

entering churches that are dying and need to find health again, and it includes examples and stories of the basic principles provided. More advanced readers may find the book lacks depth for pastors attempting to replant their congregations. Wider reading may be necessary to build on this introductory work.

Barna, George. *Turnaround Churches: How to Overcome Barriers to Growth and Bring New Life to an Established Church*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993. 111 pp. \$4.99.

Reviewed by Harvey Mitchell Jr. Harvey is currently serving in a rural town of 7,800 people where he is the lead pastor in a church revitalization. He has seen growth in his church from 12 people to over 150 in five years. Harvey graduated with a BA in Pastoral Ministries from Central Bible College, Springfield, MO, and MDiv from Fresno Pacific University, Fresno, CA. He is currently in the first year of a DMin program at Talbot School of Theology, La Mirada, CA.

George Barna founded the Barna Group in 1984, which researched various issues in culture and in the church. Due to his research, Barna has become a well-known cultural and religious researcher, writing over 50 books. His work is often cited in other publications and scholarly writings.

This book was written to those interested in how to turn around established churches that were on a slow spiral towards the end of their life cycle as a church. Barna believes that there is a way back to growth and vitality, and he uses his many years of research to help churches find a way back to life again.

This book opens with the author giving two perspectives of churches. The first perspective is of a dying church that needs to be turned around, and the second perspective is of a healthy church being able to understand how it needs to change over time to stay healthy and growing. We can simply look at the religious landscape in almost any city and see some churches that are growing while other churches are declining. The main difference is that the declining churches are trying to hold on to a style and memory of a past that is no longer here (12). Meanwhile, the growing churches are taking time and spending resources to help the church become the church

that is needed for their current context and time. The thesis of this book is summed up best by Barna when he says, “This book may be a road map to recovery, and it can identify pitfalls that could put healthy churches ‘on the ropes’” (14). The key words in the quote are “may” and “could.” The author is good at helping the reader realize and understand that there are no magical silver bullets, but turning around a church and keeping a healthy church from needing turnaround will be one of the hardest things they will ever do. The author is also clear that there are lots of variables, both seen and unseen, that will determine the results, and the only one who knows the results before the hard work starts is God.

The churches that are becoming healthy and growing are asking different questions, pertaining mostly to whom they are trying to reach. The answer to those questions will determine whether a church will even begin the process of turning around. When it comes to identifying decline in churches, we are given eight symptoms to watch out for: Demographic Changes, Inadequate Leadership, Poor Management, Old Blood, Building Campaigns, Ingrown Family, Resistance to Change, and Spiritual Health (33-38). Any one of these can lead to decline and be the outcome of decline. Most churches in decline have more than one of these symptoms showing up at the same time.

The author also explains that turnaround pastors are rare and very few turn a church around. The pastors that do, only turn around one or two churches during their career. It takes a certain type of person to be able to serve as a turnaround pastor: “Declining Churches either attract the most called and courageous pastors or those seeking a stepping stone to another ministry” (43). We are reminded that a turnaround pastor needs to have relational gifts, but also needs to be a strong leader, able to understand that they are leading the church to where God wants it to be, and not being swayed by people or other special interest groups in the church to take the church in a different direction. Turnaround pastors also were able to help the church let go of the past and develop a simple plan for outreach to the community. This book gives us a list of what is needed for a successful turnaround: 1) a praying pastor, 2) equipping the church to pray, 3) quality sermons, 4) outside perspective and voice, 5) essential staff support and the ability to move staff around, 6) a committed core group, 7) long-term

pastoral commitment, and 8) the absolute necessity of a laity committed to working hand in hand with the pastor's vision

The hardest part of turning a church around is dealing with what the author calls "growth paralysis." He goes on to explain, "It is a classic chicken-egg dilemma: Which fate is worse, enduring changes that shatter the personal comfort zone and put the church at risk, or suffocating by refusing to keep pace with a changing world?" (90). The successful turnaround pastor will be one that brings about change in the culture of the church: "The effective leader will create a team environment, gain ownership of a strategic approach to victory and invest in spiritual development" (92). Part of pastoring is developing and equipping the church to do the work of the church. The biggest step for growth is when the leadership can begin to hand off various ministries and leadership opportunities to the people in the church. The church is only healthy when the whole church is actively involved in the life, health, growth, ministry, and calling of the church.

When I saw this book was published in 1993, I prepared myself for picking through the bones and pulling out the meat. However, Barna not only tapped into timely church growth principles but also timeless church growth principles. His statement, "This book may be a road map to recovery, and it can identify pitfalls that could put healthy churches 'on the ropes'" (14), grabbed me because it was not marketed to me as the next great silver bullet in a church leader's arsenal of miraculous church growth. Barna suggested that you can read this book and apply its principles, but it may not work for you or your church. He was honest and realistic that both pastors and churches need to take a hard look at their situation and ask the tough questions to evaluate their readiness to put in the effort and resources and experience the pain that it will take to see their church turnaround.

Barna did a good job writing for a very neutral and balanced audience. I think any church (regardless of denominational affiliation) could read this book with ease and apply the principles to their context and culture. I was even amazed at how this book even speaks to the church 25 years after it was first written.

Another strength of this book is the brevity and clarity it brings to revitalization and church growth. It is deep enough to explain the various

principles and ideas without bogging the reader down in theory. The book is also short enough that it could be read quickly and would be easy to hand it off to other leaders in the church who may not be inclined to read. The author has worked hard to give clear ideas, principles, and steps that help lead to change and growth, making it a book could be used for staff training before the weekly staff meeting.

One weakness of this book is that it only shows one model of bringing change and growth to a local church. It is more of a “how-to” book and does not acknowledge the other voices addressing the topic. Another thing to consider is that, though I mentioned this book is neutral, I think the model he is suggesting fits better with evangelical Protestant fundamentalist groups, which place a high value on evangelism and biblical literacy/discipleship. Those from outside this tradition would interact with the principles put forth in this book in a different way. Despite the book’s emphasis on only one model, I still believe this book is relevant to contemporary church growth and should be in every pastor’s library.

One of the things I appreciated from this book was that I felt released from the pressure to turn around my current church. I can work hard and accomplish all kinds of tasks, but ultimately the results are in the Lord’s hands. This book reminded me that my job is to follow where God wants the church to go and not to worry about trying to please anyone but Him. Revitalizing this church will be one of the hardest things I do, and I need to learn how to enjoy this season, enjoy the people, and enjoy my family while God is working on our behalf for a better future.

Another thing I learned from this book is that I might not always be the turnaround pastor. I might turn this church around, but then in the next place I might be the one that simply prepares the church for their next turnaround pastor, or I might be the pastor that follows a turnaround pastor. Each season I find myself in will have its own challenges and new lessons I must learn.

I would recommend this book to anyone that is wanting to see God revive and restore their church to life again. This book is scholarly enough for a seminary student, theological enough for a pastor, and practical enough for a layperson to be able to read it and get a wealth of information out of it. I even think this would be a great study for a church to walk

through with their leadership as they work together to re-envision how God wants to restore them back to health and vitality.

Hunter, Kent R. *Who Broke My Church?: 7 Proven Strategies for Renewal and Revival*. New York, NY: Faith Words, 2017. 261 pp. \$16.99.

Reviewed by David Thiessen, Executive Pastor at Mountain View Community Church in Fresno, CA, and D.Min. student in Church Growth at Talbot School of Theology.

Who Broke My Church? is the latest book by Kent Hunter, founder of Church Doctor Ministries and author of 30 books dealing with various topics related to church health and church growth. In this book, the author seeks to provide practical strategies that will produce an organic growth movement in local churches. Typically called revivals, these growth movements have been observed in various countries by Church Doctor Ministries. Research has revealed “Kingdom culture” as the “spiritual DNA” that drives these movements, and the author describes this unique culture in detail and identifies strategies to break through seven “ceilings” that prevent Kingdom culture from flourishing.

The book explores the priority and nature of Kingdom culture in the first few chapters. While conducting survey research in 2006, the author observed that increasing numbers of Christians surveyed were articulating a “holy discontent” and anticipating significant growth of the church. These kinds of observations were particularly common in Great Britain, where much of the research for the book appeared to be centered (15). Evidently, church growth and vitality there is tied not to specific programs but to the spiritual health of individual disciples within the church (29).

In chapter four the nature of Kingdom culture is fleshed out, though not in detail. A Kingdom culture church is characterized by features like a priority on making disciples slowly and in small numbers (53). The priority is not to gather crowds but to equip Christians to disciple the people in their immediate sphere of influence—family, close friends, etc. This is put forward as the key to moving a church that has drifted from Kingdom priorities back to spiritual faithfulness that will, in turn, produce healthy and sustainable church growth.