor of our building throughout the summer. My other job was to coordinate the two ethnic churches that rented the facility. By serving as a hotel and a landlord, the church had been able to survive financially through some extremely lean years. A Level 1 church in severe decline can get extremely creative in its efforts to survive. This is called the “long tail” (we’ll talk about this in the next chapter).

The Church’s Past

National Memorial Church of God opened in 1942. It was a proud effort by the Church of God denomination to place a representative congregation in the nation’s capital. It was one of the last of twenty-five “national churches” to be built in Washington, D.C., just three miles directly north from the White House on a street commonly referred to as “church row.” Once the novelty wore off, however, the church struggled to live up to its

mission. By the 1970s, National Memorial had plateaued (Level 2) and then started a very long and steady decline.

By the time a long-term pastor retired in 1997, my predecessor greeted less than twenty people on the Sunday after his installation service. He was young and creative and was able to build up the attendance to fifty. After he resigned, the church went nearly two years without a pastor and lost any momentum it had gained. By the time I came to Washington, the leaders were tired and out of ideas.

Shifting Demographics

During a board meeting, I played a video of one of our recent worship services and asked our leaders to watch it through the eyes of a guest. They all said it was boring and flat.

Then I played a recording of a pretty conservative worship service that I thought might be palatable to them. They hated it! We seemed to be at an impasse. Finally, one of the board members stated bluntly: “If people would just stay around long enough, they might learn to like our kind of worship.”

Change was happening all around us, but National Memorial had stuck to the same formula.

I was staring into the well-meaning faces of a generation that had developed their worship recipe in the 1950s and had not changed it since. Unfortunately, the world around this church, like so many other churches throughout the United States, had gone through enormous shifts.

The shifts were similar to what was (and is) happening in cities all across the United States. After the white flight of the 1970s and the slowly declining populations that followed, things again changed. Housing values skyrocketed. Young families moved into the neighborhoods. The population of our area in northwest D.C., grew even more diverse.

Change was happening all around us, but National Memorial had stuck to the same formula. The Allen organ still sat proudly on the chancel ready to accompany the tried-and-true hymns or a hot-off-the-press Gaither chorus. Even though our membership reflected some diversity, the flavor of worship and leadership makeup was decidedly Euro-centric.

As individual church members grew older, they had followed the trend of moving to the suburbs of D.C., where housing was affordable, and schools weren't failing. As a result, just a handful of people in National Memorial lived within the ministry area of the church. Adding to the disconnect was the reality of a church full of suburban dwellers trying to relate to an urban demographic. In short, we weren't getting any takers for the growth plan of sticking around long enough to "learn to like it."

I (Dan) interviewed a restart church in Baltimore, Maryland, that had a similar experience of a growing disconnection from its local community. Over the course of a decade, the community had experienced a 29 percent increase in the African-American population in its zip code. During that same time, the Anglo population had dropped by 37 percent. The church named Transforming Life had a decidedly Anglo style of worship, and the leadership struggled to survive in a community that was 71 percent African-American. Without a major change, efforts to reach the local community were futile.

This is one of the areas where the idea of a restart can be so helpful. Dealing with a racial disconnect through a series of incremental changes is fraught with pitfalls and sensitive issues that can become very personal. A restart deals with the changing demographics around a church in a more holistic way without fighting battle after battle over personal preferences.

A Story Oft-Repeated

You've just gotten a glimpse inside a couple of churches struggling to maintain even a Level 1 (subtracting) existence. Churches in the throes of death aren't anything unique. Throughout North America, congregations are living out a very similar reality. Researcher David Olson paints a troubling picture of the U.S. Church in his analysis of the data from the American Church Research Project.¹ The growth rates of churches are highest in their early years. Check out some of his findings:

- Churches in their first decade grow between 4 and 12 percent each year, but once they reach forty years of age, on average churches enter a period of long and sustained decline.² From 2004 to 2005, 57 percent of churches over age forty declined.

- For mainline churches, the statistics are more dire: Some 66 percent of these older mainline churches declined.³
- Evangelical churches are faring better than mainline or Catholic churches, but evangelical churches started before 1965 are seeing more attendance erosion in this decade than in the 1990s. Since 2001, these older churches have declined by 1 percent each year.⁴
- Denominational churches have been particularly hard hit. If your church is more than forty years old and there has not been an ongoing effort to revitalize it every decade, then your church has likely been in a long, sustained decline.

In interviews with the pastors of restart churches, I (Dan) heard our story at National Memorial Church echoed over and over again. The names change, but the story stays almost the same. Two of the restart pastors I interviewed described their driving vision as simply “to stay alive.” That’s a startling reality in struggling churches we’re hearing over and over again. The desperation is so high that diverting any attention away from simply surviving to doing local ministry feels like a decision that could sink the ship.

We hear the statistics about Level 1 declining churches but digging deeper into the individual stories can be downright heartbreaking and overwhelming. Church growth consultant Gary McIntosh likens a Level 1 church in decline to a giant cruise ship whose engines shut off ages ago but whose momentum keeps pushing them forward.⁵

The desperation is so high that diverting any attention away from simply surviving to doing local ministry feels like a decision that could sink the ship.

They may not have baptized anyone in years, but these churches continue to meet for worship and potlucks. Out of embarrassment, their leaders and members gave up long ago on inviting anyone to the church, but they hope and pray the church will still be around to host their funeral. Our goal is not to villainize anyone in dying churches. These are well-intentioned, deeply committed Christians who have reached a point where any change feels like it has the potential to be the death knell in the church they have loved for so long.

More than a Museum!

Let's get back to that meeting in the basement of National Memorial. During the meeting, I presented a life cycle analysis of the church similar to the one we share in the next chapter. In my analysis, I quoted church growth strategist George Bullard who describes a Level 1 church near death that has exhausted its options—a church where even the leaders are embarrassed to invite others to their church.

I asked the leaders and core of the church for feedback. One member said she was relieved to hear that the decline she saw happening in her church wasn't unique. Others said they could relate to Bullard's description of a dying church. They all agreed that it felt as if their church was like a truck buried up to its axles in mud—it wasn't going anywhere.

I was encouraged to hear that the core of the church was seeing what I was seeing. But at the same time, they had been seeing it for years without changing. Many still clung to the original vision of the church to be a presence for our denomination in our nation's capital. In fact, the church had been scrappy enough to cobble together a financial plan that could have carried it for another decade.

That was what worried me the most. Without a catastrophic financial crisis, would this church really be willing to change? As we will see, too often churches with the ability to survive choose survival and scarcity over the opportunity to make significant impact.

This gets to the first role of any restart leader. It's up to you to convince your Level 1 or 2 church they're in a crisis that demands radical change. That crisis may or may not include a financial crisis. But it *must* include a deep analysis of how well the church is doing in reaching the lost and developing them into a lifestyle of following Christ. As the restart leader, you must paint a picture of what a vibrant church that is making disciples and multiplying itself would look like in their context.

Too often, churches with the ability to survive choose survival and scarcity over the opportunity to make significant impact.

That's why I asked my leaders to think about the huge copper-lined baptistery that sat behind the curtains behind the chancel. For months, I had been asking (and no one could remember) who was the last person they saw baptized. In fact, the baptistery had been used as a storage area for years. One of the members of the Spanish church we rented to recalled it was always his job to remove and put back the books stored in the baptism pool when their church needed to use it.

As I shared my desire to see that baptism pool used, someone tried to temper my statement with the reminder that it had a bad leak. My response was candid: "I would love to see the entire floor rotted through because we used that baptism pool so much in the coming years!"

Finally, I laid it on the line and said as bluntly as I could: "Washington, D.C., has enough museums. I didn't come here to tend to another museum."

The truth was that our mission more closely resembled a museum than it did a church. The stained glass was beautiful. The history was inspiring, and the brass plaques kept the memory of past people and organizations alive. But lives weren't being changed. Disciples were not being made. We were not sending out individuals to start new churches or ministries. Our community wasn't being transformed. We had little to no ministry to speak of.

It was time to find out just how badly that baptismal pool really leaked.

A Restart Story: Transforming Life Church, Baltimore, Maryland

After years of decline and at an attendance of forty-five people, the Level church asked the local district for assistance. A consultation process revealed the church was in a place of decline that required the drastic measure of a restart. The congregation agreed to the advice of the consultation team and even gave the outside team the authority to recommend its next pastor. The structure of the church was completely changed, allowing the next pastor the freedom to lead without being tied down to the congregational structure. It became obvious in the consultation process that the community around the church could only be reached through a huge cultural shift by the congregation from an Anglo-style church to a more African-American style of worship. David Biggers was called to lead the effort. By knocking on the doors of the neighborhood, starting ministries to equip residents for jobs, and changing the worship style, the church grew to more than two hundred within the first two years.

Chapter 2

A SEASON FOR EVERYTHING

There is a right time for everything:

A time to be born;

A time to die;

A time to plant;

A time to harvest ...

—Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 (TLB)

The opening line of this well-known passage from Ecclesiastes reveals a writer who pays close attention to life. We've boiled down these familiar words to what most of us probably say on our way back from a great vacation: "Nothing lasts forever."

As great and awesome as your church is or was, it too will grow old and diminish in its effectiveness. And yes, it will eventually die. Think about it. How many of the churches that Paul planted still exist? If churches started by the greatest missionary who ever lived eventually died, then you can be sure your church will die, too. Every church will go through natural cycles of growth, decline and death. I (Greg) tell every church I work with that it too will die someday, the question is not whether your church will die, the question is: Did it make disciples who multiplied while it lived? However, over the last couple of decades we have witnessed an inordinate amount of decline and death in North American churches and too few ever multiplied.

Why We Can't Give Up on Level 1 Churches

It's no secret that established churches are struggling. In 2015, Lifeway Research reported that 3,500 churches closed their doors in the United States.⁶ The good news is that during this same period, 4,000 new churches were planted. Many in the North American Church have all but given up on those 3,500 established churches. But the fact is that even with thousands of new churches being planted each year, we're still losing ground.

How many of the churches planted by Paul still exist? If churches started by the greatest missionary who ever lived eventually died, then you can be sure your church will die, too.

In their book, *Beyond the Local Church*, Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim say that the U.S. Church spends more than \$70 billion every decade on plants and resources. "We're experiencing a decline in adherence and membership at an unprecedented rate," they write.⁷

Between 1990 and 2006, the United States saw a net gain of 52 million people. Yet the number of people attending church stayed the same.⁸ In other words, church plants can't reverse the tide alone. Our older, established churches desperately need to find new life and a restoration of their mission. Level 1 churches are part of the team that we can't afford to lose.

A Predictable Pattern

In the previous chapter, Dan mentioned the general rule of thumb that churches similar to his tend to begin a slow decline between thirty and forty years. A great deal of research has been done to understand the natural life cycle that churches often undergo.

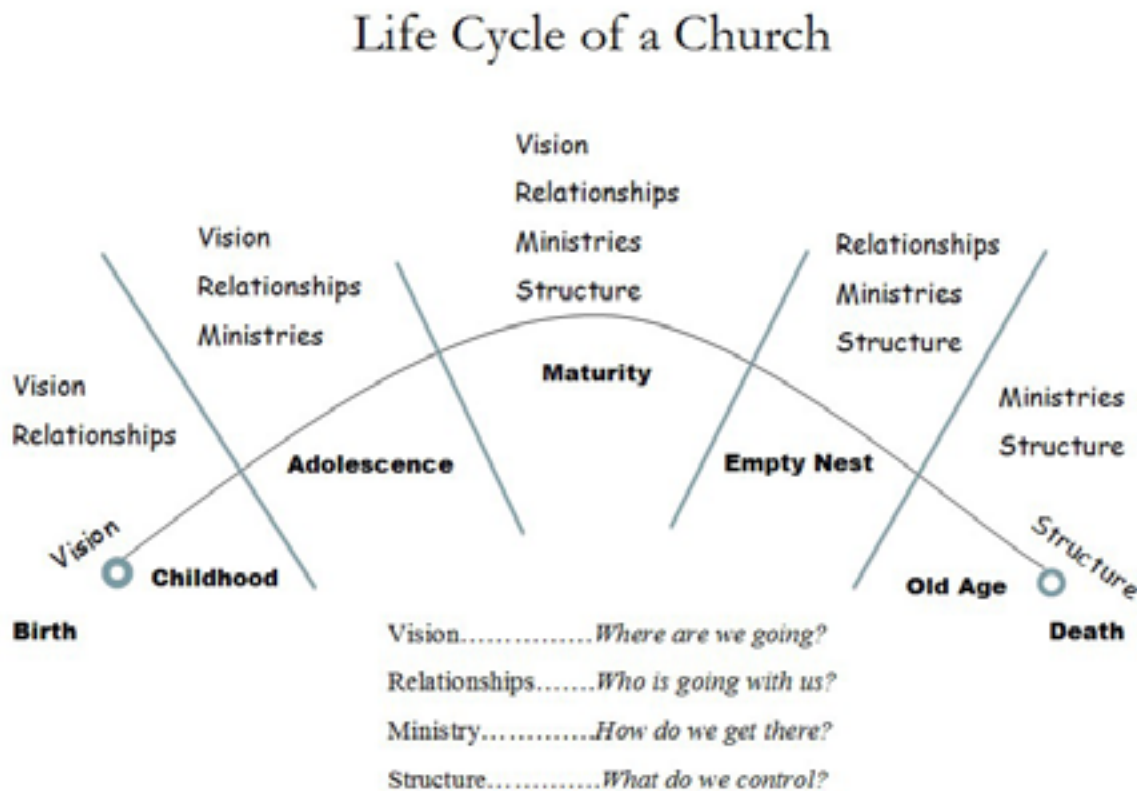
The concept of an organizational life cycle first originated in the corporate world with the theory that organizations tend to mirror human life cycles. Later, Robert Dale, Martin Saarinen, George Bullard and others adapted the concept to relate to the local church.⁹

Church plants can't reverse the tide alone. Our older, established churches desperately need to find new life and a restoration of their mission.

Dying to Restart ~ A Season for Everything

Bullard uses ten stages to describe the life cycle of a church, including birth, infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, maturity, empty nest, retirement, old age, and death.¹⁰ He estimates that 80 percent of congregations in North America are on the aging side of the life cycle or are living in the last five stages.¹¹ The following diagram illustrates an adapted version of the life cycle bell curve.

In each stage of life, churches tend to lean heavily on one of four elements:



- At the start of the church, there is nothing more than a **vision** by a church planter and his or her team.
- That vision begins to attract others until the church becomes a vibrant place of great **relationships** both inside and outside the church. The vision has attracted like-minded people who genuinely enjoy being together, and they have redemptive relationships with those far from Christ.

- As the church matures, new **ministries** that multiply are put into place to build disciples and to reach the local community. These ministries are simply organized ways of creating and keeping healthy relationships.
- And then finally, the growth becomes too much to manage so **structures** are put into place to manage the church. Boards, committees and systems are formalized. This structure ensures that ministries function consistent with the vision and healthy relationships. These structures ensure ministries are healthy and multiplication can continue.

This all happens on the front side of the curve. Ideally, a new life cycle is intentionally launched before a church gets too far down the backside of the life cycle curve.

Early Church Life Cycles

These trends in churches are not recent occurrences. In fact, we can look at the early church in the Book of Acts and see evidence of two to three life cycles. As Jesus promised His coming Spirit to His disciples, He commissioned His followers with an immense vision in Acts 1:8 saying: "... you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Can you imagine the thrill of being a first-century Christ follower and seeing that *vision* begin to be realized as thousands accepted the message of the gospel?

As the church began to develop and grow, so did the relationships. We get a beautiful picture of their life together in Acts 2 when they met daily and shared meals together with "glad and sincere hearts." At least eight times in verses 42 to 47 of chapter 2, we find examples of *healthy relationships* both inside and outside the church.

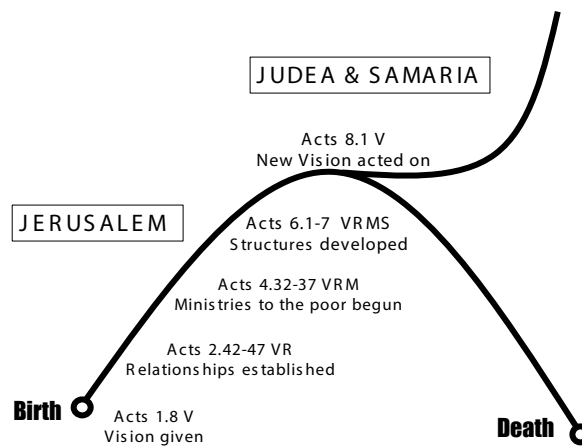
By Acts 4, we see evidence that *ministries* had developed to support the mission. Disciples were being produced and the church starts a program to share possessions with those in need. Notice that resources were shared with "everyone" both inside and outside the church. There was a great burden to build disciples who reproduced

The structure continues to be fairly loose until the number of followers reaches a point that requires a more formalized *structure*. We see that tipping

point in Acts 6 when church leaders appoint a group of seven to care for the church's needs so that the twelve disciples could focus on "prayer and the ministry of the Word." Notice that this *structure* kept the ministries functioning in a way that supported healthy *relationships*, which built disciples who made disciples, and in turn, supported Jesus' clearly articulated *vision* in Acts 1:8.

Historians tell us that at this point, the church had existed for eight to ten years. The structure was fluid and always supported the vision, relationships and ministries.

The First Century Church First Life Cycle



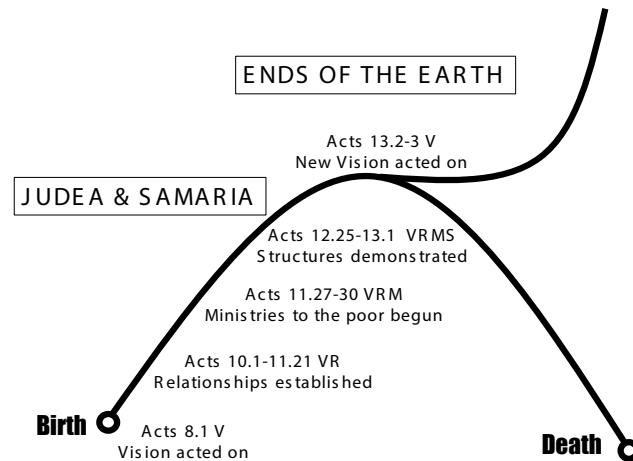
There is no doubt that the church in Jerusalem would have soon built a comfortable sanctuary with a family life center— *if* things had continued the way they were going. That was obviously not what God had in mind. In Acts 8:1, a widespread persecution breaks out against the Jerusalem church, and the believers are scattered throughout "Judea and Samaria."

This is the first time these words (Judea and Samaria) have been used together since Acts 1:8. Notice that in spite of Jesus compelling vision to keep producing disciples and multiplying the church; now ten years later they are still only in Jerusalem. It is the beginning of the second life cycle of the first-century church, though it doesn't appear to be intentional. Unfortunately,

Dying to Restart ~ A Season for Everything

today this scenario sends church planters running to their therapists. Overnight, everything the early church had worked for seemed in danger of being lost.

The First Century Church Second Life Cycle



Thankfully, that wasn't the end of the story. In fact, the setback caused the launch of a second life cycle of the early church that resulted in the church multiplying. The planting of the gospel throughout the regions *outside* of Jerusalem began. In Acts 8:4, we learn that the Jerusalem refugees started sharing the gospel with their new neighbors. New home churches began sprouting up all over Judea and Samaria. Ironically, as is true today, it took a crisis for the next life cycle to start. In Acts 9, 10, and 11, we read the accounts of how Peter, Barnabas, and Paul participated in this initiative.

However, as chapter 10 demonstrates, Peter did not embrace this next life cycle willingly. God had to use a vision to shake him out of his own bias and traditions and free him up to minister outside the Jewish culture. As we see with Paul's conversion, God is always preparing leaders that will lead the church's next life cycle. The family is strong and growing. But the church in Jerusalem doesn't get on board.

In fact, in Acts 11:iff, we read how Peter's journey into the non-Jewish domain of Cornelius didn't go unnoticed. Gossip and reports of his activity

actually beat him back to Jerusalem. He was significantly criticized and finally quiets the crowd. But as we see in Acts 15, the church in Jerusalem never fully embraced the second life cycle, or the following ones. Fortunately, the multiplying church becomes Antioch, which *did* embrace future life cycles.

This Antioch church launches its first missionary endeavor, sending out Barnabas and Paul (in Acts 13:1) to the then-known “ends of the earth,” initiating a third life cycle or multiplying of the first-century church. Historians tell us that ten to fifteen years transpired between Acts 8:1 and Acts 13:1; Acts 1:8 and 8:1 represent a similar lapse. Quietly behind the scenes, a new church multiplication structure begins to emerge.

The setback caused the launch of a second life cycle of the early church that resulted in the planting of the gospel throughout the regions outside of Jerusalem. It took a crisis for the next life cycle to start.

With so many churches springing up, James forms a council. The council is concerned over the cultural differences that are developing in the second and third life cycles. Some in the Jerusalem church have confused theological issues with cultural ones, such as circumcision. Of course, the same is true today. Too often, conflict surfaces when we express the differences between cultural expressions of new visions in theological terms—whether it’s worship style, service format, buildings, or the many other cultural factors defining one life cycle from another.

In Acts 15, we see evidence that the council based in Jerusalem is wrestling with the doctrinal integrity of cultural expressions via missional activities of the church’s second and third life cycles.

When the controversy over the growing mass of Gentile converts reaches a boiling point, we see a third life cycle begin to mature. In Acts 15, the Jerusalem council issues a statement clearing the way for the coming tsunami of Gentile converts. As the mission to the Gentiles begins to dwarf the growth of Jewish converts, we pick up the story in Paul’s letters. The third phase of the *vision* and third life cycle mission of the New Testament church becomes obvious.

We could trace the ebb and flow of the local church throughout hundreds of years of history. When one vision begins to wane, God sends new leaders to chart a new course forward. Unfortunately, most churches struggle to reinvent themselves; accept what it will take to start a new life cycle; and re-contextualize the gospel for a changing world.

When the crowd scatters or the controversy erupts, they struggle to find a way forward. At the point when they should be launching a new life cycle, instead they pull in and stall out. This is exactly what the Jerusalem church did following a fantastic start in the first eight chapters of Acts. Welcome to the backside of the life cycle.

The Backside of Life Cycles

On the backside of the curve is where we find our Level 1 and 2 churches. On the backside, a church begins to lose the four elements it once had:

- **Vision** is the first to go as the church continues to do what it has always done. As chapters 11 and 15 in Acts illustrate, Jerusalem didn't embrace subsequent visions. New vision seems to require morphing and if it doesn't change, frustration will follow.
- As the frustration grows, the past ways of doing things work less, and then the **relationships** begin to suffer. By pulling in, the people in the church often don't build redemptive relationships with people distant from Christ. This "pulling in" exacerbates the decline, and people begin to leave as the tension grows. At this point, often a new vision is quickly squashed as the church continues to "hold on to what we know." We've heard many stories from churches nearing the end. The basic narrative is almost always the same: "The world around us is changing and going to hell, and we have no way to reach it."

I (Greg) remember one man telling me through tears how no one would take the tracks he had used for years to tell people about Jesus. In his mind, his tracks were still absolutely effective, and the problem was with the world, not his approach.

Dying to Restart ~ A Season for Everything

- As the church continues to contract, it's left with fewer people and multiple **ministries** that they try desperately to maintain. Eventually, the ministries can no longer continue. Dan was correct earlier in saying that people can smell death, and visitors quickly pick up that a church is in contraction.
- Typically, when the death of a congregation is near, there is little ministry; few healthy relationships with people distant from Christ or within the body; and ultimately, no vision. But there's still a lot of **structure**. I've worked with churches that had less than thirty people, but their constitution called for thirty-five positions to be filled on their board and committees. They tried to fulfill all of these ministries with only thirty people! Once, it took me (Greg) two meetings and about six hours of work to get a church of twelve people to eliminate their weekly board meetings! The only thing they could cling to anymore was structure. In another church with about the same number of members, the Sunday school superintendent didn't want to leave her position unfilled!

George Bullard lists the following characteristics of Level I congregations nearing the end of their life cycle:

“... no vision, significant numerical decline, failed transformation attempts, survival-focused, diminishing and unbalanced financial resources, resistance to change and transformation, low expectations, long tenure and older-than-average age, irrelevance in community context, worship that's out of touch with culture, dysfunctional congregational systems and repeated conflict, controlling managers, and crumbling facilities.”¹²

The Stalled Narrative

Most churches on the backside of the life cycle have extreme difficulty in seeing their true reality and confronting the facts. As we work with churches,

one of the most difficult struggles we have is helping them acknowledge their true narrative so that they can begin to write a new story.

For many congregations, their church's narrative heavily focuses on the past. Members often share stories about how great things used to be in their church on the front side of the life cycle. In some ways, their story stalls out, and there's nothing to do but look back; looking ahead to the future seems extremely scary and uncertain.

But there is great freedom in accepting your true narrative. We all know that we can't move forward personally until we acknowledge the present problems in our life. For example, we won't get physically healthy until we acknowledge we're sick. For churches, accepting their true narrative often requires an acknowledgment that what they're doing is no longer working. It often means an acknowledgement that they have been clinging to the past instead of moving boldly out in their mission to reach the lost.

Often a counter-narrative emerges that says, "If that megachurch hadn't opened across town, or if our neighborhood hadn't changed, or if we could just build a better building—*then* we could finally start growing again." These counter-narratives mask the true narrative of decline and the reality of poor health in many churches.

For churches, accepting their true narrative often requires an acknowledgment that what they're doing is no longer working.

The idea of life cycles helps provide a mirror for your church. We use it to help churches acknowledge their true status while simultaneously affirming that they're not the only churches that have gone through decline.

A Closer Look at the Tail End

For our purposes, we want to take a closer look at the Level I churches that fall within the last two stages of the life cycle, so let's talk about what "old age" and "death" typically look like.

Old Age

A congregation entering the "old age" stage continues to gather weekly out of habit and is mainly a preaching station or chaplaincy ministry.¹³ The

congregation is afraid to do anything for fear that it could end in its final death.

In this stage, the church has little to no ministries and lots of funerals, and the pastor is likely to seek meaningful activity outside the church through the community or the larger denomination.¹⁴ The congregation is frustrated and gives up hope in their efforts to find renewal, so it finally comes to a place of rest. Members are not being added. The baptistery sits unused.

All that's left is management, so churches are filled with people holding power with hardly anyone left to lead. That may sound really weird but for many churches near death, it's the norm.

Death

As congregations move into the “death” stage, they begin to lose the ability to meet as a church and maintain a pastor. They may hang on to their status as an official congregation but in name only.¹⁵

Level 1 congregations that have reached these late stages of the life cycle will simply not benefit from another revitalization effort.

Dan mentioned earlier how his congregation had gotten creative with finding enough revenue to survive. What the life cycle bell curve doesn't really show is *how long the tail of that curve can be*. It's amazing to me how long churches will endure in these final stages. You've undoubtedly heard the strange stories of people stuffing a cat or dog to keep them around even after death. Churches will prop up themselves and keep the grass mowed outside and the lights on inside, but by most accounts they died years ago.

What's Next?

Congregations that have reached these late stages of the life cycle will simply not benefit from another revitalization effort. The leaders that could have helped champion revitalization are long gone. Over the last five to ten years, the church has likely tried every approach imaginable and has probably

run through a few pastors in the process. If this condition of “old age” has endured for more than seven years, Bullard encourages churches to consider a restart.¹⁶

A Tailored Approach

After a church acknowledges its true narrative and where it is on the life cycle, it's time to begin considering a path forward. For many pastors, the idea of a restart can seem like a very appealing “fix-all”—like the super glue of the local church. However, for some congregations, a full church restart is not the solution they need. By simply working with what they have through a revisioning or revitalization effort, many congregations in decline can start a new healthy life cycle. There are many resources for revitalizing a church (see Resources page), so we won't try to reinvent the wheel here.

If your church is clearly Level 1, in the final stages of the life cycle, there are a number of ways to lead and implement a restart. In our interviews with restart pastors, we found that restarts come in many different forms. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach. We'll talk more about this in the next chapter.

There are two free assessments which will help you to process where your church is at this point. One is the Life-Cycle Assessment and the other is the Becoming a Level Five Assessment; both are listed on the Resources page. Both instruments will give you insight as you continue reading.

Chapter 3

THREE WAYS TO DIE

It is nothing to die. It is frightful not to live.

—Victor Hugo, *Les Miserables*

AIn the process of writing this book, we conducted formal and informal interviews with more than twenty leaders of restarts. We began this project with a somewhat rigid definition of a church restart. However, as we continued to talk with restart leaders, we discovered that restarts come in a few different flavors.

Obviously, that makes it a bit of a challenge to have a succinct definition of a restart. Many other leaders we spoke with called their effort a restart, but when we dug a bit deeper it was obvious they were really talking about a re-visioning or drastic revitalization. It may sound just like semantics but there is a big difference.

Restart Defined

After all of the interviews, research, and scouring what little has been written about restarts, we have developed the following definition of a church restart.

Church Restart: An effort by a long-declining church in which the church chooses a strategic death so that a new church can be launched in

its place, using its existing members and assets. A restart is characterized by a rapid shift in vision, culture, and ministry approach with the purpose of reaching a new target group in its community. A restart combines the approach of church planting with the pastoral work of leading change.

The one important distinction between a restart and revitalization is the need for a clear break with the church's past—a break so radical that it can only be described as a death. We selected the leaders we interviewed because they met that criteria of leading a church through a radical break with its past. This was most often manifested through a period where the church literally is closed.

Each restart looked a bit different. For example, some churches could signal a break with their past in enough ways that they were able to leave their basic structure in place. For other churches, their structure contributed to their decline, which meant structure had to be completely replaced.

We also discovered several different approaches to enlisting the help of an outside group. Overall, we have identified three distinctly different types of church restarts – a legacy restart, a resurrection restart, and a merger restart. In all three cases, the church experiences death so that a new church can emerge.

i. Legacy Restart

As we noted in the last chapter, churches have an uncanny ability to linger for years at or near death. One of the goals of a restart church is to leverage the existing resources of a church, including leadership, members, financial assets, buildings, and spiritual resources.

However, for some churches, their resources may be nearly depleted. They may have a building and some assets, but it's unlikely they have enough human resources to contribute to a restart effort in any significant way. Churches at this advanced stage of decline have been living in a leadership vacuum and have not been able to hire an appropriate restart pastor for several years.

Most likely, a church district or outside church health organization would be called on to assist the remaining members in discerning their future. In essence, the church will be asked to yield its property and assets to

the local church judicatory or outside organization so that a new church can be planted in its place.

The few remaining members may be extended an invitation to be a part of the new church. If they accept the invitation, however, they come knowing that the new church will not attempt to honor their preferences. Whether they stay or go, they have the satisfaction of knowing that the assets and facilities they have invested in for decades will continue to be used for the glory of God.

The idea of a restart assumes that there is something left of the organization to resurrect. In this first type of restart, there is very little, if anything that remains of the existing congregation. In the legacy restart, the remaining DNA is no longer associated with the closed local congregation but rather with the denomination or church health organization that guides the restart process and controls the assets.

This was the story in the church that Harold Ferraro would eventually pastor. Only twelve members remained in the church, and they had been unable to pay a pastor for several years. The local church district assumed leadership of the church and invited Harold to come in and lead a restart. The new congregation would look nothing like the old one, but the denomination succeeded in planting a new associated congregation in its place.

In both the resurrected restart and the merger restart, the remnant members can have a role to play. By the way, we will use the term “remnant” to refer to members from the old church that stay with the new church plant. However, a distinctive feature of a legacy restart, is that there is little to no effort given to incorporating the remnant group. There is only one group in the legacy restart – the church plant newcomers.

I don't know of any judicatory leader that wouldn't love to get receive a call from a group of church leaders requesting to become a legacy restart church. It's an incredible opportunity to plant a new healthy expression of their denomination or association.

Even though the new church may have a building and perhaps some resources, there will be no anticipated stream of income in the beginning.

This is another distinctive feature of a legacy restart. It will be up to the judicatory to build the funding sources to get the new church off the ground.

A legacy restart is the most drastic type of restart for a congregation to initiate. They are literally giving up not just their resources but also any opportunity to be a part of the new church. In many ways, it is an incredible act of servant-hood, humility and trust to give God complete control of a declining church's future with no strings attached.

2. Resurrection Restart

A resurrection restart requires a core of members strong enough to be able to serve the new church in a substantial way. They'll serve as the first members of the launch team. Many times, they'll also serve as the primary givers in the new church until the church establishes new members. The remnant members would ordinarily not serve on the guiding board, however.

One of the things that makes a resurrection restart challenging is the work it takes to acclimate the remnant group with the culture of the new target group. With care and nurture, many remnant members will be able to adapt to the new reality, but its likely that many will transition to another church. Eventually, the newer members will outnumber the remnant members as the focus on mission continues to drive the decision-making.

Depending on the denomination, it's theoretically possible that the church could independently initiate and follow through with a resurrection restart. However, we have yet to speak with a restart leader who didn't rely on the help of an outside agency such as a consultant or a denomination.

Going through the process of a restart will be extremely traumatic for a church. We recommend building a relationship of trust with an outside group that can help provide stability and safety to calm fears during the transition. For many of the churches we talked to, that outside group coming alongside them made the restart seem doable.

A resurrection restart is in essence what Dan described as he helped guide this small church to let go of their past and die so that a new life could begin.

Going through the process of a restart will be extremely traumatic for a church. We recommend building a relationship of trust with an outside group that can calm fears during the transition.

3. Merger Restart

Merger restarts are very different than both legacy and resurrection restarts. In a merger restart, two congregations come together to form a new church. Leaders are then challenged to merge two groups as well as the new target group. These mergers often begin with a relationship between pastors or key leaders in like-minded congregations. These leaders will be committed to becoming a new church with a passion to make disciples who multiply churches and transform their communities.

The merger restart, however, still involves a death. The churches are typically both Level 1 or Level 2 churches, but there are exceptions that we will discuss later. It's common that one congregation will be farther down the lifecycle toward decline than the other. Each merger restart is truly unique, but there are some commonalities.

Tom Plank planted Journey Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. After a few years, Journey Church was barely limping along. Tom had built a strong relationship with an older congregation being led by Joe Mayerik. Joe had begun to prepare Hopewell Church of God for a new lifecycle, though he never would have guessed what it would eventually look like.

The two leaders began to dream about the possibility of a merger and saw it as the clearest path to reaching the next 200 people. The church plant contributed a much healthier culture and vision while the historic church brought seasoned members and a facility. In the end, the older church voted to completely yield to Journey's vision and leadership.

Hopewell's facility was selected as the future site and was remodeled to reflect the new vision. The new Journey Church had its grand reopening with a stronger base and a great facility. Tom led the church for the first several years along with Joe who served as the associate pastor. The merger allowed the congregation to begin a new healthy lifecycle and to reach those 200 people the two pastors had dreamed about reaching.

Journey Church is a great example of what can happen when two Level 1 congregations choose to die so that both can discover a stronger, healthier life.

The Merger-Adoption

We've been talking about mergers between declining or plateaued churches, but let's turn our attention to a different sort of merger. What does it look like when a Level 4 or 5 congregation wants to merge with a Level 1 church? Given the health and size differential, we refer to it as a restart through a **merger-adoption**.

If you knew about church restarts before this book, there's a good chance you heard about it through the efforts of New Life Community Church in Chicago. Over the last several years, Mark Jobe has successfully led the church in its efforts to help restart nine congregations nearing death in the Chicago area.¹⁷ However, these restarts look much different than a legacy or resurrection restart. New Life Community Church has come alongside struggling churches and helped them relaunch their church as a campus in their network of churches. Each church has the New Life brand and is staffed with a pastor the main campus selects.

A restart accomplished through a merger-adoption includes many of the elements of the resurrection restart. A struggling congregation allows their history to end so that a new church can be planted in its place. The new church emerges with a new larger family. That new family comes with a new culture - a culture of discipleship and multiplication.

In the case of Clarksburg Church in Maryland, the church was relaunched using the systems, worship style, branding, interior design elements, and staff from Fairfax Community Church. Fairfax Community Lead Pastor Rod Stafford said that a key factor in choosing to adopt the church was realizing that the target group's demographics were similar to that of the main campus' demographics. This allowed the church to inject their own culture into Clarksburg Church, a culture that would likely attract the surrounding community. After two years, the restart congregation has more than doubled in size.

One notable difference in an adoption restart is that the restarted church doesn't search for a new culture to best reach its community. They are *inheriting* a culture from the parent church. Churches are typically given some freedom to adapt to the surrounding community, but within the constraints of maintaining an identity as one church.

Selecting the Best Option

My (Greg) organization often gets called into churches that are in severe decline and are looking for guidance. They always ask the all-important question: “Should we pursue a restart or a revitalization?” If they appear ready for a restart, then the next question is which restart option to choose. We look at several factors to assess 1) the readiness for a restart as well as 2) the best type of restart. See the chart at the end of this chapter for a quick reference guide.

Effective Leadership

When determining a church’s readiness for a restart, the current leadership of the church is always paramount. By leadership, we mean the governing board and the pastoral leadership. If the church doesn’t have strong leadership, there is very little likelihood they would be able to pull off any sort of revitalization effort.

Leadership must drive the process of revitalization and it must have the commensurate gifts, skills and passions to actually lead the process. The same leadership characteristics we identify in Chapter 5 are very similar to what a leader would need to possess to accomplish a successful revitalization.

Most Level 1 and many Level 2 congregations simply don’t have the effective leadership to lead through the revitalization process, so it is best to consider a restart.

Financial Resources

The next factor to consider in determining both the restart readiness and restart type is the financial resources of the church. This includes its financial assets, cash flow and facilities.

If the church does not have sufficient cash or liquid financial assets, then a resurrection restart or revitalization would be very difficult. If there is not sufficient cash flow to sustain the church while shutting down and making the necessary changes; this would position the church for the legacy restart.

The viability of the facility is also an important factor. If the facility is in severe disrepair or in a terribly bad location, we may recommend that the church consider a legacy restart.

Congregational health

We also look at the church's human resources. A church with less than ten people, for example, would not likely provide enough of a launch team to make a restart possible. If there is dramatic trauma and strife within the congregation, this also would point to a legacy-restart.

We also assess the church's spiritual strength. A church that has been earnestly praying for and seeking renewal for the purpose of reaching their neighbors, building disciples and being part of starting other churches offers a level of support and passion that becomes a priceless asset in a restart situation.

Community Engagement

In consulting with churches, we have also found that strong relationships with nearby healthy churches or a denominational health and growth team can be a tremendous asset for declining churches. As we've said, we strongly recommend that churches use an outside agent to oversee the restart.

We also look closely at the demographics of the congregation and the surrounding community. Increasingly, we're seeing large ethnic shifts in communities while churches continue to look the same. There may also be a large generational disconnect between a church and its community. Without a drastic death and resurrection, the problem of a demographic disconnect is a nearly insurmountable obstacle. We saw this issue at work in several of the restart churches we interviewed.

A church that has been earnestly praying for renewal for the purpose of reaching their neighbors offers a level of support that becomes a priceless asset in a restart.

Denominational Controls

The polity of a congregation will also determine if a restart is possible. We have found that restarts are possible in more denominations than you might think, but you may have to spend considerable time shepherding this process through with your denominational leaders.

Dying to Restart ~ Three Ways to Die

Willingness to Let Go

The final factor which is hard to measure, but it's glaringly obvious. As we interview leaders and members of a declining church, it becomes apparent how tightly they're holding on to their identity as a church even if they're not reaching the lost.

For many struggling churches, they're literally just a few funerals away from losing the majority of their financial support and core leaders. It may very well be that the church will need a few more years of decline and/or failed revitalization attempts before they are desperate enough to agree to a restart process.

Given the time required to prepare for and implement a restart, this issue may determine the church's readiness and suitability for a restart option. The time factor could also serve as a major motivating factor for some churches.

SELECTING A RESTART OPTION

Requirements	LEGACY	RESURRECT	MERGER
Effective Leader Present?	No	Maybe	Often
Financial Resources?	Maybe	Yes	Yes
Core Group?	No	Maybe	Yes
Spiritual Strength?	No	Maybe	Yes
Community Engagement?	No	Maybe	Maybe
Good Location?	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe
Denomination Approval?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Willingness to Let Go?	Yes	Yes	Yes

Chapter 4

IS THIS BIBLICAL?

For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whomever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

—Mark 8:35 (ESV)

At a certain stage in life, doctors and hospitals will begin urging their patients to consider a “do not resuscitate order.” Having been involved with several of those exchanges, I (Dan) can tell you it’s never an easy conversation. No one wants to think about what happens at the end.

The thought often raises ethical and spiritual issues: Is it okay to say that we would rather die than be completely dependent on a feeding tube or life support? The medical community calls it artificial life support because there’s nothing natural about it. Short-term intervention aside, it’s not how we are intended to live. Ironically in Philippians 1:21, Paul writes, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Paul actually saw death as gaining something.

We find equal resistance when we begin talking about a do-not-resuscitate strategy for a church. That’s why so few churches are willing to follow the path of a strategic death and restart. Instead, churches languish on artificial life support. Instead of a church being naturally replenished and renewed by conversion growth and new members, it draws life from artificial, man-made things like structures, continued traditions, endowments and even building projects.

Is something in our theology telling us that it's better to live on artificial life support than accept a strategic death? I believe many churches that refuse to accept the reality of death are actually living out a *distorted theology* of the Church.

Instead of a church being naturally replenished and renewed by conversion growth and new members, it draws life from artificial, man-made things like structures and traditions.

Distortion #1

'We can't let the church die!'

As I write this book, a major sporting goods chain is closing several stores in our area. The bottom line is that several of the local stores were no longer profitable. We can all understand that reasoning. A store that fails to succeed in its mission should be shuttered so the company can redirect its efforts to more profitable regions. But when it comes to God's Church, we get really uncomfortable thinking in terms of repurposing assets to preserve the mission.

For those sitting in the pews of a dying church, it seems the death of their church would be an unthinkable loss to the Kingdom of God. My guess is that those who managed and worked in our recently closed sporting goods stores thought the same thing. But somewhere at company headquarters, a team enacted a strategy to stop the bleeding and make the company profitable again through a painful refocusing effort.

Is it possible that at a larger level God might want some Level 1 or 2 local churches to close so that He could reach more people through a shift in focus? We think it is. In fact, consider the churches in North America that have invested millions of dollars in assets and facilities yet are serving just a few faithful attendees each week. Case in point, consider my (Dan) church before the restart. Each week, we served thirty-two people with \$4 million worth of facilities in a flourishing real estate market. Would God approve of such an ineffective use of resources? Our church members may not want to

ask such difficult questions, but we as leaders should certainly be asking the hard questions.

Is it possible that at a larger level God might want some Level 1 or 2 local churches to close so that He could reach more people through a shift in focus?

Those in a local church near death often lose focus of the bigger picture. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus says: “...upon this rock I will build *my church*” (emphasis mine). Clearly, from this passage we can conclude that Christ is the founder of the Church, and it is forever His possession. Furthermore, He promised His followers that He would be with them always (Matt. 28:20) and give them authority (Matt. 10:1). He also promised to be among them anytime they’re gathered (Matt. 18:20). Jesus was not only the founder of the community, but He also continues to be the very essence of the community. In fact, the New Testament speaks of the Church as the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23 and 1 Cor. 12:27).

It would seem that often people in the congregation might agree Christ owns the church, but *they* own the facility! As the body of Christ, the Church is much bigger than the visible local church. When a local church dies, we shouldn’t automatically assume that the body of Christ is diminished. Because the Church is sustained by Christ and is wide-reaching in its influence, it’s entirely feasible that the Church is growing even as a local expression dies. And it’s entirely possible that the strategic death of a local church could actually strengthen the body of Christ.

Distortion #2

‘We can be faithful without being fruitful.’

What could a church stop doing and still be considered a viable church? Could it stop giving glory to God and be a viable church? Could it stop teaching and discipling believers and still be a viable church? Could it stop gathering for regular times of worship and be a viable church? I think we would readily say that if a local church failed to give glory to God (Psalm 29:1-2) or to gather for regular worship (Heb. 10:25) or to equip the body (Eph. 4:11-13), that congregation has ceased to be a viable church.

But could it stop reaching the lost in their community and be a viable church?

That's the question most churches don't seem quite so certain about. In fact, they could go for decades without impacting their local community or seeing anyone converted, and no one would question their status as an authentic church. Churches have even developed language to cope with the uncomfortable reality by saying things like, "God has called us to be faithful—not necessarily fruitful."

In other words, leaders often settle for being faithful with little regard for results. Yet Scripture repeatedly points to the need for fruitful results. Jesus even calls for branches to be pruned (death) so that new fruit can emerge. Fruitfulness involves many aspects, but it's obvious the results of mission are vital fruit in God's Kingdom.

A church that ceases to live out the Great Commission has lost its way and jeopardizes its status as a viable expression of the body of Christ.

Churches that haven't been part of Kingdom growth for years get increasingly self-absorbed and insular. The late theologian Donald Bloesch went so far as to say that an insular church is one of the marks of a "false church."¹⁸ He goes on to say that insularism is, "the desire to enjoy the benefits the church confers without reaching out in sacrificial love to a world groping in darkness."

To be an agent of change, a pastor must be the one to lift up the looming crisis. Too often, the only thing to qualify as a crisis is the inability of the church to pay the bills. I would argue that the lack of missional focus is a much greater crisis.

A church that ceases to live out the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) has lost its way and jeopardizes its status as a viable expression of the body of Christ. The remedy that Jesus proposed was the radical step of pruning. The restart process entails a drastic realignment of the church's essential functions with its missional focus being front and center.

Distortion #3

God only asks people (not churches) to “deny themselves.”

As I (Dan) considered leading my church through the restart process, the five verses of Mark 8:34-38 became an incredibly motivating passage. I had never considered applying Jesus’ teaching to a corporate entity such as the local church. But the church is simply a collection of people, so I saw no reason why it shouldn’t be applicable. Jesus says in Mark 8:34:

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (ESV).

In his book, *The Gospel of Mark*, New Testament professor John Donahue helps us understand what Jesus had in mind when He says that denial is “to act in a selfless way and to give up one’s place at the center of things.”¹⁹ In the accounts of churches nearing death, there are almost always a handful of people whose preferences and desires are front and center in the church.

People who would readily agree about the spiritual need for self-denial have a difficult time seeing their own lack of denial when it happens within the church walls. Some literally just want to keep things the way they are so that the church they’ve known for decades can be the church that buries them. Others get so much comfort from the traditions, rituals, and familiar song lyrics that they will gladly deny the gospel to others so that they can continue to enjoy their coveted church experience.

People who would readily agree about the spiritual need for self-denial have a difficult time seeing their own lack of denial when it happens within the church walls.

What would it look like to practice self-denial in the context of a church? It might look like the story of the oldest member of Clarksburg Community Church in Maryland. As the church considered a restart that would involve becoming a campus of a nearby larger church, this man went to visit the larger church.

Dying to Restart ~ Is This Biblical?

For the first time, this church member experienced a contemporary worship service. He hated it. The music was loud. The lights were bright. They didn't sing any hymns. But then he looked over at his grandchildren who had come with him. For the first time, he saw them fully engaged and enjoying worship. He came back to his dying congregation and insisted that the restart and merger happen.

Now every Sunday at his church, he sees his grandchildren worshipping alongside young families and newcomers. He may never like the music, but it pales in comparison to his love for his grandchildren and his desire to see the lost come to Christ. In a very real way, this man learned what “denying himself” looked like inside the walls of his church.

Distortion #4

‘The mission shouldn’t be too costly.’

There was a time in North America when it was relatively easy for churches to share the gospel with their neighbors. In fact, the church was such an integral part of society in most regions that it seemed to happen almost automatically. Churches learned they could do what they had done for decades, and they would keep reaching people for Christ. Pursuing the mission didn't seem too costly.

Then times changed. People stopped showing up on the doorstep of the church because they were supposed to attend a church. Churches responded by largely doing the same things. Changes would be costly to those who had grown comfortable, and the mission wasn't supposed to be costly. Returning to Mark's Gospel in chapter 8, Jesus says these profoundly frustrating words in verse 35:

For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it (ESV).

Jesus shares these words with followers in the first century. He knew they would put their lives at risk when they shared the gospel. Most of us in North America have never experienced that kind of persecution. We aren't used to

the gospel costing us anything. We intentionally selected Mark's version of this verse here because he takes the phrase "for my sake" and adds to it "and the gospel's."

Mark wants us to know that the gospel is worth dying for. Without sacrificing for the gospel, can we ever truly grasp its importance and tremendous worth? The current decline in the churches in North America positions us to discover the surpassing worth of the gospel by once again sacrificing ourselves for it.

A church that dies a strategic death allows itself to be placed in a pregnant tomb.

Even as the disciples struggled to resolve the tension between a triumphant Messiah and a suffering Son of Man, so we struggle with the tension between being a strong conquering church (Matt. 16:18) and a church called to die in the model of its founder. But as Mark 8 illustrates, the introduction of the resurrection resolves the tension. This is not accepting a tragic fate. A church that dies a strategic death allows itself to be placed in a pregnant tomb. A local church willing to die does it for the purpose of experiencing new life on the other side.

At its core, this passage in Mark 8 is a missional expression that calls us to risk all for the gospel. The local church is called to lay itself down to serve the larger goal of following Christ and sharing the gospel. But in laying itself down, the church also releases its covering of strength and power and then moves out into a culture where they'll experience shame. It moves out into a culture that often does not respect the church.

While difficult, the drastic actions necessary for reversing the decline in our churches are subservient to the act of following Jesus and reaching the lost. All of the identity markers of a local church are subject to change. Vision, history, structure, worship styles, name, and target group are all factors that must yield to the mission.

Unfortunately, many local Level 1 or 2 churches are experiencing the result of a refusal to die a purposeful death. **They are forfeiting their lives in**

a tragic way with no hope of resurrection in view. Ultimately, this Scripture passage brings hope that through a purposeful death, a local congregation can find renewed vitality, favor from God, and Kingdom effectiveness.

Open Minds and Opened Hands

These four distortions and many others cloud our vision of what God wants to do in His Church. We are reminded in Scripture that our ways of thinking and functioning are not God's ways (Isaiah 55:8). The challenges we are facing are going to require some radical rewiring of how we think about the local church.

Corrie Ten Boom said: "Hold everything in your hands lightly, otherwise it hurts when God pries your fingers open." Many churches are holding tightly to their past, and the pain is enormous. Slowly, the thing we cling to suffocates. All the while, God wants to open a new future that is filled with life and purpose.

It's a future that doesn't require artificial life support. Instead, life begins to flow naturally when we learn to release our grip and let God take control of His Church. It is, after all, His Church, and we already know how the story ends!

A Restart Story: New Beginning Church, Meadville, Pennsylvania

A district leader coaxed Harold Ferraro into considering a return to his hometown to lead a small church of fifteen people. The church was no longer able to pay a pastor or even weekly speakers. The whole thing made no sense, but one night as he looked down at the community from a nearby mountainside, Harold knew God wanted him to do it. The local district health team was already heavily involved and convinced the church to go the route of a restart.

Harold was brought in to lead the effort.

The church hadn't seen a conversion in years. Through a focus on ministering to those in recovery and those who were "broken," the church began to grow. The growth was painful for the members of the old church who were not sure about having those types of people in their church.

During the transition, Harold had to deal with the resistance and keep pushing forward. The church had grown to one hundred people after a year. As the attendance continued to grow to several hundred, the church baptized five hundred people in five years! Harold says he felt completely unqualified for the restart task. He advises restart pastors to make sure they have a calling to do it and to build a team around them.

Chapter 5

DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES?

*The place God calls you to is the place where your
deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.*

—Frederick Buechner

“**H**ussein Bolt Has Never Run a Mile.” This was the headline of an article during the 2016 Summer Olympics. We all watched as Bolt blew away his competition—again. Seeing him run his signature 100-meter sprint was like watching poetry in motion—albeit very entertaining poetry. But, we didn’t see Bolt competing in any race beyond 200 meters. And apparently, he has never run even a mile during his training routine. Instead, Bolt focused on producing explosive speed at short distances. He is a man who knows who he is and what he does well. He has embraced both his gifts, as well as his limitations. How many times have you seen church leaders who are sprinters trying to run marathons or vice versa? It’s a formula for disaster.

A New Leader for a New Day

A church hoping to move from a Level 1 to a Level 5 church will need a pastor with a diverse skill set. It’s highly unlikely that an existing pastor will be able to lead the effort if he or she has been part of that declining church for any significant length of time. For quite a while, these leaders have been running a marathon hoping that the next mile will be more productive.

While there's nothing wrong with slow and steady leadership, it's simply not what the local church needs to undergo radical change. The church will need a sprinter able to keep up with the demands similar to those of a church plant.

While there's nothing wrong with slow and steady leadership, a restart church will need a sprinter able to keep with the demands similar to those of a church plant.

Gary McIntosh contends that on a church's life cycle curve, there are "choice points" in which leaders are called to lead the church through another transition to discover fresh growth.²⁰ McIntosh writes that these choice points require different types of leadership depending on the church's life stage. So current leaders have to either adapt or make room for a new leader. The front of the life cycle requires a different leadership style than what we typically find on the backside of the life cycle.

You may be familiar with the assessment tool called the DISC profile, (which stands for, "dominant, influencing, steadiness and conscientious"). Typically, we need **Dominant** and **Influencing** leaders to help start and grow a church. As churches fall into a maintenance mode and near decline, a pastor with a high **Steadiness** (cooperation) style will keep most of the congregation satisfied. In the final stages of a church's life, the **Conscientious** leader enjoys managing the structure and getting the details right even if the church is nearing death.

It's possible that an existing leader could adapt his or her style with some coaching, but the changes for the leader will be as drastic as those for the church preparing to restart. The conscientious leader doesn't likely have enough dominance or influence to pull off leading a restart. We're not saying that one leadership style is better than the other. God needs all types of leaders. But it's vital the sprinters and marathon runners know themselves and stick to what they do best.

Many Level 1 churches considering a restart begin to wonder how their dying congregation could possibly attract a gifted leader capable of leading a restart. What churches don't realize is that at this point, the restart effort

can provide the opportunity to craft a model of leadership that could be very attractive to leaders who are genuinely interested in bringing visionary leadership.

Many young and gifted leaders won't even consider going to an established church that's so encumbered by structure that they would have to spend the next three years fighting to get their vision through committees. If they do go, they likely won't last beyond three years - the average tenure of pastors. But a church willing to start with a fresh vision begins to look very attractive to gifted leaders.

Remember from the life cycle model that restart churches are in effect, choosing to end ministries, structure and relationships. They are creating an atmosphere that suddenly becomes very attractive to a gifted leader. Restart churches create an atmosphere where visionary leaders can thrive. Most churches don't realize they possess this potential for ministry capital.

Help Is on the Way

In their book, *Beyond the Local Church: How Apostolic Movements Can Change the World*, missiologists Sam Metcalf and Alan Hirsch lament the underutilization of “sodalic” organizations²¹ (referring to apostolic groups designed to support and complement the local church). Metcalf and Hirsch argue that throughout the history of the Church, these sodalic organizations have been the ones to help guide and steer the church back towards its mission at crucial moments.

For example, the monasteries faithfully maintained the integrity of the Scriptures and fostered models of deeper spirituality. The monasteries were the second set of eyes just far enough away from the local church to see the bigger picture. Metcalf and Hirsch grieve that the church has lost the understanding of the value of the sodalic arm.

In recent years, we have witnessed the rise of new sodalic movements. They look like church-planting networks that support and train leaders in best practices and like church movements devoted to seeing the revitalization and renewal of the Church. They look like coaching networks that help provide experienced guidance to pastors. Sometimes, they even look like local districts that throw out the old management playbook and move to a model

of seeking to support churches and leaders who are willing to take a risk and grow healthy again.

Selecting the right leader is without a doubt the most critical decision a restart church will make. Given the history of decline and failed past revitalization attempts, we strongly encourage churches to look for help beyond themselves.

Unfortunately, most churches hire a pastor based on a sermon, a board meeting, and a few reference letters. And believe me, pastors are incredibly capable of making a fabulous first impression. A sodalic group such as a vital district or a church health and growth organization is able to dig a bit deeper.

Restart churches create an atmosphere where visionary leaders can thrive. Most Level 1 or Level 2 churches don't realize they possess this potential for ministry capital.

Any time my (Greg) organization helps guide a church through a church restart, we say upfront that we will be the ones doing the work of finding a suitable leader. The church may get to vote to approve or reject that leader, but as an outside agency, we're able to probe at much deeper levels to ensure a proper and effective fit with the church. We do that by using personality and leadership assessments, including personal interviews with candidates and their spouses.

Our objective distance allows us to discover the real story of how a leader is likely to perform in the context of a radical church restart. Our organization is one of many that are capable of assessing potential leaders. Your local or national denominational leaders can help guide you to a "sodalic" ministry to assist you. We can't say this strongly enough: *Don't try to do a restart without help!*

Assessments and Calling

What type of leader or personality is best suited to lead a restart? Like any assessment process, it's important to understand that assessments are imperfect tools. And frankly, sometimes God surprises us by using a person whom we might not have expected. When the district superintendent tapped

the Rev. Emily Moore-Diamond to lead a restart effort in Warsaw, Virginia, she couldn't understand it. After all, leading a restart wasn't something she ever saw herself doing. But she is flourishing and guiding her church to creatively reach out to their small town.

There is no perfect leader profile to lead a restart effort. For some personalities and leadership styles, a restart may require more energy than other styles. The assessment process helps both the leader and the church understand that upfront. At its best, the assessment process helps a leader understand the *context* that would be a good fit, as well as the type of team he or she will need to be successful. Assessments are not replacements or substitutes for God's calling. Instead, they complement the process, helping leaders see in themselves what others have already seen.

Assessments are meant to help leaders discern how God has wired them and how He could use their unique gifts and abilities. Wiring does not replace calling, but it is uncanny how often in the scriptures a leader's wiring set them up to succeed in fulfilling their calling. Assessments should assess the wiring of leaders from various perspectives.

The Restart Leader Profile

Based on our experience of working with churches, the interviews we conducted for this book, and the other literature available on the topic, we have seen a consistent theme emerge around the restart leader profile.

When I (Greg) conducted several assessments of Dan's leadership style, I discovered that Dan has some of the unique qualities that leading a restart requires. He has a lot of dominance and influence in his leadership style, but he also has a lot of steadiness. We joke that he's a bit schizophrenic. But the reality is that a restart requires an adaptive leader. In his research project, "Restarting the Dying Church," revitalization and ministry consultant Ken Priddy appropriately described the restart leader:

"The restart pastor must be able to move toward the future while dealing with the past. He must be able to create new ministry while rebuilding a broken congregation. He must be leading on the frontlines while taking care of the wounded back at camp. He must be able to connect

with a new target community while connecting with an established congregation ... In short, the restart pastor must be a church planter-plus. He must have experience as a visionary and entrepreneur, as well as experience in problem solving, conflict resolution, and leading a reluctant group of people through change.”²²

Restart leaders must be willing to live in the tension between catalytic leadership and being a caring shepherd. For those familiar with some of the recent literature on the fivefold APEST gifting the apostle Paul describes in Ephesians chapter 4, there is often a tension between the APEs (Apostles, Prophets and Evangelists) and the Shepherds/Teachers.

If the leader leans too heavily in either direction, the restart may falter. It is advisable for all leaders to know where their gifting is and how it can be used in the church. Here is a link for such an instrument: [Spiritual Gifts/APEST](#). Metcalf and Hirsh wrote much of their earlier referenced book to deal with this tension.

We have seen leaders that leaned so heavily toward catalytic leadership that they blew up the church, leaving a big hole of destruction. This made it difficult to launch a new church out of the blast zone. Conversely, we have also seen shepherding leaders who cared so much about the remnant group that they refused to lead the radical change necessary to provide the best chance of success.

Restart leaders must be willing to live in the tension between catalytic leadership and being a caring shepherd. If the leader leans too heavily in either direction, the restart will falter.

Though we look for a leader who can balance pushing and encouraging, we seek out a leader that allows the catalytic leader in themselves to win when they come to an impasse. Sometimes relationships must be sacrificed for the mission.

Restart leaders know their decisions might hurt the remnant group, but in the long run it won't harm them. Ultimately, the restart leader sees a

future beyond what the remnant group can see. Make no mistake. There *will* be anger and grief, but the leader must keep the restart moving forward.

The Church Multiplication Training Center lists several characteristics of an effective restart pastor, including, "... aggressive; sensitive; respecter of people; thick-skinned and able to handle doubt and criticism; culturally matched to newcomers; self-starter; motivated from within; able to hold himself accountable; spiritually, emotionally, and physically healthy; and called by God."²³

A Candidate's Track Record

In selecting a restart leader, we look to see if their history aligns with the demands of carrying out an organizational transition. Have they shown a history of leading change? Do they have a history of starting new things? Have they enjoyed the creative opportunities present during the chaotic years of an organization's lifecycle? Do they have a history of building systems or maintaining systems?

Some leaders may be able to adapt to the changing leadership demands of the different stages of an organization's lifecycle. However, most leaders find they have a sweet spot in a particular stage of the lifecycle; this is where they can bring their A-game. It is very likely that the pastor hired for a restart will be at their best during the transition period but then ready to move on once some level of success is achieved. Then, you can expect them to be off to the next challenge after five years. If you find a candidate with a history of helping churches begin new lifecycles then steal their car keys and don't let them leave after the interview! It is not uncommon to find the best Resurrection-Restart pastors are equipped to do exactly this in one congregation after another. Others, we find are gifted in helping congregations die. We call these transition pastors, Hospice Pastors, and it takes a unique skill and temperament.

Exceptions and Calling

Without looking at the specific context, it's difficult to discuss the ideal profile. We have seen many situations where a district committee, transition pastor, or consultant has done the work of preparing the church for the

Dying to Restart ~ Do You Have What It Takes?

restart. When that's the case, the restart leader can understandably lean more heavily towards being a catalytic leader. Even a remnant group ready for change, however, often still requires a bit of shepherding after the reality of those changes sets in.

The group of restart pastors we spoke with for this project all demonstrated a unique ability to stay focused on the mission while at the same time caring for all of their congregants—old and new. These are remarkable leaders doing remarkable work. We also found that these leaders had a profound sense of calling to the restart effort. They were sold on the idea that old bones could live again—that there could be life on the other side of the empty tomb.

Chapter 6

PAIN NOW OR PAIN LATER?

There is a big difference between hurt and harm. We all hurt sometimes in facing hard truths, but it makes us grow. It can be the source of huge growth. That is not harmful. Harm is when you damage someone. Facing reality is usually not a damaging experience, even though it can hurt.

—Henry Cloud, *Necessary Endings*

“**T**his is going to hurt.” Imagine saying those words to a couple dozen people in a dying church—a church that has been part of the fabric of their lives for decades. You can expect their pupils to dilate, their muscles to tense, and their heart rate to quicken—pretty much what happens to all of us when we’re in a doctor’s office and hear those words. There’s just no way to soft-sell the idea of a church restart. By its very definition, it is a drastic action designed for the direst of circumstances.

Getting Buy-In

As I (Dan) prepared for the restart of National Memorial Church of God, I began by assembling the brightest and most trusted leaders within our association of churches. They were people our congregation knew and trusted immensely.

When I knew it was time to start working with the existing church board at our dying church in Washington, D.C., I prayed that God’s Spirit would

prepare the way. I did eight home visits to present the idea to the individual board members. I picked the hardest one first. With each board member, I laid out the plan of giving up control so that something new could happen and presented the slate of leaders willing to serve as our outside board of advisors.

I held my breath and waited for the response.

I experienced a miracle eight times over. Each board member agreed that it was time for this radical step. They were surprised and encouraged that other church leaders would want to be part of the process. Later, there would be some “buyer’s remorse,” but they at least agreed it was time for an about-face.

With the board in agreement, we started the process of preparing the congregation. In a series of half a dozen meetings, I laid out the plan and then just listened. The reactions were mixed. Some were ready for a change, but many feared this would be the end of the church they had loved for so long. Congregants pushed back. They reminded me of my relative age and lack of experience. They threatened to withhold their giving. They questioned the motives of a restart.

Most of us would rather have a short duration of pain than pain spread across a decade.

At times, the response felt very personal. It was hard to see it in the moment, but I was experiencing the anger that naturally surfaces from the well of grief. They were losing something they loved, and it hurt. There were times when I (Dan) was tempted to back-pedal and do a softer revitalization, but by then my outside advisory board was already holding my feet to the fire. I’m glad they did.

In the previous chapter, Greg talked about the need for the restart leader to be both a catalytic leader and a shepherd. You could probably guess that there’s often tension between those roles. Some leaders want to be so catalytic that they end up blowing up any chances of a new start. Some want to be so much the caring shepherd that they start backing down and don’t make the necessary radical changes. In my leadership assessments, Greg has often

laughingly referred to me as a schizophrenic leader. Honestly, it feels a little schizophrenic at times.

In his dissertation on the topic of restarts, Ken Priddy writes that the restart leader, “must be leading on the frontlines while [at the same time] taking care of the wounded back at camp. He must be able to connect with a new target community while connecting with an established congregation.”²⁴

In the end, our congregation voted nearly unanimously to go the route of a restart.

Standing Firm

In our interviews with restart leaders, we found that an unwillingness to confront the hard changes upfront will leave a trail of pain for years to come. One congregation reported that their decision to do a restart while leaving the existing leaders in place caused lingering cultural differences in the years following. I think most of us would rather have a short duration of pain than pain spread across a decade.

One of the most inspiring restart stories came from New Beginnings Church in Meadville, Pennsylvania, and restart leader Harold Ferraro. We introduced you to Harold in chapter 3. You may recall that under pressure from his association’s health and growth team, Harold moved back to his hometown to restart this dying church of fifteen, which could no longer afford to even pay speakers for their weekend services. Supported by his growth team, Harold asked all of the current leaders to resign. Then he began to invite the most vulnerable and needy into the church as he focused on ministry to those with addictions.

At times, he had to confront those who insisted it was the wrong direction. As the church began to experience some major growth, the resistance began to move to the sidelines. The change was radical, but so were the results. The church grew to two hundred members in two years. Over the next five years, they baptized five hundred new believers. Eventually, they would grow to more than eight hundred members.

On special occasions and anniversaries, Harold has asked the few remaining members of the old church to stand so that he could recognize the “heroes” in their midst. They were heroes because they accepted the pain of

change so that they could reach the lost and hurting in their small town in rural Pennsylvania.

The Elephant in the Room

If you're a pastor or church leader reading this book, you're likely already thinking about *the* big issue—finances! It's inevitable. The changes we're talking about will put your personal financial stability at risk. Before the healing begins, you will likely alienate the people who are paying your salary. We won't blame you if you stop reading this book now. In fact, we talk to pastors all the time who know their church needs to take the drastic action of a restart but feel as if their finances are holding them (and the church) hostage. They would rather deal with years of the dull ache of an unfulfilled mission than to accept the pain of a huge financial risk.

First, I will make the full disclosure that when I (Dan) led the restart at our church I was still a few years away from supporting the disposable diapers companies. Now with three more mouths to feed in our home, the decision to restart would be a bit more complicated. But I doubt I would do anything different. I have witnessed firsthand God's unblemished history of faithfulness. To refuse a tough call from God for financial reasons is a missed opportunity to see God show up and move in ways we would never imagine.

A restart gives you the opportunity to experience the creativity of our God. One of the unexpected ways God showed up was through other churches. In our case, a leader of a large suburban church was asked to serve on our board and really helped to subsidize our income during the first few years. Many churches will help plant new churches, but thankfully some churches are also able to see the benefit of helping turnaround churches.

Of course, if we're honest, most church turnarounds want to just tweak what they're doing. I learned that when mission-minded churches catch the vision of a struggling church that's so serious about a fresh start the people are willing to die for it, other churches will line up to support the effort!

To refuse a tough call from God for financial reasons is a missed opportunity to see God show up and move in ways we would never imagine.

During the course of our interviews, we also heard repeatedly about the willingness of denominational efforts to support a church willing to restart. Most churches or denominations are reluctant to support revitalization, but a restart project inspires new motivation. Revitalizations tend to be more cosmetic in nature, which most outside groups will assume the church can handle internally.

A restart involves enough risk that compels outside groups to see the need and get involved. It also tends to generate more excitement from those with a mission mindset. They're eager to support anything that isn't a fresh coat of paint but rather a very intentional effort to reach the lost for Christ.

There are certainly opportunities to find outside sources of funding, but I also want to encourage you to take the leap and see how God shows up. After our congregation voted to begin the restart process, we were still constricted by our building that had suffered through years of neglect. Honestly, I had some doubts that our community would react positively to a church with no technology, a moldy basement, outdated restrooms, and unappealing children's areas.

A week after the church voted for the restart, I received a check in the mail. Our church name was so similar to the name of a nearby large suburban church that we would often get their mail. As I read the check, I thought, *Those lucky people down at National Church. I'll bet they get checks like these all the time.* A quick call to the law firm revealed that this money was indeed intended for our church.

Here's the amazing thing: The check was for \$100,000! I had never seen that many zeroes on a check. Jesus said in Matthew 6:8 that the Lord knows what we need before we even ask. The check came from a member of the church who had moved out of the area twenty years earlier but had remembered the church in his will. He would have never guessed how the timing of that gift would correspond with God's work in Washington, D.C. We poured every dollar of that gift into updating our facility. Within several months, we were ready to proudly welcome our neighbors into our space.

When dealing with this elephant in the room, I (Greg) believe it is dangerous for pastors to launch into the restart process without some sort of financial checkup to ensure they know where they are. This doesn't preclude

the kind of faith Dan expresses above, but it is an informed faith, rather than an ignorant faith. If you are part of a denomination, then utilize their services for such. If you are not a part of a denomination I would recommend [Servant Solutions](#) (See Resources page) as an excellent source for a free financial check-up for pastors.

Denominational Hurdles

One of the major hurdles to accomplishing radical change involves navigating the parameters and restrictions of denominations. Many leaders would love to make radical change but fear their denominational requirements would not allow it. Some leaders may even try to accomplish a restart while simultaneously walking the tight rope of restrictions within their denomination.

Through our interviews, we discovered that a restart could happen within the context of almost all of the mainline denominations. Interviews with pastors revealed that an ongoing relationship and dialogue with their district superintendent or local bishop was the key to getting their restart approved. In short, the restart conversation doesn't need to end with a quick scan of the denominational requirements.

The Need to 'De-Structure'

Many gifted leaders don't want to deal with trying to turn around established churches primarily due to control or power issues. We can't say we blame them. Without the freedom to lead and make decisions, these leaders know that most congregations will leave them feeling frustrated and emotionally drained.

In our interviews with restart leaders, we found that the restart almost always included some sort of change in how the congregation was governed. In almost every case, the key is freeing up the leader from cumbersome structures so that he or she can use his or her gifts and abilities to the fullest.

In the previous chapter, Greg spoke about some of the governance issues. The old church I served had a typical congregational governance structure, which meant that I left our monthly board meetings with a very long task

list. My time was eaten up with meetings and tasks seldom related to reaching the lost.

Are you willing to stay with a restart for at least five years? If you're considering a restart, you should plan on making a relatively long-term commitment.

In the midst of this restart process, I discovered that churches could function with greatly simplified bylaws or, in some cases, without bylaws completely. Doesn't Scripture somewhere call for the church to have bylaws? It actually doesn't. There comes a point when a church needs bylaws to help bring order; sometimes legal circumstances will require them.

But in fact, our church adopted an interim set of bylaws that were all of three pages and served us well for four years!²⁵ My board consisted of five pastors and church leaders from other congregations that met every few months. There was accountability, but there was also a recognition that God had called me to this church to lead. It was life-giving!

Gut Check for Leaders

Warning: You're about to move beyond the point of no return. As we have repeatedly said, the process of a restart is by its very nature a drastic step. Before you take that quantum leap, I (Dan) want to ask you what one of the members of our outside advisory board asked me: "If we do the restart, are you willing to stay with it for five years?" In his wisdom, this board member understood that it could have been devastating to the church for the leader to jump ship during the time when the church is most vulnerable. If you're considering leading a restart, you should plan on sticking with it until it's in a healthy position. Some contexts may not require five years, but my urban context certainly did.

The End

Funeral services play a critical role in how we cope with grief and in helping us launch into our next stage of life. In June 2006, we celebrated the end of the history of National Memorial Church of God. This was not a

time to diagnose what had led us to that moment. This was a day to celebrate sixty-five years of ministry and the hundreds of lives that had been touched. It was a moment to remember the music ministry of the 1970s, the church dinners, annual bazaars, Bible classes, and previous pastors—to celebrate what God had done in that space.

Given the role the church had played as a “national church,” I contacted our association’s national office and asked them to provide a letter of release to the congregation. No one knew what to do with my request. Finally, one of the national leaders asked me to write the letter, and he would review and sign it! Our local regional leader also provided a letter celebrating the church’s past and releasing the congregation. The letters were read to the congregation.

At the end of that service, I said the following:

I hereby release you from all volunteer, leadership, and financial commitments to National Memorial Church of God. You are released from your commitment as a member of this church. In October of this year, we will be launching a new church. You are invited to meet in a living room Bible study over the next few months if you would like to be a part of the new church. You have my blessing to transition to another church if you feel that it is time to do so.

As I said the words, I felt the enormous weight lift from my shoulders. Yes, the change was painful, but I was beginning to sense new life on the other side of the grave. The first phase of the journey was drawing to an end, and the next phase was beginning. In retrospect, God used that moment in some amazingly healthy ways to help members transition to new churches and for the new church to experience the freedom of a truly fresh start.

A Restart Story: Grace UMC, Cape Corral, Florida

Jorge Acevedo is no stranger to the restart process. He led Grace UMC through a dramatic change that began in 1996. When he came to the church, they were in a new facility and experiencing a major financial crisis. Jorge brought with him a missional focus that he calls “pushing church out.” After helping to turn around Grace UMC, he sensed God calling him to help with other struggling churches. In 2005, he helped a church of forty members do a drastic restart. Leaders from Grace UMC were sent out to lead the congregation and to help build a new, healthy culture. In 2016, Grace UMC adopted another dying congregation in the area and is beginning the process all over again. Is a restart possible within a mainline denomination? Jorge responds to the question by talking about the importance of “leading up” and being a team player within the denominational district.

Chapter 7

RESTARTING WITH MISSIONAL DNA

Dying to restart is not about re-creating a better version of the past but rather, something qualitatively different.

—Greg Wiens

The phone call from my father jolted me (Greg) as he told me that my mother had collapsed at the graveside service for a friend. They had rushed my mom to the hospital and had found no pulse. They ended up giving her eleven units of blood and bringing her back from death only to discover that her one remaining kidney had a metastasized tumor emptying blood into her cavity. The doctors told us that she had only a few days to live, so we gathered around her for those precious few days to say our goodbyes.

My mother was a cool mom. I loved and cherished her. She later told me very quietly how she had viewed all of the afternoon's events in the ER from "above." She said she left her body and looked down on the events as the hospital staff diligently worked on her body. She was eventually reunited with her body and regained consciousness.

To the doctors' amazement, Mom lived *seven* more years. During that time, we had many great discussions. My mom was different. She was always

kind, considerate and nurturing; however, after this near-death experience, she was much more honest, discerning and eternally minded. She wasn't afraid to tell me the truth, even when it hurt. For example, she said she was surprised I had stayed with my wife over the years because I had never committed to much in my life. But she quickly followed it up with, "that is obviously the difference that Jesus has made in your life." I've read accounts of others who have experienced death and then come back to life, and they share the same characteristic. Their experience completely changes their perspective.

A New Focus

It seems to me that this is the same with the church. Churches I know that have gone through death to allow a new church to be born also go through a transformation of perspective. They know there's nothing left to lose. They have given up their buildings, worship style, and structure—all of those things that brought comfort—so that the church could have new life. They have an honest perspective with an eternal focus.

When we allow our churches to die, our goal is not to try and control the form of what will emerge from the grave. That is wholly the work of God.

A Resurrected Body

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:37 that when you lay a body in the grave, it is akin to sowing a seed. You don't bury a body only to dig it up later! In the same way, a restart church rises as something completely different. You sow a seed in the ground, surrendering your future to God. Paul says in verse 38: "But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body."

When we allow our churches to die, our goal is not to try and control the form of what will emerge from the grave. That is wholly the work of God. But Paul makes it clear there are some elements of the seed that will endure into this new future. The seed contains the germ of who you were, but it is now sanctified for who God wants you to be.

Strands of DNA of a Restart Church

As a church begins to emerge from death, it's obviously in a very fragile state, but this is a critical time to start accepting the new DNA that God wants to infuse into the resurrected church. The DNA must actually be built into the foundations of the new church—not just talked about. In studying churches that have died to find new life, we have discovered some common practices to help ensure the survival of the new, healthy DNA. Healthy restart churches tend to be very intentional about formalizing the DNA through the church's mission, vision, values, relationships, ministries, structures and operating systems.

The DNA must actually be built into the foundations of the new church—not just talked about.

A rediscovered mission. A church doesn't choose to die unless it really catches the importance of its mission to reach the lost and be a Level 5 multiplying part of God's expanding Kingdom. So, by their very nature, restart churches are infused with a passion for the mission of making disciples. This is the time and place for the new church to embrace a DNA of multiplying disciples and churches. The voices of those still in darkness seem especially loud to a church that has risked everything for the sake of the gospel.

A Level 5 church is one that is willing to do whatever it takes, short of sin, to multiply disciples who will start churches that will repeat the process over and over. It is no longer acceptable for the church to be growing disciples only in their location. Instead, a Level 4 and 5 church releases disciples to start churches which make disciples, literally next door and around the world.

These resurrected churches are uniquely positioned to move from simply growing to ultimately multiplying. In recent months, the church that for years had struggled to simply survive in the middle of Washington, D.C., is now nearing the launch of a new congregation to meet the needs of its diverse community.

New compelling vision. Many struggling churches we spoke with said their compelling vision was simply to survive. Once a church has embraced

its worst fear, it emerges with greater courage. It is more apt to have God-sized dreams that go well beyond just growing the local church to impacting a region through movements. A restarted church has a chance to cast a vision as a community that's making disciples who can make disciples—well positioned to become multiplying churches.

The voices of those still in darkness seem especially loud to a church that has risked everything for the sake of the gospel.

New values. Every church faces the tension between caring for the ninety-nine sheep safely in the fold and going out to search for the one that's lost. The values that a restart church prioritizes help them define how they will navigate that balance.

While God calls every church to make disciples, many congregations in mission drift are more focused on doing what C.S. Lewis describes in *Mere Christianity* as trying to simply make nice people a little nicer.²⁶ As a church begins its restart journey, they have the opportunity to build strong disciples who can help make disciples and so on—to the fourth generation.

This is literally a different operating system from the way the previous church operated. This new operating system impacts not only the mission, vision and values; but down to the daily decisions of who leads, how they lead, who uses their gifts and how they use their gifts. This change to a new operating system is difficult, if not impossible, for an existing church to make while it is trying to maintain the old structure. However, in a restart, the leaders can make these changes from the inception of the resurrected church.

We have seen six shifts in a church's culture that are necessary to keep the church focused in its mission.

- The lead pastor shifts from being everyone's hero to becoming a "hero maker."²⁷
- The remnant members are encouraged to shift from having a consumer mindset to being disciples who make disciples—disciple multipliers. New members experience this expectation from the beginning.

Dying to Restart ~ Restarting With Missional DNA

- The expectation that serving can only take place inside the church shifts to a holistic view similar to John Wesley’s perspective: “I look on all the world as my parish.”²⁸
- The leadership shifts from a bias of “no” and control to a bias of “yes” and release.
- Finally, there is a shift in the metrics. A church shifts from counting nickels and noses to measurements that indicate transformation is happening in their community and the world.

Renewed relationships. It’s amazing what a fresh and clear vision can do for the quality of relationships. In the absence of a strong vision, the halls and recesses of a church are filled with negativity and in-fighting. If you’ve served as a church leader, you have undoubtedly had to mediate on such weighty matters as the color of carpet in the nursery. When you fill the halls with vision, relationships naturally refocus and strengthen. And, it’s not just the internal relationships that improve.

As a healthy church begins emphasizing the multiplying mission of reaching the lost, it also places an emphasis on sustaining strong relationships outside of the church. This renewal of relationships is not just limited to our human relationships. A church on mission aligns its members to be in closer connection with the One who calls us.

Once a church has embraced its worst fear, it emerges with greater courage. A restarted church has a chance to cast a vision as a community that’s making disciples who can make disciples—well positioned to become multiplying churches.

Healthy ministries. So many churches in severe decline hold onto ministries just to have something to point to as evidence of life. Resurrected churches become much more purposeful in the ministries they choose to sustain. At their core, ministries become a mechanism to create and sustain healthy relationships whether they’re 1) within the church; 2) with the lost of the community; or 3) with God. In a resurrected church, every ministry is evaluated from the perspective of these three healthy relationships.

Healthy churches look for evidence of transformational outcomes from every ministry. If they aren't supporting healthy relationships, then they're abandoned for a new, more effective ministry. All ministries must point to a church committed to making disciples who will multiply through making other disciples and churches.

New structures. Jesus warns us in Mark's Gospel about putting new wine into old wineskins (Mark 2:22). As a restart church begins to take shape, its structure must change to accommodate the new vision and mission emphasis. The structure is not sacred, but the vision is! (Check out chapter 8 for a more detailed discussion of governing structures.)

A healthy philosophy of ministry. A church that has survived years of decline and a purposeful death has most likely witnessed firsthand the destructive power of a ministry philosophy that places all of its emphasis on sustaining itself. Most churches we have worked with in the throes of death have a past history of successful building campaigns; incredible anniversary celebrations; Bible studies that have set longevity records; and staff that were good looking with above-average intelligence. For a long time, it *felt* like they were winning ... even if they weren't.

Leaders in a healthy restart church are perhaps more vigilant than most about avoiding the pitfalls of a self-serving ministry mindset. Instead of growing larger and more comfortable, the church views it as essential to multiply. Instead of building a bigger building, the church is bent on sending out people to start a new church in their neighborhood. Instead of hiring more program staff, the church hires planting interns to develop leaders for future congregations. Even the budget reflects this philosophy with a percentage of it allocated to save toward a future church plant.

CHAPTER 8

THE EYE OF THE STORM

The eye is a region of mostly calm weather at the center of strong tropical cyclones.

—Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological
Laboratory

If you've ever been in the path of a hurricane, you have no doubt experienced that strange moment after the initial storm bands pass over. Suddenly, the winds die down, and it feels almost normal—at least for a few minutes. In fact, the most powerful parts of the storm are in the winds that surround that center eye.

Gestation Activities

After a year of laying the groundwork, meeting with leaders, answering the questions of nervous congregants, and finally holding the last service of the old church, it felt like the storm was subsiding. But in fact, we were on the cusp of launching a new church plant just a few months after helping a church to die. We had three and a half months to strengthen our launch team and prepare for the launch. We were in the eye.

This is what is commonly referred to as the gestation period of a church restart because it is during this time a new and holy different DNA is being developed for the new church. This DNA sets the culture to be one of discipling individuals to be sent out to multiply new churches. Everything in the new church will evolve and grow from this core DNA.

In interviews with restart pastors, we found this period to be the most widely varying factor. Many leaders we spoke with did all the work of making a hard break with the past *without* going dark between the death and new launch. They did experience considerable pressure to maintain regular ministry for the remnant who wanted to be part of the new church. There are usually those on-the-fence people that pastors know may leave if their immediate needs are not met.

Instead of inviting people to a worship service, we invited people to help us launch a new church.

In our case, we scaled back ministry to the most basic level. The *only* thing we did for those three and a half months was hold a very informal service around the tables in the dining area of the church. I shared with the church that the former church had begun in much the same way—with a small group of people meeting in a home in a very informal service.

We made it clear that we were going dark for a few months so there would be no active effort to invite people to this informal worship service. Instead of inviting people to a worship service, we invited people to help us launch a new church.

Why You Shouldn't Skip the Shut Down

There are a few reasons to be intentional about the gestation period. First, it's extremely helpful to physically demonstrate that a seismic, cultural shift in the DNA has taken place. In our case, we didn't want to have the final worship service of National Memorial Church of God and then come back the next week into the same space and format and pretend everything had changed.

Many of the congregants in a restart will keep their heads in the sand about the changes taking place. You can either enable that behavior or force people to confront it. The week after the final worship service, we made it very obvious to everyone that this was not business as usual. There were lots of questions and resistance, but this period was an essential part of the cultural shift. For the DNA to be new, a physical break is essential.

Second, you need the extra time to start planning for the launch. There is just no way you can effectively maintain all of the ministries and programs of the old church while moonlighting as a church planter. Launching a new church is far too demanding to add it to everything else you have always done. Developing a multiplying disciples DNA requires rethinking everything in the church. This is arduous and usually requires experienced coaches to guide the process.

Third, the gestation period gives you a chance to reset the stage. In our case, we literally reset the stage. We removed a huge organ, pulled out all the furniture of what was a split chancel design, and installed new sound and media equipment. Resetting the stage also involved determining our new target audience. In our case, we decided to target people between twenty-five and forty-five years old. Given that the former church had a dominant age range of fifty-three to seventy years old, appealing to this new target would require a drastic change in style.

During the gestation period, we held three preview services, which led to an incredible amount of culture shock. Other than the stained glass, not much was familiar. However, the gestation period gave us room to work through the remnant's concerns and to continually reiterate why we were making the changes. Without the gestation period, we would have had week after week of complaints and no time to debrief and reiterate the vision. The vision of making disciples of those in the target community and planting churches through these disciples is not easily grasped by those of traditional church models designed in the 1950's. So all programming and ministries of the church need to be carefully planned, explained and executed. This takes time and practice.

A gestation period also gives a church restart an extremely effective tool to help inject a discipling mindset into the church's DNA. The church has the time to step back and reflect on why they're doing what they're doing. After deciding to do a full restart, Mosaic Church of the Nazarene in Washington, D.C., moved their worship service to their dining area for several months like we did.

Pastor Rob Kazee used that time to teach the congregation about worship and its beautiful simplicity. Out of that season of teaching, the

Dying to Restart ~ The Eye of the Storm

church launched in a new direction radically focused on the Eucharist and table fellowship. The gestation period allowed for a healthy alteration of the church's DNA. During Mosaic Church's gestation period, the church also used most of its savings account funds to improve its signage and update its facilities in preparation for its new start.

A Restart Story: Colonial Hills Church, San Antonio, Texas

The UMC district superintendent told Bill Easum to either grow the church or close it. Though a young church, it had a rocky eight-year history. Attendance had declined from two hundred and fifty to nineteen people. They could no longer pay a pastor or their mortgage. Trying to work within the requirements of the UMC denomination, Bill quickly began to make changes. He called on every person to consider themselves a missionary. He got out into the neighborhood and realized that families' biggest need was quality preschool. The church started a preschool and began drawing new members. With the help of some changes to the facility, the church grew to two hundred and fifty after eighteen months. Twenty-one years later, the church has grown to 2,200. In hindsight, Bill learned a few lessons. He advises leaders to wipe the church structure clean and start with new leaders. He also encourages leaders to discover the value of coaching early on in the process.

CHAPTER 9

COVERING THE BASES

*It's the little details that are vital.
Little things make big things happen.*

—John Wooden, UCLA Basketball Coach

By its nature, the beginning of a new life cycle is an extremely chaotic time. A pastor who's in the middle of managing the closure of a church and starting a new one will likely live in a constant state of feeling overwhelmed. In the midst of managing conflicts, dealing with grief, and planning for the future, it's natural to overlook some details.

However, we can't stress enough the importance of paying attention to the details that can easily derail the entire process if left unattended. It's extremely important that someone on your team does sweat the details to ensure the process goes smoothly. Let's talk about covering your bases at the beginning of a restart, during the pre-launch, and then after the launch.

The Beginning of a Restart

When we help lead a congregation through a restart, we begin with a very simple covenant the entire congregation must approve. It won't be long before members of even the most resolved restart church will begin to back-pedal on the need for radical change.

The covenant helps ensure that the steps of the restart are in writing and well known. As we have discussed, often an outside party is involved who's investing heavily with funding, expertise, coaching, or providing guidance.

The covenant helps ensure that the outside groups supporting the restart can feel confident their investment is well placed.

It won't be long before members of even the most resolved restart church will begin to back-pedal on the need for radical change.

After an extensive questionnaire, interviews with the staff, and a weekend consultation that includes interviews with leaders and members, we draft the covenant to fit the specific needs of the congregation. We realize that every restart will look a bit different, but the covenant we ask congregations to approve generally includes the following elements:

- A plan to hire the restart pastor (includes an assessment process).
- A two- to three-year period of coaching for the restart pastor.
- The congregation will allow the mission of reaching their community for Christ to guide their decisions.
- If asked by the pastor or denominational leaders,
- current leaders are required to resign.
- A process to determine the new mission and vision with a new DNA.
- Changes to the organizational structure that include a simplification and a call to bring in outside catalytic pastors and/or denominational leaders on the board.
- If needed, a plan to deal with unresolved conflict.
- A covenant from the congregation committing them to praying for the process.
- A commitment from members to financially support the efforts to launch a new life cycle.
- Recommendations to update or change the location of the worship facility.
- The church will report progress measures to the coach and outside partners.
- Details of the support the outside partners intend to provide.

Depending on the situation, the covenant may include additional items. Many congregations may be restricted by their congregational bylaws in

their ability to approve the covenant. Obviously, the method of hiring a new pastor or recommended structural changes will differ from the existing bylaws. Many churches will likely need to approve an interim set of bylaws at the same time they approve the covenant. These bylaws can often be simplified to a simple two- to three-page document.

Remember that church plants (the closest existing paradigm to restarts) are typically not launched with a full set of bylaws. Most church plants don't adopt a set of bylaws until their growth requires it. This was consistent with what we saw earlier with the Jerusalem church not "structuring" their body for the first 8-10 years.

In a church restart situation, we want to try and replicate that freedom at the launch of a new life cycle. We want churches to be driven by their passion to build disciples of the lost, not by their allegiance to a twenty-page set of guidelines passed down from previous generations. Those overly extensive bylaws are often an accumulation of rules set up in reaction to decades of past wounds.

We want churches to be driven by their passion to build disciples of the lost, not by their allegiance to a twenty-page set of guidelines passed down from previous generations.

Most denominations can help their congregations draft an appropriate covenant. You could also ask a church consultant. The covenant provides that line-in-the-sand moment for the congregation as they start the period of rapid transformation and also gives the lead pastor the mandate to move forward and begin the work.

Pre-Launch

Welcome to the operating room otherwise called the pre-launch. Things are about to get messy. The value of a restart lies in its ability to allow a huge amount of change in a short amount of time. Once those changes start happening, you can expect resistance. You might even experience an unhinged level of resistance as remnant members see their church begin to transform into something unfamiliar right before their eyes. It's going to take

time for them to understand, and you're going to love them through it. But as you love on them in your "innocent dove" stance, don't forget to also be as "wise as a serpent" (Matt. 10:16).

The level of resistance may get to the point that members try to derail the restart efforts through legal means. We have worked with several churches where that was the case. It's extremely important that you have all of your legal bases covered. Your governing documents and articles of incorporation need to reflect the new reality that a new group of leaders has been granted the authority to lead. Before you begin making drastic changes, make sure all of your legal documents are in order. This is especially important for independent or autonomous congregations.

If you're part of a denomination, it's also important to bring the denomination and any local judicatories into the process if they're not already involved. Many of the pastors we interviewed pointed to their local superintendent's buy-in as a major key to their success. Once the complaint calls start coming in, you'll need the superintendent in your corner.

Remember, eventually you *will* make it through this messy, conflicted period and see the new church begin to emerge.

Post-Launch

A newly restarted church is likely to have a high level of chaos—which is normal. New people are now coming to the church, and the church will still be shaping its new identity. Leadership will likely be working to manage the expectations of the remnant members alongside the unbridled excitement of the newer attendees. The start of a new church should be driven by relationships instead of policies and structures.

Chaos is expected, but there are potential pitfalls during this period. In his book, *Winning on Purpose*, denominational coach and trainer John Kaiser talks about the problems of anarchy: "Without a structure for accountability, the most dysfunctional people often shape the life of a congregation ... Lack of intentional structure will facilitate the path of least resistance, which is inward focus."²⁹

Once the new growth precipitates the need to organize, it's important for restart churches to solidify their mission and vision in a new healthy

structure. The temptation will be to default into the former model of leadership, which for most older congregations would have been a congregational structure or what Kaiser calls a “democratic structure.” He warns that congregations with a democratic structure are fertile ground for controllers and have a difficult time raising their agenda above the lowest common denominator of spiritual maturity.³⁰

Your Window of Opportunity

Most churches that make it through to the point of restarting will have dismantled a significant portion of their ministries and structures. Lay leaders who might have relished the power of a position in an unhealthy way will find it deeply unsatisfying that the structures they counted on for their status (and identity) are gone. But be careful. The chaos in the restart period can become fertile ground for new leaders to step in and set up their own mini kingdoms.

We’ve found that an interim set of bylaws can help limit the potential for unhealthy leadership issues. However, if these issues aren’t dealt with and taken care of within a reasonable amount of time, there will likely be enough vagueness in structure to be problematic.

We want to encourage you to start thinking about your future structure not long after the restart. You have a narrow window of opportunity to shape the future of your church.

During their second year of the restart, Dan’s church began pulling away from an all-external governance board. Two years is a good rule of thumb for considering when to move to a more normalized structure.

Still, we want to encourage you to start thinking about your future structure not long after the restart. You have a narrow window of opportunity to shape the future of your church through a structure that’s driven by mission instead of management.

The Governance Model

We recommend that restart churches continue to utilize some outside catalytic pastors on their board. These leaders’ input in the decision-making

process keeps the church from moving back towards being inwardly focused. It also helps the congregation get innovative ideas from other churches. This of course implies that the board of the church is not involved in the day-to-day decision-making process but rather provides oversight to ensure the church stays on mission. This is really the essence of what a governance model is designed to do.

The goal of the governance model is to create a structure that ensures leaders take responsibility with accountability and lead with authority. The governance of leadership shows a great deal of promise in providing a balance between freedom and accountability for the lead pastor. The structure needs to be nimble and free to make changes without undue bureaucracy and strings. Furthermore, the structure must maximize the ownership of the ministry in the hands of the congregation so that they can use their gifts to impact their neighbors, friends and families.

For the governing board to be successful, five things should happen:

- The chair of the board and the lead pastor must have a transparent, authentic relationship.
- The staff must set goals that the lead pastor presents every year as his/her own. The board uses these goals to measure whether or not the church is on mission and to what degree.
- The board must be concerned for the lead pastor's personal health.
- The pastor must take time in every meeting to train the board.
- New board members must totally agree with the current mission, vision and values.

The Long Game

To give the restarted church the best opportunity for long-term success, the issues presented in this chapter are an essential part of the restart agenda. We want you to consider the question: What do I want this restart church to look like in a decade? There's a chance the pastor who started the restart will move on during that decade. Hundreds of new members will come into the congregation.

The culture you foster early and the structure you create will largely determine your church's trajectory. If you want a discipleship oriented

multiplying church, then you must structure for it from the beginning. The destination of a rocket heading into space will change drastically just by trajectory shifts as small as a fraction of a percent. Thinking through these structural issues early will help set up the launch for both short- and long-term success.

CHAPTER 10

RESURRECTION TIME!

Deep change differs from incremental change in that it requires new ways of thinking and behaving. It is change that is major in scope, discontinuous with the past, and generally irreversible.

—Robert E. Quinn, *Deep Change*

After all the hard work of closing down a church and preparing for a new start, this next phase is by far the most exciting part of the journey. It's time to see if Jesus knew what He was talking about with that whole “dying to live” thing.

‘What Is Changing?’

This was one of the questions I (Dan) heard over and over again from a very anxious remnant group. As you read this book, you might be wondering the same thing. You might even be looking for the “secret sauce” of changes that will resurrect your nearly dead church. There really is no secret sauce, but I can tell you the base ingredient—a clean slate. If you have done the work of a shutdown and clearing out the structure, you're in a great position to rethink church for your context.

It's time to see if Jesus knew what He was talking about with that whole “dying to live” thing.

The changes will look different for every church context. While research on restarts is sparse, Gary Taylor did some very helpful work in his

Dying to Restart ~ Resurrection Time!

dissertation dealing with the most common steps taken by restart churches.³¹ The list below details his findings. We're not suggesting that every church restart has to do every step. Some steps are more critical than others.

- Change the church name.*
- Close for a period of time.
- Celebrate the old church's past.*
- Change pastors to bring catalytic leadership.*
- Add paid pastoral staff with discipling emphasis.*
- Add paid support staff.
- Replace personnel on church board.*
- Adopt an entirely new constitution.*
- Rewrite the current constitution.
- Give control to an outside board or denomination.*
- Adopt a new vision statement with a primary discipleship and multiplication emphasis.*
- Update children's programs.*
- Update music style.*
- Change approach to outreach/evangelism.*
- Change approach to newcomer assimilation.*
- Remodel the current facilities.
- Expand the current facilities.
- Secure a mentor/coach to help the pastor.
- Add a website or revamp an existing website.*
- Secure outside financing.
- Change advertising strategy.*

** Our interviews indicate that these steps were the most essential and common practices of church restarts.*

A New Day

With the groundwork laid in closing down the old church and restructuring for the new day, you really do have a lot of freedom in where you go from here. As I (Dan) met with my new church board, we began

to pray and discern what the new church would look like. We knew the demographics of our area. We knew the target group we were going after. To reach that target, we knew we would have to pursue an entirely different style of worship; reflect diversity in our leadership; and develop ministries tailored to singles and young families.

First, we needed to select a new name that would reflect our aspirations. We eventually selected the name Northwest Community Church. Washington, D.C. is divided up into four quadrants. Choosing to associate ourselves with the quadrant that we occupy helped us clearly define our ministry area.

To reach our target area, we began to experiment with how to best reach our community. For the next several years, we gave away tens of thousands of cups of water and lemonade at local festivals in our target area. Through the financial help of our suburban church partner, we blanketed our zip code with postcards. I know postcards aren't always the most effective outreach tools, but in those first few years they accounted for almost all of our growth. Perhaps the best decision was to invest in a completely new website. Over the years, the site has accounted for 90 percent of our guest traffic.

We also reached out to the schools just a few blocks from our campus and eventually partnered with the elementary school. With the school on 100 percent free lunches, the needs would keep us busy and allow us to invest in our neighborhood. In the following years, the most dominant profession would be teachers. They were not necessarily from our partner school, but they were attracted to a church that valued education.

As we began finding our new worship personality, our suburban church partnership was again very helpful. They sent several people to help with our worship technology and to increase the number of people in our pews. Eventually, we hired musicians to help facilitate a diverse musical experience that would appeal to our neighborhood.

The changes weren't limited to just everyone else. I had to change my preaching style to adapt to our new target group. I began planning sermon series based on this group's needs. There is a big difference in preaching to a well-churched group and a group that hasn't been to church since childhood—if ever.

The changes weren't limited to just everyone else. I had to change my preaching style to adapt to our new target group.

In our second year, we hired a very part-time staff to help grow our children's ministry. Many churches try to do a full suite of student ministries (children's, junior high, high school, college) from the very beginning of the restart, but we made a very conscious decision to focus on children's ministry. In fact, we lost some families that wanted a youth ministry. But we knew we couldn't do it well in those early stages.

A Relentless Focus on the Mission

We're convinced that without a relentless focus on the mission, churches would never take such drastic action as a restart. In interview after interview, we heard leaders say that the call to be missional was the driving force in their decision to do the restart. Colonial Hills Church in San Antonio, Texas, knocked on the doors of their community and discovered that the greatest need was a quality preschool, which they soon launched. An outward focused mission is the only reason to restart.

New Beginnings Church in Meadville, Pennsylvania, developed a passion for addiction recovery, which accounted for most of its early growth. Warsaw United Methodist Church in Warsaw, Virginia, launched a new outreach team and began sponsoring a Little League team in their small town. Their pastor, the Rev. Emily Moore-Diamond, keeps office hours in a local café so she can regularly interact with the community. Transforming Life Church in Baltimore, Maryland, began hosting community meetings and launched a job-training center in their unused classroom space. Mosaic Church of the Nazarene in Washington, D.C., launched a fresh food ministry to connect its neighborhood with produce from nearby farms. The list could go on and on.

Restart churches tend to have leaders who convince the church it's time to recover what it means to be a church on mission.

Most churches could limp along for decades. Restart churches tend to have leaders that have convinced the church it's time to recover what it means to be a church on mission.

A Church Plant ... Almost

At this point, the road ahead will highly resemble a church plant. By and large, the principles of church planting will be directly applicable. Books, resources, and networks abound to help launch new churches. There's no need to try and cover that territory. However, there are some unique aspects to launching a new church restart. After all, it is a resurrection and not a new birth.

When pastors ask about how it was to do a restart, I (Dan) usually say: "The encouraging thing is that you have a committed core of people and a facility. Of course, the challenge is that you have a committed core of people and a facility."

The Role of the Remnant

One of the major challenges for a church planter is building the launch team. The advantage of a restart is that you likely have a remnant group who has access to a wider network of people than a single planter would have starting out. The challenge is that many in that remnant group are still not too sure about this new thing. They stayed in the old church for a reason, so there's a strong possibility they won't like the culture and style of the new church. During my doctoral work, I conducted interviews with remnant members from three church restarts. Here's a sampling of the reasons they shared for why they chose to stay and be part of the new church:

- "I'm not easily swayed to go from place to place."
- "I hate change, but I have friends at the church."
- "There were a lot of things I wasn't happy with in the old church, so I decided to give this new thing a chance."
- "It was our church home, and we were committed to the long-range mission and vision of the church."
- "I stayed because I was born and raised in this church."
- "Change was inevitable. I couldn't see myself going elsewhere."
- "I promised to never leave."
- "I stayed because the people were few but warm and friendly."

The two most common things we heard in the interviews were: 1) they had a very strong sense of commitment to the church and 2) they were curious to see what would happen. Even in this small sampling, you can see that as much as they had heard their leader talk about the mission of the church, lots of other things were going on in their minds.

Throughout the relaunch, you can expect to keep lifting up the vision of reaching the lost.

This remnant group can be a huge asset in the new launch, but they will also be carrying lots of baggage. Again, here is where the need for the pastor to be both a leader and a shepherd is so important. Throughout the relaunch, you can expect to keep lifting up the vision of reaching the lost. I repeatedly told our remnant group that if they wondered why we were doing something, the answer or reason would always be to reach the lost. It will take work but if you can bring them along on the journey, you'll see huge rewards.

The Remnant's Paradigm Shift

They may not come right out and say it, but your remnant group will be taking a wait-and-see stance. If they stay, that's an indication they have some level of trust in you or the process.

We had one remnant member, Alma, who had been in the church for sixty-five years. She had repeatedly told me that she longed to see the pews filled with young families like they were years ago. She supported the restart out of that desire.

But once the new church launched, Alma wasn't so sure. She missed the organ. The furniture that suddenly went missing from the stage upset her. She missed the hymns. The music was too loud and too new. And she was increasingly frustrated that she hardly knew anyone in the church. (The irony wasn't lost on me!) I knew she was upset. I did my best to help Alma grieve and to remind her why we were doing what we were doing. I reiterated the fact that we both wanted the same thing—to see the church grow.

I didn't realize until a few years later just how upset Alma was. I eventually learned she had gone to the funeral home where she had made

arrangements and requested the location of her funeral be moved from our church to the chapel of the funeral home! She said all of the changes had made her feel like the church was no longer her church.

I'm so glad the story doesn't end there.

As she confessed this change of venue to me one afternoon, Alma said that a couple of years later she went back to the funeral home and moved the service location back to our church. I'll never forget what she said: "I don't like the music or the changes, but I love seeing the church full and people coming to Christ."

We held her funeral service just a few months before I wrote these words. The church was filled with her old friends. But the church was also filled with her new friends that grew to love this white-haired lady who sat in the pew next to them. We sang the hymns she loved, but we did it with our full band and the young vocalists she grew to love. Alma never stopped coming and never stopped giving, even as she grieved the loss of so much that was comfortable and familiar. She personally lived out the call of Jesus to, "deny yourself" for the sake of the gospel. I wish I could share Alma's story with every church struggling to change.

So many of our churches have forgotten how energizing it is to see people come to Christ in their midst. They may dislike the delivery mechanism, but the power of seeing lives transformed will begin to dwarf their grief and apprehensions.

In our interviews with remnant members from three restart churches, we found that they were overwhelmingly satisfied in their new church. They also overwhelmingly said that their new church was healthy and that they would be comfortable inviting others to attend. The persons we interviewed had an average tenure of twenty-five years in their church.

People may dislike the delivery mechanism, but the power of seeing lives transformed will begin to dwarf their grief and apprehensions.

Northwest Community Church maintained approximately 65 percent of the members from the previous church. However, it would be just a few years before the remnant group was in the minority.

Facility Challenges

My church planter friends and I often debate whether having an established facility is an asset or liability. Facility rentals are definitely a challenge both financially and in availability. However, almost all of the leaders of restarts that we interviewed indicated that their facility had been neglected and needed major repairs to be a viable place of ministry. In our case, the former church had not kept sufficient funds to adequately maintain the facility for more than twenty years. You can imagine all of the deferred maintenance issues that existed.

At his restart in San Antonio, Texas, Bill Easum reported that the public could literally not even see the church because of two old buildings resembling army barracks that had been built on the property years earlier. The church restart facility in Meadville, Pennsylvania, had a capacity of eighty people and no air conditioning!

In every town, there's always that building housing a steady stream of businesses that have opened and closed their doors in short succession. Most people have already concluded a business will fail before their grand opening simply because they have never seen a business succeed in that location. When it's time to launch a new church, the idea of relocating should be on the table.

If your location carries too much baggage, you may be launching a church that's destined to fail. We discovered our church location wasn't necessarily a detriment. People just didn't know it existed! There are literally twenty church facilities in a two-mile stretch of our street. As we talked to the community, however, we discovered that most churches were serving people who lived outside the immediate area. With a focus on the immediate community, it seemed viable that the new church could thrive in its present location.

A Restart Story: Warsaw UMC, Warsaw, Virginia

After participating in a program called, “Reaching New People,” the leaders of Warsaw UMC were concerned about their decline and asked their district superintendent for help. They had dropped to an attendance of sixty and were still falling. The superintendent suggested it was time for a radical break from their past and helped the congregation to conclude that a restart was their best option. The superintendent reached out to the Rev. Emily Moore-Diamond and asked her to come to this small community to lead the effort. Emily helped lead a team to engage its neighbors in determining what most mattered to them. She has since led the church in maintaining a relentless focus on its local community. Each month in their “Love Wednesday” campaign, they pick a group of local workers like teachers, custodians, sanitation workers, etc., and love on them with baked goods, cards and expressions of thanks.

CHAPTER 11

LIFE AFTER A RESTART

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

—John 15:8 (ESV)

We've all heard the story (actually Greek mythology with a Christian twist) in which God appears to a man and every day asks him to go out and push against a giant boulder. For years, he pushes this rock but continues to grow frustrated and disillusioned while the boulder never moves the slightest bit. At the end of the man's life, God appears again to console him in what the man perceives as a wasted life with the reminder that He has called him to be faithful, not successful.

It all sounds like a great spiritual anecdote—unless *you're* the one pushing the rock!

That little misdirected analogy isn't what Scripture teaches about Christian ministry—no matter what your entrenched board has led you to believe. Scripture teaches that bearing fruit is so essential that a radical pruning is necessary to facilitate it. Scripture teaches that our mission as a church is to go and proclaim the gospel, to baptize, and to disciple converts. We also learn that Jesus promises us an abundant life filled with biblical joy (John 10:10). For all of those Christian leaders pushing against the immovable rock, it's time to rediscover the joy of a ministry that's bearing weekly fruit.

Scripture teaches that bearing fruit is so essential that a radical pruning is necessary to facilitate it.

General Observations

From the numerous interviews we did, we found some general trends concerning restarted churches. We did not interview leaders of failed restart churches; so don't assume that failure can't happen. But in general, the results are very positive for churches willing to take this drastic step.

Overall, attendance increased at a modest rate in most cases and at an explosive rate in a few churches. People are attracted to the freshness that a restart church offers. Within a few years, the new members typically outnumbered the remnant members.

Overall, restart churches initiated a relentless focus on reaching their local community for Christ. This is the one area in which we saw hardly any variation. Depending on the context, that focus took different shapes. But it was a prominent part of the church's new culture.

Generally, the demographics of the church shifted to better reflect the surrounding area. In almost every case, the average age of the restart congregations decreased. For those churches that didn't reflect the ethnic diversity of their local community, the restart helped them to better reach new populations.

The number of baptisms, conversions and disciples made increased. This was a logical outflow from the focus on mission.

Finally, in almost every case, the restart helped launch an era of new financial health for the congregations.

Bearing Fruit in Washington, D.C.

We have heard some remarkable stories about the growth of churches after the restart process. The evidence is anecdotal. There is no guarantee of success. However, we can say that the likelihood of success appears to be quite high and in line with that of U.S. church plants, which have a 68 percent chance of surviving to the four-year mark.³² However, more research will need to be done to confirm these observations.

Overall, restart churches initiated a relentless focus on reaching their local community.

Since the restart and launch of Northwest Community Church, the amount of deterioration in the floor below the baptismal pool has been significant. Nearly sixty people have been baptized over the last decade. We have seen lives transformed and people serving in the church that never thought they would ever set foot in a church, much less be a part of it. Our church is involved in ministry with the local schools, a crisis pregnancy center, homeless ministries, university campus outreach, and regular street outreach events. Worship attendance has increased an average of 8 percent each year over the last decade, and our membership has grown to include more than two hundred people who call Northwest their church home.

We are starting to plan for the next stage of ministry. We believe God is calling us to multiply and plant another church in another neighborhood over the next few years. We are beginning to fulfill our mission of multiplication.

As our church has grown, we have worked hard to maintain the ethnic diversity. Currently, our membership is 50 percent people of color, 45 percent Caucasian and 5 percent Asian and Spanish. Washington, D.C., is a major hub of immigrant communities, so we see dozens of countries represented in our pews.

Over the last decade, we saw a major shift in the age of our congregation from between fifty-three and seventy years to now twenty-five to forty-five—our target demographic. Over the course of a month, we minister to fifty children in our children's ministries. I've done so many baby dedications I've lost count.

The changes didn't end with the restart. We have continued to sustain a culture that expects ongoing change and innovation. After five years, we used a church consultant to help us evaluate and begin crafting a vision for the next five years. We wound up cutting some ministries and implementing new structures to accommodate our next stage of growth.

My role has shifted drastically over the last decade. For each stage of growth, I've personally had to make major adjustments in how I lead.

Newcomers and Restart

Every eight weeks, I sit down with usually a dozen newcomers to talk about our church and what makes us unique. In the midst of sharing values

and vision, I always offer a very brief description of the restart. I want our newcomers to know they are here because more than a decade ago, a congregation made a brave decision to close its doors so that we could start something new. I also let new members know they are the beneficiaries of a facility that a previous generation built and paid for, so that their gifts could be devoted to ministry and not a mortgage. Almost always, they want to know if any members of that old church are still around. There is always admiration for the group that stuck it out even through enormous and drastic change.

I want our newcomers to know they are here because more than a decade ago, a congregation made a brave decision to close its doors so that we could start something new.

Our newcomers are attracted to the idea that they're experiencing something very fresh with roots in something that is very old. The stained glass above our stage reflects the unique history. In 1941, the church chose to place the scene of Jesus welcoming the children from all over the world in that prominent location. During World War II, the craftsmen contacted the church to make sure they wanted to include a child from Japan, given the circumstances.

This overwhelmingly white congregation requested that no ethnicity be left out of that scene. So every Sunday, a very diverse congregation looks up to see Jesus welcoming children from all over the world. They are the beneficiaries of something old and something new. Every Sunday, they experience a taste of the old and new treasures of God's Kingdom that Jesus talks about in Matthew 13:52. I believe that a restarted church has the ability to bring a unique richness to its ministry.

Surveys of Post-Restart Members

During my dissertation work, I (Dan) interviewed newcomers from three restart congregations (including my own).³³ The nine interviews offered an interesting perspective on restart churches. When I asked if they would have theoretically attended the previous church, none of the members said they

would have. In general, the new members knew very little about the narrative of the previous congregations—a result of the clean break that restart churches attempt to make with the past.

Overall, the new members said they were very satisfied in the restarted church and were very comfortable with inviting others to attend. Most of the new members said they came as a result of the church's outreach into the community and stayed because of the warmth and friendliness they found there.

Restarts and Finances

Restarted churches present some unique funding challenges and opportunities. In looking back at the church we closed, nearly all of the sustaining givers have passed away since the restart in 2006. Before the restart, the church had a budget of \$95,000. While I acknowledge that something unexpected could have happened financially, in my estimation there's little chance that the church would still be a financially sustainable congregation were it not for the restart.

Which leads us to a tricky issue that's unique for restart churches. Assuming a church is able to maintain a good portion of members from the old church, they are likely very strong givers. By virtue of their level of commitment to a church near death, they are also likely to be very faithful givers.

That was the case with our remnant members at Northwest. For the first five years after the restart, they carried the lion's share of the overall budget. I was so proud of this group of senior adults who were not the target audience of the music and programming and yet continued to faithfully give. Most of the new members we attracted were new to church or hadn't been to church since their childhood. They were much more likely to give a "tip" than a tithe.

We were in fact walking a tight rope in the space between where the remnant giving would diminish and the new member giving would increase. On a yearly basis, we would hold a funeral for a remnant member and then hold our breath that God would replace their giving. After a decade, we have emerged out of that uncertainty as our new members gradually developed an understanding of sacrificial giving.

It's worth the effort to stay relationally connected to the remnant even though it may feel like you need to stay engaged on the frontlines of outreach to new members.

Some church restarts have the benefit of funding from their denomination or other partners, but most restart churches rely heavily on remnant giving. This is where the restart pastor must use lots of care and diplomacy. You cannot compromise on the vision to please the remnant. At the same time, the remnant's presence, gifts, abilities, and giving can be a *huge* asset to the new church. From my experience, it's worth the effort to stay relationally connected to the remnant even though it may feel like you need to stay engaged on the frontlines of outreach to new members.

A New Life Cycle

Earlier, we explored church life cycles and how the different points on a life cycle indicate a church's current situation. A church restart will climb the steep side of the bell curve yet again. As the restart church focuses on strong vision and relationships, new systems, structures, and ministries will begin to emerge to handle the growth. It's an exciting time in the life of the church as the beginning chaos begins to give way to a more mature expression.

However, it's important to remember that at some point even this new church will begin to plateau (Level 2) and decline (Level 1). While we don't yet have the research, based on anecdotal evidence our hypothesis is that restart churches may begin to plateau more quickly than a church plant. If that's the case, then you'll need to be vigilant in re-visioning and refocusing on a regular basis.

Our Advice (for what it's worth)

Get help! Maybe we should say it again. Get help! Leaders should never try to tackle the restart process on their own. I (Dan) had the assistance of an outside advisory board, but in retrospect I would have asked our local judicatory to play a more active role in helping the congregation choose a strategic death. The conflict was so draining that I wondered if I still had anything in the tank for the new church launch. An outside group or consultant can help take a lot of pressure off of the restart leader.

The other thing I would say is to make the changes that need to be made while the waters are stirred. The advantage of a restart is that you're given this one-shot permission to initiate huge, substantive changes. Don't shy away from the opportunity and call to become a Level 5 multiplying church. If you wait, you'll only prolong the season of grief and loss. You've been given a blank check—sign it and cash it!

The advantage of a restart is that you're given this one-shot permission to initiate huge, substantive changes. Don't shy away from the opportunity.

If I could change one thing in our restart journey, I would have acted sooner in building systems to welcome and integrate newcomers. Everything else may seem really important, but this ministry is the lifeblood of the new church. It deserves as much energy and as much passion as you can give it.

Heroes and Hero Makers

The dictionary defines a hero as, “a person who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities.” The remnant members of restart churches are truly heroes and also hero makers. They sacrificed their comfort, their preferences, and their traditions so that new life could take place. I sincerely desire to witness our remnant members riding a new wave of God's work in the old pews they had known for years.

I love hearing one of our remnant members' excitement over seeing how many people are in worship, or inspired by witnessing another baptism. Because they know how far we've come, they appreciate it in a way our new members may never experience it. Our remnant members know what a privilege it is to be used by God to accomplish something new in our city.

A Restart Story: Peninsula Community Church, Te Atatu, West Auckland

Planted in 1996, this suburban church in New Zealand struggled from the start to survive. It started at Level 1. In 2014, the denomination stepped in and began assisting the church. An outside consultant conducted a full assessment of the church, and the recommendation was made to restart. The eight remaining church members voted for the restart. An outside leadership team was assembled, and eventually Kris Gilbert was hired to lead the restart. The church went dark for six months before it re-launched in 2015. Since its re-launch, the church has grown to an average attendance of fifty, giving has tripled, and the church is well on its way to becoming a healthy, mission-focused congregation.

CHAPTER 12

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, *and the dead in Christ will rise first.*

—1 Thessalonians 4:16 (NIV)

Here Paul describes the scenario when Christ comes again and the dead in Christ begin rising up from the graves all around us. Talk about an exciting day! Can dying churches rise to new life? YES! We have seen it and it is true.

Instead of growing larger and more comfortable, the restart church looks for the first opportunity to multiply.

Our dream in writing this book is that the world would experience a miraculous resurrection of local multiplying churches. We dream of a day when local churches in cities, towns, and rural areas would suddenly begin rising from the dead. We pray that those little rural churches on the edge of town with the peeling paint on the steeple would be stirred to new life. We pray that they would start giving themselves away through multiplying and serving their communities in startling ways.

We pray that inner-city churches with property that real estate developers have been salivating over for years would be resuscitated to new life. We pray that their cavernous sanctuaries would be filled with the diverse faces of their

community. And we pray that their kitchens and halls would become places where the most vulnerable in the city come and receive help and disciples are made.

We long for a movement to begin among the churches that, frankly, many have given up on. And as those churches take their first gasp of air and open their eyes to the reality of the world around them, we believe the world will take notice.

There's nothing like a resurrection to get someone's attention.

But our dream doesn't stop there. We believe these resurrected churches with a rejuvenated DNA will be the start of a new Level 5 movement even beyond themselves. We long to see resurrected churches giving birth to new churches. A good parent shares the mistakes of their past with their children to save them heartache. The lesson we see restart churches wanting to share is the message to never grow so consumed with yourself that you lose sight of the call to serve this world. It's the ancient call to deny ourselves for the sake of the gospel.

The New Testament speaks to the health, effectiveness and impact of the local church. The Bride of Christ is pictured much differently than we see in many churches today. We know there are many facilities today, which formerly held communities of committed followers of Christ significantly changing the spiritual landscape of their communities; that now only house a shell of what was once alive and thriving. Through this book our prayer is that many of these small struggling bodies would make the tough decisions to deny themselves for the sake of the Kingdom. A Kingdom expanding through lives eternally transformed by the redeeming presence of Christ, as seen in new vibrant churches of disciple makers started from the remains of restart churches.

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Dying to Restart

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Finally, I thank my wife, Kristie, for her patience and encouragement to see this project through.

Resources to Get Started

Dying2Restart.org: It is our desire that this book helps start a movement of churches that are willing to do whatever it takes to reach people for Christ. At our website, you can read blogs from the authors and from others pastors who are going through the restart process. You can find links to the latest resources and evaluation tools. You will also see information about Greg and Dan's upcoming speaking engagements and how you can bring them to your next leadership event.

[Healthy Growing Churches](http://HealthyGrowingChurches.com), Engaging churches to be healthy and multiply: This organization founded by Greg Wiens, has helped guide congregations through the process of determining if restart or revitalization is needed. They evaluate all options for congregations to become Level 4 or Level 5 congregations. If a restart is needed, they can be that much needed outside agent to help guide this process. If revitalization is needed, they can also coach the church through a custom process designed for that church. They've also helped churches navigate the merger process. Go to www.healthygrowingchurches.com to learn more about their services.

[Healthy Growing Leaders](http://HealthyGrowingLeaders.com), Engaging leaders to be healthy and impactful: The most important decision you will make in a restart situation is the selection of a lead pastor. Over the last decade, we have developed a series of evaluation tools to help evaluate potential leaders. Perhaps the most important part of the evaluation process is interpreting the results. We have walked hundreds of churches and leaders through the evaluation process with great success. Go to www.healthygrowingleaders.com to setup an appointment to talk about the available services.

[Servant Solutions](http://ServantSolutions.com) is a non-profit ministry serving independent church pastors, missionaries and lay-workers with comprehensive financial planning and retirement planning. Servant Solutions mission is "To improve financial security for servants of the church." They provide *three free levels* of financial planning to help you secure your financial future. Discover which one of these is right for you.

Dying to Restart

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[New to Five](#) by Ralph Moore & Jeff Christopherson. This eBook is a resource on how to start a church which will have a DNA committed to multiplying churches which make disciples to be sent.

[Becoming a Level Five Multiplying Church](#) by Todd Wilson. This eBook is a resource which gives an excellent overview of the five levels of churches from declining (L1) to multiplying (L5).

[B5 Assessment Instrument](#)—This instrument allows you to self-assess where your church has been, currently is and wants to be in regard to multiplying and health.

[Flow](#) by Larry Walkemeyer. This eBook is a resource which unpacks the Kingdom and personal rewards that come from being obedient to the command to be fruitful and multiply

[Becoming a Disciple Maker](#) by Bobby Harrington & Greg Wiens. This eBook is a resource which gives challenges and practical advice on how all followers of Christ are called and equipped to make disciples who make disciples

[DM5 Assessment Instrument](#): This instrument allows you to assess where you personally are as a disciple and in your practice of making disciples.

[Life Cycle Assessment](#): This instrument allows you to assess where your church is on the lifecycle as presented in chapter 2.

[Spiritual Gifts/APEST Assessment](#): This instrument allows individuals to evaluate whether they indicate APE giftings necessary for leading a restart.

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2017: “Dream Big: Discover Your Pathway to Level 5 Multiplication”

2018: “HeroMaker”

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FOR MORE INFO

exponential.org/events

Other FREE Exponential Resources on Multiplication

The following eBooks are available for free download via exponential.org/resource-ebooks/

Multipliers: Leading Beyond Addition by Todd Wilson

Dream Big, Plan Smart: Discovering Your Pathway to Level 5 Multiplication by Todd Wilson and Will Mancini

Dream Big Workbook by Will Mancini and Todd Wilson
Dream Big Questions by Todd Wilson and Bill Couchenour

Becoming a Level Five Multiplying Church by Todd Wilson and Dave Ferguson with Alan Hirsch

Spark: Igniting a Culture of Multiplication by Todd Wilson

Becoming a Disciple Maker: The Pursuit of Level 5 Disciple Making by Bobby Harington and Greg Wiens

New to Five: Starting a Level 5 Multiplying Church by Ralph Moore and Jeff Christopherson

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Network* by Bruce Wesley

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Congregation* by Tom Hughes and Kevin Haah

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Herrington

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Josh Howard

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*More Than BBQ: How God is Creating a City-Wide Church Planting
Movement in Kansas City* by Dan Southerland and Troy McMahan

Give God Some Credit: Risk Taking for the Greater Impact by Brett Andrews

Start a Movement, Plant a Church by Josh Burnett

Small Church, Big Impact: A Call for Small Churches to Multiply by Kevin
Cox

*The Question That Changed My Life: How Planting Life- Giving Churches
Became Our Direction* by Jeff Leake

About the Authors

GREG WIENS serves as the Chief Catalyst for Healthy Growing Churches (a church consulting group). With more than thirty-five years of experience, Greg has developed twenty different assessments in a variety of fields, which he has used as a consultant for corporations, public schools and churches. Greg has served as visiting assistant professor of education at the University of Central Florida, associate professor at Warner Southern College, and as the former state pastor for Florida Church of God. For more than twenty years, he has pastored in a church plant, a church turnaround and a megachurch.



Greg graduated from University of Michigan with a Bachelor of Science in Industrial Operations. He received his Master of Divinity at Anderson University School of Theology and was awarded his Ph.D. from the University of Central Florida in psychometrics.

Greg has been married to his wonderful wife, Mary Kay, for more than forty years. They have three married children and seven grandchildren.

DAN TURNER is the founding pastor of Northwest Community Church in the middle of Washington, D.C. The church was restarted from an older church nearing death. He led the congregation through a full closure in 2006, built a launch team, and relaunched the church several months later. Since the restart, attendance has quadrupled, and the church is now actively involved in ministry in their



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local neighborhoods. Dan has also served on staff with the D.C. area church district of the Church of God, Anderson.

Dan earned his Master of Divinity from Anderson Seminary School of Theology and his Doctor of Ministry from Wesley Seminary. Before accepting the call into ministry, he served as a civil engineer with a manufacturing company and as a research engineer with the Federal Highway Administration. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in civil engineering from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Dan is married to Kristie, and they are in the midst of managing both a growing church and a growing family. They have three very active children all under the age of nine.