

The Cost of Church Revitalization

I'm amazed by these words by researcher Ed Stetzer in his book *Planting Missional Churches*: "Church revitalization does not happen much, but it does happen sometimes. I have been struck by how infrequently it actually occurs."

Talk about sobering! **Church revitalization is possible, but it's rare.** According to statistics, most existing churches are in a state of plateau or decline. The good news is that these churches can be turned around, at least in theory. The bad news is that most of them will never pull out of their decline.

I've been thinking a lot lately about what it takes to turn a church around. I can think of a lot of churches that are in decline, but I can only think of a few that have turned around. Here's what they have in common.

First, they got uncomfortable. I'm amazed how easy it is to drift into a comfortable life and ministry. Sadly, comfort and decline go together. Churches that become stable and comfortable have chosen safety, but it's a safety that leads to death. Churches that die are churches that have forgotten how to take risks and live dangerously in their mission.

In each church turnaround, the church made a decision to begin living on the edge again. This meant taking new, very real risks. Leaders are the first to go here. Leaders put a lot on the line when they choose to lead a church into risk and discomfort.

Second, they confronted dysfunction. Churches have a way of slipping into dysfunction over time. Because it's scary to confront dysfunction, a lot of it goes unchecked and eventually it becomes unnoticed. The dysfunction eventually begins to choke the church and its ministry. Until the dysfunction is confronted, there's little hope for a turnaround.

The cost of confronting dysfunction is high. In each church turnaround, people got angry, and many people left. In some cases, the church was almost stripped to its core. It took courage and a willingness to suffer. The payoff was substantial, but there's no denying that it cost a lot to those who were willing to confront the dysfunction.

Third, they refocused on the gospel and on mission. It's not enough to get uncomfortable and to confront dysfunction. Churches need a positive focus. In the faith communities I know that have turned around, the churches became focused on two things: the core of the Christian faith, centered on the person and work of Jesus; and the mission to take that news to others.

It's no wonder that church revitalization is rare. In each case, the turnaround took years, and the pain was significant. Both church planting and church revitalization are necessary, and both are costly and risky. But churches can be revitalized, and the cost, though significant, is more than worth it.

Read more from Darryl [here](#).