

5 Seeker-Sensitive Strategies That Threaten Revival

Is it possible your church is risking revival by adopting seeker strategies?

“All these new methods of how to build the church has [sic] left me confused” – David Wilkerson

It's easy to fall into the trap of believing revival is defined by an influx of new believers into the church. After all, we see this happening in the great revival chapter of the Bible, Acts 2: “And continuing daily with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:46-47).

The ultra-simple protocol seems clear: Provide opportunities for the lost to get saved, and as a result, the church will grow. Ultimately, it is presumed, with enough such impact—revival will land.

Unfortunately, many pastors are adopting this paradigm, and, due to the necessity it creates, they are also adopting many of the strategies seeker- sensitive churches are known for. Most of these pastors would be shocked and horrified at such an accusation. Yet, the truth remains that many pastors who are passionately pursuing revival are compromising that pursuit due to a misunderstanding of just how revival will come.

Friend, the ultimate goal of revival is not a church full of new Christians. It's a church full of the presence of the Holy Spirit and an army of fully surrendered burning men and women of God. You'll know revival has hit when the church is full of people who can't stop praying on fire, which is a key evidence

of legitimate salvation. The desire to be with God night and day consumes us.

The seeker model results in some very tempting false positives. Keep the bar low, the atmosphere naturally familiar and the pace slow, and you absolutely can gather a crowd of people who are interested in Jesus. Churches can become mega in size, leaders can gain a reputation of success and a lot of people can entertain an affinity for God as their busy lives allow.

I could buy a large building, fill it with comfortable leather couches and serve the best coffee in the city for half the price of everybody's favorite chain. Add in some connection opportunities, possibly some live entertainment and some 10-minute sermonettes, and I would have a large group of people almost overnight.

Or, I could call a prayer meeting and wait for the remnant to show up.

5 Seeker Strategies That Threaten Revival

1. A non-threatening environment. The purpose of the church, including the Sunday service, is not, nor has it ever been, to draw in visitors. It is not to be an evangelistic tool.

The purpose of the church is clear in Scripture. It is to be a believer's intercession meeting with a focus on the nations.

"And He taught them, and said, 'Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations?' But you have made it a 'den of thieves'" (Mark 11:17).

When I was pastoring several years ago, I became increasingly frustrated with our pre-service prayer. I have always held raging, explosive intercession for one hour before the start of every service. I started this as a youth pastor and continued as a senior leader.

I wasn't frustrated with participation because people filled up that room every week. It was often my favorite part of the day. I wasn't frustrated with the level of passion or focus. The roof regularly came off that prayer room.

My frustration hit after a simple revelation. If the church is a house of prayer for all nations, why was prayer intentionally scheduled to end when the church service began?

I have always been aggressively given to prayer. I've taught on it, written a book and innumerable articles and based a school of ministry on it—yet I was embarrassed by my error.

The obvious reason a fiery prayer meeting would end prior to the start of the service was that many people who would be uncomfortable in such an atmosphere would feel out of place. It seemed right. It felt appropriate that we would be sensitive to the seekers who might not enjoy such a supernatural environment. Oh, how that human wisdom grieves me today.

My job as a leader is not to create an atmosphere that is naturally familiar. It's to invite everybody into a shocking, burning atmosphere of Holy Spirit activity that will cause the flesh to cringe and spirits to explode.

The most important shift I ever made in church ministry was to extend the hour of pre-service prayer right into the first half of the service. When the service began, the firebrands were already on their face, pacing the room, praying in tongues, dancing and shouting and declaring the Word of the Lord with boldness. The previous hour of fire would launch the beginning of the service like a rocket. Not only did we start the service with raging intercession, we also moved musical worship down a notch. It would come in later, after prayer set the foundation for the rest of the service. The service was finally a prayer meeting; the church, a house of prayer.

My promise to those under my leadership has always been clear:

I refuse to tone down the activity of the Holy Spirit out of respect of those less hungry. This means we must promote an extremely threatening, costly, uncomfortable church atmosphere that results in only the hungry and surrendered locking in.

You see, the church wasn't "added to daily" through natural means. Don't forget how it all started:

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like a mighty rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. There appeared to them tongues as of fire, being distributed and resting on each of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to speak" (Acts 2:1-4).

2. Overemphasis on connecting people. So often today, churches are marketing themselves as the perfect place for you. You matter. Come as you are. We have saved a place for you. I have to wonder if it's a club or a church, a place for natural man or our magnificent God.

Again, the primary goal of the church is to nurture a habitation for the Spirit of God to dwell and for the people to pray for the nations.

I cringe at church marketing strategies that emphasize just how well I would fit in if I attended their church. Pastor, it's not about me. Tell me how much Jesus is glorified and how massive your vision is for prayer, revival and kingdom advance, and then I'll get excited. The moment I hear about how special I am and just how I can fit in is the moment I realize filling seats is a little too important.

My favorite church growth strategy actually results in an empty church building, not a full one:

And when Solomon finished praying, fire came down from the heavens and consumed the burnt offering and sacrifices, and

the glory of the Lord filled the temple. And the priests were not able to enter into the house of the Lord, for the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house. And all the sons of Israel saw when the fire came down and the glory of the Lord came on the temple, and they bowed their faces low to the ground on the pavement, and they worshipped confessing, "The Lord is good, and His mercy endures forever" (2 Chron. 7:1-4).

The church doesn't need seats filled with people who receive a gold star for showing up. We need pavement people, those who will hit their face on the pavement and declare God's goodness. We need an army to stand in position, ready to train and do battle against the enemy. Warriors are needed to assume the position on their knees in intense, Holy Spirit-driven prayer.

I don't know how many times I would get excited when a small group of prophetic, prayer-fueled warriors showed up for a church service, because I knew we were actually going to get something done!

And, yes, a function of the church does include ministering to orphans and widows. Without question that must happen, but not as a foundational goal. First comes a culture of raging, burning prayer, and then we can invite the orphans and widows into that blaze.

I propose eliminating most strategies and programs that focus on connecting people and drawing them in, and starting giving much more energy to prayer and training the remnant, which brings me to my next point:

3. Underemphasis on training people.

Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

But when He saw the crowds, He was moved with compassion for them, because they fainted and were scattered, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest, that He will send out laborers into His harvest" (Matt. 9:35-38).

Jesus had compassion on those who were ready to become part of the remnant church. Trained laborers are needed to fan the flames that revival ignites in people's lives.

The plan is simple. Train laborers in fervent prayer, the prophetic, revival, the Kingdom and other key disciplines while simultaneously praying in the Spirit together several hours every week. Then, invite the harvest into those prayer and training sessions and watch them get set ablaze.

When I was leading Revival Church in Detroit, we had a powerful, prayer-based ministry school called the Lab. It was an intense, three-month training program that was required for anybody who wanted to serve in any capacity in the church. We strongly encouraged every member to enroll in the school. It was in this furnace of intercession and discipleship where the vision was caught and the passion for Jesus consumed them.

I believe we need intensives like that one at the foundational level of every church. It will quickly identify those who are merely socially or naturally interested while revealing your remnant warriors, those who can take their place on the wall of intercession in the house of prayer.

4. Being naturally familiar. The church is a strange, otherworldly entity. It is meant to be unusual, supernatural and confounding to human intellect.

They were all amazed and perplexed, saying to each other, "What does this mean?" Others mocking said, "These men are full of new wine."

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and said to them, "Men of Judea and all you who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to my words. For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is the third hour of the day. But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days it shall be," says God, 'that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even on My menservants and maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy'" (Acts 2:12-18).

I believe there is a day coming when worship will be mostly sung in the Spirit. Groans of intercessory worship will radiate out of the people. Screens with words that assist with karaoke sing-alongs in today's church experience will go dark as remnant intercessors are erupting with spiritual songs.

Prayer will follow the same pattern as English (or the language of the culture) gives way to tongues of fire. Prayer lists will no longer be needed as people prophetically cry out and decree the prayer on God's heart in perfect sync.

In this atmosphere, the desperate and unsaved will yearn for God as they cry out in repentance and hit the floor in tears under the weight of an invisible Savior. We are a peculiar, supernatural people.

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may declare the goodness of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:8-9).

Such a spiritual Sunday-morning experience is rare even in churches that would laugh if you suggested they have adopted seeker strategies.

The simple litmus test is this: Are we doing anything to make

visitors comfortable that would be different if everybody was a part of the on-fire remnant?

Are the teachings deep or shallow?

Is prayer low-key or moved to a different part of the day or week?

Is the atmosphere intentionally not “scary” or strange to ensure visitors are welcomed?

5. Lack of fiery preaching. “I’m not about to put up a silly skit and preach a 15-minute message on ‘how to cope’ to a multitude of people who are dying and going to hell. I tremble at the thought.” –David Wilkerson

Those who are zealous for Jesus and who are part of the remnant absolutely crave in your face, challenging, convicting sermons.

It’s time we stop apologizing for preaching hard truth and deliver what is necessary to refine and prepare the people.

The remnant church is quickly becoming bored with all of the teachings that are directed at the seekers and marginally interested. It’s time for bold, prophetic preaching to erupt from our pulpits again.

We are so easily offended today. I say, let the truth offend and clear the pews of the pretenders. They are a risk to revival and are costing the hungry the meal they so desire.

If our preaching doesn’t often result in some running out into the parking lot with cursing at the same time others run to the altar in tears, something is wrong.

I’ll never forget the time I was a guest speaker at a church and was preaching with an extremely sharp edge on the reality of hell. I made it clear that Christians are at risk of an eternity there if we aren’t sober and alert.

Suddenly someone in the back started shouting and cursing me. They ran into the foyer and then out the door, screaming, into the parking lot.

When anointed preaching lands, there is a spiritual reaction that can't be denied.

Pastor, when you preach truth it will be controversial. It will trouble. It will cause some of your best tithers to leave the church. It will result in a continual disturbance in your ministry.

“Do you know what Finney did? Finney preached sometimes, and the whole congregation got up and walked out on him. That's a good meeting! He sent them out horrified! I only preach for two reasons these days: either to send people out that door blazing mad at me or blazing with the peace of the Holy Ghost! That's all!” – Leonard Ravenhill

There are many other seeker strategies that put revival at risk. These are but a few. I want to challenge you to let our holy God grip you. Burn with fire so hot that flesh can't stand in your presence. Preach with a tremble in your voice. Shock and shake a dead religious culture with truth. Love people deeply, but build the ministry around God. Minister to Him first, and watch the nations report about the strange and wonderful things happening in your region. {eo}

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