

## 8 Responses of Leaders When Their Church is in a Slump

The meaning of “slump” is more evident in sports. When a baseball player, for example, is in a slump, we surmise that he is not hitting as well as he was earlier in the season.

For churches, however, there is no clear definition. Indeed, some leaders wonder if it is even right to say that a church can get in a slump. Still, some pastors say their church is in a slump if they are not connecting as well with members as they once were. Others declare a slump if attendance or offering numbers are down. Still others have a more subjective sense of a slump that defies a clean or clear explanation.

But many pastors will tell you about times when their churches were in a slump. Some will admit that the slump is present tense. So I asked a number of pastors how they react when this reality hits them. **What do they do to lead their churches out of this perceived slump?**

The pastors shared with me eight consistent responses. I list them in the order of frequency that I have heard them.

1. **They sought the advice of a leader outside their specific church.** Sometimes that person was the pastor of another church. On other occasions it was a denominational leader or a church consultant.
2. **They refocused on the vision of the church.** A number of pastors indicated that the church had “lost its way.” So they spent time reminding the congregation of the vision of the church. Of course, this approach presumes the church has a clearly articulated vision (I’ll cover that in my Wednesday blogpost).
3. **They led the church to more outwardly focused ministries.** Some church slumps were the result of the congregation becoming too inwardly focused. One pastor led his church to “adopt” an elementary school in the area. The members became motivated and enthused as they did whatever the principal and other leaders of the school told them the school needed.
4. **They sought a trusted confidant to evaluate their leadership.** This reaction is similar to number one. In this case, however, the problem was specifically perceived to be the leadership of the pastor.
5. **They spent more time in prayer.** I suspect this and the next response were actually more frequent. Many pastors sought the face of God more intensely and more frequently for guidance out of the slump.
6. **They became more consistent in their time reading the Bible.** Many pastors get into the trap of reading the Bible only to prepare sermons or lessons. I know. I’ve been there as a pastor. But pastors need the consistent nourishment of the Word of God beyond the time they spend studying it for sermons or lessons.
7. **They became more intentional about connecting with their members.** One pastor made a commitment to hand write one letter a day to a church member, write two emails a day to a member, and make one phone call a day to a member. The purpose of each piece of communication was brief encouragement and gratitude. It took him less than 30 minutes to do all of them, and he was consistent in it four days a week. In one year’s

time, he connected with 800 members.

8. **They set aside time on the calendar during the week to dream.** Pastors are on call 24/7. Life can become hectic and frustrating. One pastor sets aside two hours a month to go to a private room to dream about the future of the church. The time is a fixture on his calendar. Sometimes he prays. Sometimes he reads about God's work at other churches. And sometimes he writes ideas and thoughts. The process invigorates him, and he can thus lead the church with greater enthusiasm and clarity himself.

These responses to a slump could really apply to any Christian leader. In this case, I listened to pastors.

**So . . . can you sense when your church is in a slump? What is it like? How do you respond?**

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