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Characteristics of Turnaround Pastors

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CHARACTERISTICS OF TURNAROUND PASTORS

Gordon E. Penfold

abstract

While the population of the United States grows, the percentage of people attending church continues to plummet. Much of the drop can be attributed to the 70% to 85% of the churches that have plateaued or declined in attendance.

However, bright spots are on the church landscape. Many churches, after decades of plateau or decline, begin to turn around and grow as they are led by "turnaround" pastors. This paper explores the leadership characteristics of turnaround pastors in contradistinction to non-turnaround pastors and argues that church renewal and church planting are critical components needed for a healthy twenty-first century church.

the need for church renewal

The church in the United States is in distress. Troubling signs appear at every juncture. Church researcher David T. Olson, whose data base includes information from 200,000 churches, declares, "In summary, the future looks grim for the American church. The conditions that produce growth are simply not present. If present trends continue, the church will fall farther behind population

growth."[1] He demonstrates that the percentage of the population attending a Christian church each weekend will decline from 20.4% in 1990 to 14.7% in 2020.[2]

Many churches are characterized by an inward, self-serving focus, territorialism, control, passivity, disillusionment, lack of a clearly defined purpose, and lack of vision, all accompanied by division and conflict. The consequence of such attitudes and actions is a mass of churches that are plateaued or declining in membership, attendance, and vitality.

Not only does the picture look grim for existing churches, but the overall outlook is also not much better when one considers the impact of church planting. Olson also notes that, based on current trends, church closures will nearly equal the number of church plants between 2005 and 2020. He asserts, "Approximately 55,000 churches will close between 2005 and 2020, while 60,000 new churches will open, producing a net gain of 4,500 churches [*sic*]. However, to keep pace with population growth, a net gain of 48,000 churches will be needed."[3] Church planting alone will not solve the problem of the decline of the church in United States.

While the decline of the church in the U.S. has no simple answers, church revitalization must certainly be a part of the solution. Church revitalization will require churches that turn from plateau and decline to growth and vitality. For the sake of this research paper, these churches will be called turnaround churches. Turnaround churches are normally led by turnaround pastors—individuals who are able to lead churches through difficult transitions so that these congregations may once again become fruitful and productive.

The future of the church in North America is at stake. Looming before the church of Jesus Christ is a potential post-Christian America that resembles post-Christian Europe. It is a place where Christianity has been marginalized, and the church no longer plays a significant role in European life and thought. At risk are millions of people who are not vitally connected to the Lord Jesus Christ. Many of these individuals consider the church irrelevant and passé. Not only is this current generation at risk, but the future of unborn generations in America is at risk, as well. The impact of the church of Jesus Christ in the next two decades will have a profound effect on the spiritual future of the United States. Ministry, as usual, is not acceptable. The transformation of existing churches from plateau, decline, and death to growth, health, and vitality must be an essential ingredient for America to maintain a bright, spiritual future.

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[1] David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Database of Over 200,000 Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 179.

[2] Ibid., 180.

[3] Ibid., 176.

The Challenge: The challenge of church renewal may be likened to boulders. A boulder at rest (a plateaued church) tends to stay at rest. Boulders rolling downhill (declining churches) must first be stopped, and then, with great exertion, must begin to move uphill once again. In either case, the challenge of change and renewal is daunting!

Two Requirements: Church renewal requires two elements, two interconnected pieces—a capable pastor and a willing congregation. Both elements must be present for turnaround to take place.

research process

From 2009 to the present, this researcher gathered information from evangelical pastors primarily in the Rocky Mountain states of Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho. The focus of the research has been to understand what sets turnaround pastors (TAP) apart from non-turnaround pastors (NTAP).[4]

The research question was, "Are there identifiable characteristics of turnaround pastors among evangelical churches in the Rocky Mountain states?" The research tools were designed with this specific question in mind. The researcher designed a three-page pastor's survey and a corresponding two-page lay leadership survey designed to answer this question.

Mid-level judicatory leaders were contacted to secure the names of both TAP and NTAP. Willing pastoral participants received a packet of material that included the two surveys, a cover letter for the pastor, cover letters for the lay leaders, a consent letter, a DiSC Profile, and a Modified Heights Spiritual Gifts Survey.

Part of the research examined the growth or decline in the worship attendance figures supplied by the pastors. TAP were pastors whose current ministry (or last ministry for retired pastors) demonstrated an Average Annual Growth Rate (AAGR) in worship attendance of at least 2.5% per year for five years. NTAP were pastors whose current ministry (or last ministry for retired pastors) demonstrated an AAGR of less than 2.5% for at least five years. Church growth leader Gary McIntosh, in a lecture at Talbot School of Theology, stated that if a church "keeps" all of its biological growth, it will grow an average of 2.5% per year.[5] In other words, a turnaround church must, at a minimum, match the growth of a

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[4] Gordon E. Penfold, "Defining Characteristics of Turnaround Pastors among Evangelical Churches in the Rocky Mountain States" (D.Min. dissertation, Biola University, 2011).The findings used in the paper are taken from the author's Doctor of Ministry research.

[5] Gary L. McIntosh, Class Lecture, "Growing and Multiplying Churches in North America," Doctor of Ministries track, Talbot School of Theology, La Mirada, CA, January 2009.

church that retains all of its biological growth. This means that a church must show a minimum AAGR of 2.5% in worship attendance in five years, regardless of church size, to be considered a turnaround church. In two instances, pastors who had served less than five years were used in the study. It is obvious that they were TAP.

The research probed the following areas:

1. Are there significant differences between turnaround pastors and non-turnaround pastors in their Performax Leadership DiSC profiles?

2. Are there significant differences between turnaround pastors and non-turnaround pastors in their spiritual gift mixes? The Modified Heights Spiritual Gift Survey was used to evaluate each pastor's spiritual gift mix.

3. Are there significant differences between turnaround and non-turnaround pastors in the history of their pastoral leadership? Do the turnaround pastors have a consistent history of turnaround ministry? Do the non-turnaround pastors have a consistent history of non-turnaround ministry?

4. Are there any significant differences between the turnaround and non-turnaround pastors in terms of their clarity in communicating the purpose/mission of the church?

5. Are there any significant differences between the turnaround and non-turnaround pastors in terms of their clarity in communicating the vision for the church?

6. Are there any significant differences between the turnaround and non-turnaround pastors in their interpersonal relationship skills with multiple generations?

7. Are there any significant differences between turnaround pastors and non-turnaround pastors in terms of their having coaches or mentors?

8. Are there any significant differences between turnaround pastors and non-turnaround pastors when answering a series of questions about their pastoral leadership style?

A companion survey was also developed to be completed by three lay leaders in each participating church. This survey compared the pastor's perception of his ministry with that of his lay leadership's perception. The questions in the following four sections corresponded exactly to the pastor's questionnaire. Each lay leader who participated was asked to do the following:

1. Answer a question about the purpose/mission of the church.

2. Answer a brief series of questions about the ministry vision for the church.

3. Complete a chart that dealt with the pastor's interpersonal relationship skills with multiple generations.

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4. Answer a series of questions about the pastor's leadership style.

The legitimacy of the pastors' answers was verified by his lay leaders' responses.

Listed below are the differences discovered that set TAP apart from NTAP, as well as the areas of research where no appreciable differences were discovered between the two groups.

characteristics of turnaround pastors

general information

Mid-level judicatories were contacted to obtain the names of potential turnaround and non-turnaround pastors. These judicatory contacts generated forty-nine pastoral contacts. Out of the forty-nine contacts, twenty-eight pastors and sixty-three lay leaders completed surveys. Worship attendance in the churches ranged from 20 to 5500. The AAGR was used to determine if a pastor was a TAP or a NTAP. Table 1 provides the distribution of church sizes examined in the research, the percentage of each church size in the research pool, and the number of turnaround pastors and non-turnaround pastors in each category. The average annual growth rates ranged from a range of –4.7% to +1.6% for the NTAP and +2.8% to 35% for the TAP.

areas where there were no measureable differences between TAP and NTAP

At the outset, it will be helpful to see the areas where no measureable differences were discovered between TAP and NTAP. Several surprises occurred as the researcher anticipated that differences would be discovered between the two groups of pastors.

- The use of the Modified Heights Spiritual Gift survey showed that the distribution of spiritual gifts had little or no bearing on church turnaround.

Table 1.

Distribution of Church Sizes and the Turnaround to Non-turnaround Pastor Ratio

Average Worship Attendance	Number of Churches	Percentage of Total Churches	Turnaround/ Non-turnaround Pastors
0–99	8	28.6%	3/5
100–199	7	25%	6/1
200–499	8	28.6%	8/0
500–999	1	3.6%	1/0
1000–1999	3	10.6%	2/1
2000+	1	3.6%	1/0
Total	28	100%	21/7

- The history of a pastor was a key factor in determining whether or not a pastor was considered at TAP. However, length of tenure, age, or number of churches pastored did not provide distinguishing characteristics of TAP.

- The researcher felt that a clear sense of purpose/mission ought to have a strong bearing on turnaround ministry. A clear understanding of the purpose/mission of the church provided no substantial differences between TAP and NTAP.

- The researcher anticipated that TAP would demonstrate much great ability at ministering to multiple generations that their NTAP counterparts. Once again, little or no difference was demonstrated between the two groups of pastors.

Understanding the areas in which some distinctions between the two groups of pastors exists will make the differences that are now discussed all the more pointed.

182 **distinctions between TAP and NTAP**

Of the eight areas surveyed, four showed significant differences between TAP and NTAP. The results are shown below.

1. Differences in the Performax Leadership DiSC Profile

The DiSC Profile is a standard tool that helps in understanding a person's leadership style. The Profile measures leadership characteristics: Dominance (D), Influence (i), Steadiness (S) and Conscientiousness (C). Twenty-seven of the twenty-eight pastors completed a DiSC profile. One pastor granted an interview only and did not complete a DiSC Profile. The DiSC Profile uses the following scoring system:

- Low-Range 1–3
- Mid-Range 4
- High-Range 5–7[6]

Of interest are the high and low scores for each group of pastors as well as the differences in leadership profiles between the two groups of pastors.

Comparison of DiSC Scores Between Turnaround and Non-Turnaround Pastors

The overall average DiSC scores for all twenty-seven reporting pastors are found in Table 2. Included in the table are also the average scores for turnaround pastors and non-turnaround pastors.

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[6] "DiSC Classic Version 9.0," (Minneapolis, MN: Inscape Publishing, Inc., 2001), 5.

Table 2.

DiSC Profile Scores for All Pastors, Turnaround Pastors, and Non-turnaround Pastors

Pastor Group (number of pastors)	D	I	S	C
All Pastors/ 27	4.1	3.8	3.7	4.6
Turnaround Pastors/ 20	4.7	4.4	3.2	3.9
Non-turnaround Pastors/ 7	2.6	2.1	5.1	6.6

Two strong trend differences are noted between the TAP and NTAP. First, TAP were more heavily weighted toward the mid to high D and I range. Second, the NTAP scored in the high range in the S and C, while TAP scores were in the low to mid range.

It should be noted that one of the turnaround pastors had a D and I score of 1 and 2, respectively. This means that a DiSC profile that does not fit the high D and high I does not necessarily mean an individual cannot be a turnaround pastor. However, this was the exception, not the norm. It should also be noted that one NTAP had a Promoter Profile with a D and I score of 3 and 4, respectively. The point is this—the Lord will use who He chooses, regardless of his ministry profile. However, the high D and high I pastors are most often used for turnaround in this sample group of pastors, while high S and C scores were prevalent with NTAP.

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Leadership Profiles of Turnaround and Non-turnaround Pastors

The overall leadership patterns that are reflected in both the TAP and NTAP are exhibited in Table 3. The leading turnaround styles are Promoter, Inspirational, Creative, Developer, and Practitioner. The Perfectionist and Objective Thinker

Table 3.

DiSC Leadership Profiles of Turnaround and Non-turnaround Pastors

Number of Pastors	Turnaround/Non-turnaround	Pastoral Profile
5	4/1	Promoter
5	1/4	Perfectionist
4	4/0	Inspirational
3	3/0	Creative
3	1/2	Objective Thinker
2	2/0	Developer
2	2/0	Practitioner
1	1/0	Agent
1	1/0	Results Oriented
1	1/0	Investigator
Total	27	20/7

Table 4.

DiSC Profile of the Promoter, Perfectionist, and Inspirational Leadership Styles

	Promoter	*Perfectionist*	*Inspirational*
Emotions:	Is willing to accept others	Displays competence; is restrained and cautious	Accepts aggression, downplays need for affection
Goal:	Approval, popularity	Stability; predictability, accomplishments	Control of their environment or audience
Judges others by:	Verbal skills	Precise standards	Projection of personal strength, character, and social power
Influences others by:	Praise, opportunities, favors	Attention to detail; accuracy	Charm, direction, intimidation, use of rewards
Value to the organization:	Relieves tension; promotes projects and people, including himself or herself	Is conscientious; maintains standards; controls quality	Acts as a "people mover," initiates, demands, compliments, disciplines
Overuses:	Praise, optimism	Procedures and "fail-safe" controls; overdependence on people, products, and processes that have worked in the past	Attitude that "the end justifies the means"
Fears:	Loss of social acceptance and self-worth	Antagonism	Weak behavior, loss of social status[7]

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styles are most prominent among this group of pastors who are NTAP. Note that the two most prominent leadership styles, the Promoters and the Perfectionists, have representatives from both the TAP and NTAP.

For illustrative purposes, the characteristics of the three most prominent patterns are given below in Table 4 for comparison. Turnaround pastors fall into the Promoter and Inspirational style, while non-turnaround pastors tend to fall into the Perfectionist style. Striking differences exist in the three leadership styles. Note that the Perfectionist Leadership Pattern does not change easily. High S people tend to "cooperate with others within existing circumstances to carry out

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7 Ibid., 16–24.

the task," and high C people tend to "work conscientiously within existing circumstances to insure quality and accuracy."[8] Their leadership style makes change, conflict management, and transition difficult. However, change is necessary for churches to turn around. Ministry in plateaued and declining churches seldom changes. Maintaining the status quo has already gotten these churches into trouble. More of the same will simply cause the plateau or decline to continue. In this study, 57% of the NTAP were Perfectionists, individuals who resist change. However, turnaround demands change. In contrast to the Perfectionist Profile, Promoters and Inspirational patterns inspire change and transition.

The DiSC Profile can be a helpful tool in assessing an individual's ability to be a TAP. However, the DiSC Profile should not be the sole tool used to determine turnaround capability. As has been seen, one exception is with one TAP exhibiting a Perfectionist Profile and one NTAP exhibiting a Promoter Profile.

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2. Differences in the Ability to Communicate Vision with Clarity and Passion

This section of the research focused on the clarity of understanding of the vision of the church. The underlying question was, "Are there any significant differences between the turnaround and non-turnaround pastors in terms of their clarity in communicating the vision for the church?" Three parts to this section of the research were included.

In part one, the researcher looked at the clarity of each pastor's response to the question, "What is your vision for the church's ministry?" This is followed by an examination of the statements made by three of the lay leaders in the church. The objective was to see if the pastor's statement of vision had a good correlation with that of his lay leadership team.

In part two, the pastors and churches are compared to see if either a clear or a fuzzy understanding of vision has an impact on turnaround or lack thereof.

In part three, each pastor and leadership team was asked a series of six questions regarding vision.

Part 1: What is the Church's Vision for Ministry?

The pastors and lay leaders responded to the question, "What is your vision for ministry?" The following includes some remarks about the results of the vision question.

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8 Ibid., 7.

- Thirteen TAP (61.9%) and three NTAP (42.9%) had clear and compelling vision statements.
- Only five out of twenty-one turnaround churches (24%) and one non-turnaround church out of seven (14.2%) demonstrated a strong correlation between the pastor's and the lay leaders' understanding of the vision of the church. In most cases, a clear, compelling vision did not affect the growth of the church.

The results of this section on vision showed that most pastors in this research group have not clearly communicated the vision for ministry in the church.

Part 2: The Impact of Clear Vision on Turnaround

Though pastors may have a clear vision statement, most pastors were not good communicators of their vision for ministry. Three notable exceptions were seen when it came to clarity in communicating vision. Three of the four churches of 1,000 or more had razor sharp vision statements that were clearly understood by the lay leaders. One church of 1,000 or more lacked a shared vision. It was the only church in that group that was declining in attendance. This suggests two possibilities. First, the research demonstrated that churches over 1,000 in worship attendance need a clear purpose/mission statement and a strong, shared, central vision in order to grow. A second option is also possible. These churches grew to 1,000 and more, in part, because they had a clear purpose/mission statement and a compelling, shared vision.

It is of interest to note that the pastors and leaders had a much better grasp of purpose/mission than vision. As a matter of fact, no appreciable difference between TAP and NTAP was noted when it came to an understanding of purpose/mission of the church. The research bears out Warren's statement, "Recapture a clear vision of what God wants to do in and through your church family. Absolutely nothing will revitalize a discouraged church faster than rediscovering its purpose."[9] Many churches with a strong mission/purpose statement did well. The majority of the churches, 64%, had a clear sense of purpose/mission, while only 24% of the turnaround churches had a strong sense of shared vision. The research also supports the notion that churches with a strong mission/purpose statement and a clearly defined vision do better than other churches that do not, as demonstrated by the large churches of 1,000 or more.

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[9] Richard Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 81. (Note Warren's free interchange of the terms, "purpose" and "vision".)

Part 3: Six Vision Questions

Each pastor and leadership team member was asked to answer the following six questions:

1. I have clearly communicated our vision for ministry to our church.
2. Our vision for ministry is spiritually challenging.
3. The people in our church have a very clear picture in their minds of our vision for ministry.
4. The people in our church have a clear understanding of where we want to be in two, five, and ten years.
5. Our vision is feasible.
6. I communicate the vision with passion.

The available responses were: **SA**—Strongly Agree; **A**—Agree; **U**—Uncertain; **D**—Disagree; and **SD**—Strongly Disagree. The responses were assigned a number from five **(SA)** to one **(SD).**

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The turnaround pastors' answers compared to the responses of the non-turnaround pastors are found in the table below. Significant differences are seen between questions number 1, 3, 4, and 6. Some observations related to turnaround ministry.

- The difference between the turnaround and non-turnaround pastors is clearly seen in the answers to these four questions. First, TAP clearly communicated vision (Question 1). This response is supported by the pastors' own statements about themselves as well as by the lay leaders' responses. The vision may not be a succinct statement, as was demonstrated in the previous section, but it is understood by the turnaround leadership of the church. The pastor leads in a direction, and the people follow.

Table 5.

Responses to Six Vision Questions

Survey Questions	TAP Responses	NTAP Responses
1. I have clearly communicated our vision for ministry to our church.	4.5	3.7
2. Our vision for ministry is spiritually challenging.	4.5	4.3
3. The people in our church have a very clear picture in their minds of our vision for ministry.	3.8	2.7
4. The people in our church have a clear understanding of where we want to be in two, five, and ten years.	3.5	2.4
5. Our vision is feasible.	4.3	4.1
6. I communicate the vision with passion.	4.6	3.9

- The church needs a clear vision and direction. The turnaround pastors provide a much stronger base for casting vision than do the non-turnaround pastors (Question 3).
- Both groups had their lowest scores with Question 4, yet, the turnaround pastors outscored their counterparts by over a full point. Turnaround pastors do have a clear picture of a preferred future, and they pass that along to the church.
- Turnaround pastors are passionate about the future (Question 6). Their passion draws others after them.

This final portion of the vision section shows a distinct difference between turnaround pastors and non-turnaround pastors in the area of leading with vision. These six questions are an excellent line of demarcation between the turnaround and non-turnaround pastors. Malphurs' definition of vision certainly fits these turnaround pastors. A vision is a "clear and challenging picture of the future of a ministry as you believe that it can and must be."[10] TAP are better at painting a compelling vision of the future than their NTAP counterparts are.

3. Differences in the Area of Coaching and Mentoring

Coaching and mentoring is thought to have a bearing on ministry. The simple design of this portion of the project asked two questions. 1) "In the first five years of my ministry, I had someone who I regarded as a mentor/coach." 2) "I currently have someone who mentors or coaches me in ministry." Each question was answered with a "yes" or "no." A simple tabulation is found in the table below that compares the affirmative responses of turnaround and non-turnaround pastors. The majority of turnaround pastors (62%) had coaches or mentors at the beginning of their ministry, and 62% continue to have coaches and mentors today. In comparison, 57% of the non-turnaround pastors had coaches at the beginning of their ministry. Currently, only one non-turnaround pastor (14%) has a mentor. Three of the non-turnaround pastors had mentors early in their ministry. Two of

Table 6.

Coaches and Mentors

	TAP	*NTAP*
Did you have a coach or mentor at the beginning of your ministry?	13	4
Do you currently have a coach or mentor?	13	1

[10] Aubrey Malphurs, *Developing a Vision for Ministry in the 21st Century,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 48.

the three of them were previously leading growing, turnaround churches. The result of this portion of the survey suggests a strong correlation between mentoring/coaching and turnaround ministry. This appears to be one key that may be employed to help pastors develop a successful turnaround ministry.

4. Differences in Leadership Styles and Abilities

A twenty-three question survey was developed to probe various leadership characteristics. The questions, responses to the questions, and a comparison between TAP and NTAP are included in the table below. The following are observations from this portion of the survey. The numbers at the beginning of each paragraph refers to the corresponding question in the survey.

1. "People view me as outgoing." Turnaround pastors are significantly more outgoing than their non-turnaround counterparts. This is extremely important in order for a church to grow with new people. Effective outreach requires the ability to connect.

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Table 7.

Leadership Style Responses

Questions	TAP	NTAP
1. People view me as outgoing.	4.3	3.3
2. I tend to be a self-starter.	4.5	3.9
3. People would view me as caring and loving.	4.2	4.1
4. I am much more innovative than traditional.	3.8	2.4
5. Energy and activity mark my life.	4.2	3.6
6. I work best when I am working with a team of people.	4.0	2.7
7. I am good at delegating responsibilities to others.	4.0	3.3
8. People see me as empowering and encouraging them in ministry.	4.4	4.0
9. I have trained new leadership for ministry.	4.3	3.4
10. People view me as focused and determined.	4.5	3.7
11. Goals and results are very important to me.	4.0	3.9
12. Strong relationships are a very important part of my ministry.	4.5	4.0
13. I tend to be pushy when I am working toward a goal.	2.9	2.6
14. I am able to influence people to follow me.	4.2	3.9
15. I am impatient with people who disagree with me.	2.6	2.6
16. People would view me as a directive type leader.	3.3	2.8
17. People would view me as controlling.	2.3	2.1
18. I consider that reaching people for Christ is my top priority.	3.6	3.6
19. People say that I am an able communicator.	4.7	4.0
20. I feel that the Bible must be central in all matters.	5.0	4.9
21. Conflict resolution and problem solving have been part of my ministry.	4.4	3.9
22. Making the Gospel relevant to the community is imperative.	4.4	4.4
23. People view my preaching as more challenging than comforting.	3.8	3.7

2. "I tend to be a self-starter." TAP do not require outside motivation. They are wired for ministry.

4. "I am much more innovative than traditional." TAP are not afraid to break barriers and try new things to reach people for Christ, while NTAP like stability.

5. "Energy and activity mark my life." Turnaround pastors are more energetic, and turnaround requires a tremendous amount of energy.

6. "I work best when I am working with a team of people." Turnaround pastors appear to be better team players. Teamwork is essential in a growing church.

7. "I am good at delegating responsibilities to others." In partnership with question #6, TAP are better at delegation than NTAP. Delegation is essential as no single person or small group can carry the load required for turnaround. Perfectionists tend to not trust others to do a task adequately (and perfectly!). Consequently, everything must flow through the pastor. Failure to delegate chokes growth and reduces ministry effectiveness (see Exodus 18:13–18).

9. "I have trained new leadership for ministry." New leadership opens new doors and avenues for ministry. Developing new leaders fits well with #6 and #7. Pastors must increase their leadership base if a church is to grow.

10. "People view me as focused and determined." Turnaround leaders are very focused in what they do. They are driven by vision to accomplish what cannot be accomplished by a shotgun approach to ministry.

12. "Strong relationships are a very important part of my ministry." Both groups have strong relational capabilities, but turnaround leaders have the edge. It is difficult for any church to grow without a relational pastor. Relational pastors tend to produce relational people.

16. "People view me as a directive type leader." NTAP are more passive than TAP.

17. "People would view me as controlling." Both sets of pastors scored very low on this question. One might think that turnaround pastors would be seen as more forceful. However, even the lay leaders gave low scores to both turnaround and non-turnaround pastors on this question. Dictators are not successful in turnaround ministry.

19. "People say that I am an able communicator." Good communication is essential for healthy relationships. This is equally true in the church. The turnaround pastors have a significant lead in this category.

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21. TAP have the edge when it comes to conflict resolution skills. Change produces conflict, and good conflict managers will help move a church further faster.

This was one of the most productive sections of the research. Turnaround pastors are more outgoing, innovational, and energetic self-starters than their counterparts. They are also better team players, better at delegation, and better at training new leaders. They are focused, have strong relational qualities, and are more directive without being domineering. They are also better than average communicators with above average skills in conflict resolution.

5. Other Significant Findings

The following two tables show the length of pastoral ministry, average tenure at each church, total number of turnarounds (if appropriate), and the age of the pastor at the beginning of the latest turnaround.

Turnaround Ministry: Length of Pastoral Tenure. Pastoral tenure at the turnaround churches ranged from two years to twenty-five years. Pastoral tenure in the non-turnaround churches ranged from six to twenty-six years. The following observations were discovered:

- Long tenure does not guarantee growth, but long tenure with a turnaround leader produces steady and continuous growth.
- Two short-tenured pastors are definitely leading their churches to turnaround.

Table 8.

Non-turnaround Pastors' Statistics

Number of Churches Pastored	Number of Pastors	Total Length of Pastoral Ministry (years)	Average Tenure at Each Church	Total Number of Turnarounds	Age at Beginning of Latest Ministry
1	2	23	23	0	32
		19	19	0	50
		Avg. = 21.0			Avg. = 41
2	2	15	7.5	0	34
		24	12	0	50
		Avg. = 14.5			Avg. = 42
4	3	36	9	3	39
		38	9.5	3	60
		19	4.7	2	44
	Total = 7	Avg. = 26.3			Avg. = 47.7

Table 9.

Turnaround Pastors' Statistics

Number of Churches Pastored	Number of Pastors in This Group	Total Length of Pastoral Ministry (years)	Average Tenure at Each Church	Total Number of Turnarounds	Age at Beginning of Latest Turnaround
1	9	20	20	1	50
		25	25	1	28
		3	3	1	32
		8	8	1	?
		9	9	1	32
		2	2	1	49
		6	6	1	30
		6	6	1	34
		24	24	1	28
		Avg. = 11.4			Avg. = 35.4
2	5	11	5.5	1	43
		16	8	1	37
		20	10	2	41
		13	6.5	1	41
		13	6.5	1	35
		Avg. = 14.6			Avg. = 39.4
3	3	30	10	2	42
		17	5.7	2	31
		29	9.7	1	48
		Avg. = 25.3			Avg. = 40.3
4	4	31	7.8	3	56
		34	8.5	4	54
		30	7.5	4	55
		25	6.3	3	50
	Total = 21		Avg. = 30.0		Avg. = 53.8

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- Long tenure with a non-turnaround pastor at best produces plateau, and in most cases, steady decline.
- Age is not a factor in turnaround.
- Pastors are capable of leading multiple churches in turnaround.
- Leading a church in turnaround does not guarantee a repeat performance. Three of the current non-turnaround pastors once led turnaround ministries.

These factors are not definitive differences that distinguish between turnaround and non-turnaround pastors. However, these factors debunk some myths about turnaround leadership. The question concerning pastoral history is essential in the evaluation process but not definitive in its results.

Age of Turnaround Pastors and Multiple Turnarounds

A number of assumptions and myths abound concerning turnaround ministry. For example, George Barna suggests that pastors have the possibility of turning around one church in their lifetime,[11] and that turnaround normally occurs with pastors aged forty-five or younger.[12] From Table 8 one observes that seven of the twenty-one TAP began their last turnaround at age forty-eight or older! One pastor began his first ministry as a pastor at age fifty (he had served a number of years as an overseas missionary) and led a plateaued church from 140 to 1200 over the next twenty years! It can also be observed that seven pastors have led two or more churches in turnaround, while two pastors have led four churches through turnaround. Neither age nor the number of churches pastored is a limiting factor in turnaround.

The Percentage of Turnaround Pastors in Evangelical Churches

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Some doubt exists as to how many pastors are actually turnaround pastors. Church growth expert Gary McIntosh does give a hint at the number of turnaround pastors in North America. He describes four types of pastors of growing churches. The "catalyzer" is normally a church planter. The second, the "organizer," is an individual who becomes pastor of a growing church and helps it continue to grow. The "reorganizer" is a turnaround pastor who helps a declining church to grow once again. The fourth pastor type is a "super reorganizer,"[13] a pastor who is able to turn around a dying congregation. He notes that "reorganizers are also in short supply, perhaps numbering about 5 percent of all church leaders."[14] "Super reorganizers are in extremely short supply, perhaps numbering around 1 to 2 percent of all church leaders."[15] The reorganizer and super reorganizer are of interest in this project. Barna suggests that turnaround pastors are rare.[16] Church consultant Paul D. Borden concurs that those who are able to produce systemic change in a church are limited in number.

> Another major reason why most pastors cannot lead systemic change on their own is that God has not given them the gifts and talents to do so. In my experience of supervising pastors, perhaps 10 to 15 percent of pastors have the leadership skills required to produce such change . . . A small percentage of

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[11] George Barna, *Turnaround Churches: How to Overcome Barriers to Growth and Bring New Life to an Established Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993), 68.

[12] Ibid., 69.

[13] Gary L. McIntosh, *Taking Your Church to the Next Level: What Got You Here Won't Get You There* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 90–95.

[14] Ibid., 94.

[15] Ibid., 95.

[16] Barna, 15.

pastors possess either a natural talent for leadership or the spiritual gift of leadership. Other pastors can increase their leadership behaviors, but without the gift or talent they probably do not have the innate resources needed for such a difficult task.[17]

As a part of continuing research, evangelical judicatories have been contacted to determine the number of TAP in each judicatory. This research has followed on the heels of the judicatory leaders reading a copy of the dissertation. To date only three judicatories have responded. The results have been somewhat surprising. According to the judicatory leaders, 23.7% of their pastors are capable or have led a church in turnaround ministry. In the judicatory where I serve and have done considerable research, only 14.9% of the pastors meet the TAP criteria.

Summary

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Turnaround pastors demonstrate significantly stronger abilities in the following areas of leadership than do the non-turnaround pastors. Turnaround pastors are:

- Pastors who most often score mid to high D and I on the DiSC Profile
- Passionate, visionary pastors who are able to draw followers after them
- Pastors who, more often than not, have a mentor or a coach
- More outgoing, with excellent people skills
- More innovative than traditional
- More energetic (an absolute essential for turnaround ministry)
- Pastors who are "young in ministry," regardless of their biological age
- Better team players
- Better at delegating ministry responsibilities
- Better at training new leaders
- Focused and determined in ministry
- Pastors who embrace necessary change and are prepared to pay the price to lead change
- Pastors who have good conflict resolution skills
- Better than average communicators. This communication includes not only great preaching and teaching skills, but communicating vision and direction with passion.
- Pastors who passionately use their primary spiritual gifts and empower others to use their gifts.

TAP are rare. They have a God-given skill set that enables them to lead churches in renewal.

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[17] Paul D. Borden, *Direct Hit: Aiming Real Leaders at the Mission Field* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 98.

the challenge

The solution to declining church attendance will require a two-prong approach—both church planting and church renewal. Church renewal will be led by turnaround pastors. One must first stop the church's downward momentum and then begin to bring transformation and renewal. It requires enormous energy, perseverance, wisdom, and commitment to turn a church from plateau or decline to growth and vitality. If the task were easy, more pastors would attempt the assignment. As the old adage says, "It's easier to give birth than to raise the dead." How, then, is it possible to accomplish the task? Behind the task of both planting and revitalizing churches is the Lord's promise, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." Let us rededicate our lives to both planting new churches and to bringing renewal to the bride, the body of Christ, for the sake of generations yet unborn.

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a suggested course of action

The following is a suggested scenario that can be used to produce multiple turnarounds.

- Identify turnaround and potential turnaround pastors.
- Develop boot camps for TAP similar to boot camps that have been developed for church planters. Provide tools for turnaround to these pastors including at a minimum mentor/coaches, conflict reconciliation skills, envisioning skills, leadership development tools, and delegation skills.
- Place these pastors in strategic churches in urban, suburban, and rural settings.
- In order to facilitate change, provide church assessments for strategic churches to establish what John Kotter calls "a sense of urgency."[18] This will help prepare the congregations.
- Begin to use these TAP as coaches and mentors with pastors who have a good set of pastoral skills, but not innate turnaround capabilities, in order to help facilitate change in a growing number of churches.
- Since there are a limited number of turnaround pastors, use multi-site and merger strategies so that the impact of turnaround pastors will be extended beyond a single, local congregation. This will require separate strategies for rural and city settings.
- Since pastors generally are not prepared to understand the difficulties and complexities of turnaround ministry while they are students in seminary and

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[18] John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 35–49. Kotter's work is essential reading for anyone interested in turnaround ministry.

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Bible college, provide training clinics for pastors related to leadership, conflict resolution, and strategic thinking after they have experienced the reality of church ministry.

- TAP need to intentionally train pastoral interns so that these interns will be imprinted with turnaround DNA for their future ministries.

The challenge before us is enormous. The stakes could not be higher. The spiritual future of a nation hangs in the balance. America's problem is fundamentally spiritual. Church leadership must engage churches to engage their communities with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The strategy for spiritual vitality must be two-pronged. We must plant churches, and we must seek church renewal.

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