

4-1-2006

## The Work of the Holy Spirit and Church Revitalization: Acts 2:42-2:47

Ray W. Ellis

*Free Methodist Church of North America*, raywellis@aol.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/jascg>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [Practical Theology Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Ellis, R. W. (2006). The Work of the Holy Spirit and Church Revitalization: Acts 2:42-2:47. *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth*, 17(2), 37-40. Retrieved from <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/jascg/vol17/iss2/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

**The Work of the Holy Spirit and Church Revitalization**  
**Acts 2:42-2:47**

**Ray W. Ellis**

The work of the Holy Spirit is vital to the revitalization of a local church. The entire process of revitalization is based on seeking spiritual health, prayer and the energizing work of the Holy Spirit. Without the presence of the Holy Spirit at work in the life and ministry of a local church all efforts are in vain. A local church may experience numerical gains in attendance, but without the ministry of the Holy Spirit the church will not experience redemptive, Kingdom of God growth.

The work of the Holy Spirit in revitalization can be compared to the human body. A person can live and breathe without arms and legs. A local congregation can love the Lord but not make an impact for the Kingdom. Church growth, New Testament principles give the local church arms and legs — purpose and direction to make a significant impact for the Kingdom of God. But without the blessing and energy of the Holy Spirit, a local church is merely like a secular organization that experiences sociological growth.

*Vision from God.* Spiritual renewal begins with a vision from God. We get our vision as we take time to fast and prayer. Nehemiah is an example of a leader who was filled with passion and empower by the Holy Spirit to bring about a renewal of leaders in Jerusalem. Before Nehemiah traveled to Jerusalem he “sat down and wept. For some days he mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven” (Nehemiah 1:4).

The Apostle John was in the Spirit, praying and meditating as an exile on the Island of Patmos when the Lord gave him insight on the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2-3. The work of leading local congregations toward renewal is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit and secondarily the work of interven-

---

Journal of the American Society for Church Growth, Spring 2006

tion, inspiration and information. I like what the authors of the book, *Marketing for Congregations - Choosing to Serve People More Effectively* say: "The best marketing plan in the world cannot compensate for spiritual lethargy or confusion, so that none are able to listen in the silent closets of the heart where God awaits to communicate with us. Nor can a marketing plan counterbalance a lack of vision" (Page 380).

*Climate for Growth.* A businessman purchased a tropical plant. He put the plant in his office and did every thing he knew to keep the plant healthy. He gave it water, plant food, sunshine and lots of tender loving care. After two weeks the plant was turning brown and dying. He called the Florist and asked if the plant had a guarantee because the plant was dying. The Florist asked how he was caring for the plant. He said he was giving it water, plant food and sunshine. The Florist asked: "Are you misting the plant?" "What do you mean, misting the plant?" The Florist replied, "The plant you purchased is a tropical plant and it needs high humidity. Take a spray bottle and spray mist on the plant for a week or two." After two weeks of spraying the plant it turned green and was revitalized.

Without a proper climate in the local church you can do everything right and not experience health and vitality. God cannot bless a toxic church climate. A proper climate for growth is the work of the Holy Spirit in response to the leaders in the church practicing and modeling Biblical qualities.

Unhealthy churches are filled with conflicts, spiritual carnality, leaders who are more interested in control than allowing the Holy Spirit to lead. The focus of toxic churches is inward. They are ingrown, lack vision, lack passion for souls, are comfortable, apathetic and satisfied to play church.

Unhealthy churches are characterized by five deadly diseases.

1. *Toleration of known sin*—gossip, carnality, and critical spirit. Healthy churches practice the Biblical principles found in Matthew 18:15-17.

2. *Lack of reproductive ministries.* Healthy churches have a plan to equip leaders for ministry. Leaders are mobilized according to the teachings found in Ephesians 4:11-16 and 2 Timothy 2:2.

3. *Lack of desire to grow.* Healthy churches have a compelling passion for Kingdom growth and recommitted to carrying out the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20.

4. *Lack of commitment to pray.* Healthy churches not only talk about prayer they pray with a deep passion for lost people who need Jesus.

5. *Overly organized for the size of church.* Healthy churches have a simple organization with a focus on having time for ministry and not attending more meetings.

Characteristics found in the Seven Church in Revelation cause a local congregation to be sick:

- The church in Ephesus left her first love for Christ and Christ's love for the lost. A prime characteristic of a sick church is one that has no passion for the lost.
- The churches at Pergamum and Thyatira had compromised their faith and had allowed sinful practices to prevail among leaders in the church.
- The church at Sardis had the reputation of being alive, but they were dead. Here is possibly an example of a church with financial and numerical growth, but no convert growth. They may receive church growth awards but they are not advancing the Kingdom of God.
- The church in Laodicea was satisfied to merely maintain ministries. They had money in the bank and were able to care for their own needs. Every Sunday they sang, "I'm so glad to be part of the family of God so let the rest of the world go to hell."

*Turning Point In Ministry.* In my first year of ministry I began with a zeal to bring new people to Jesus. I helped the church focus on outreach and evangelism. I went door to door making contacts, but at the end of the year there was little fruit and no conversions.

The second year of my ministry I lead the congregation in the relocation of church to a new ministry area. We built a new church and parsonage and experienced some transfer growth in new location. But there was little convert growth with more of our energies given to building the new church and parsonage. I had moved from being mission driven to maintaining ministry.

During my year of ministry I became involved in many ministries outside the local church. I became an officer in the Greater Kansas City Evangelical Fellowship, served as a trainer of counselors for a Billy Graham Crusade held in Kansas City and as a follow-up to the crusade, I helped coordinate Billy Graham Gospel Films in local theaters in Kansas City Kansas. In the midst of all these activities I developed stomach pains. I began to take tranquilizers, that I called "I don't care pills."

Over a period of weeks the Lord showed me the primary problem, self-pity and self pride. I deserved better treatment from my local congregation.

Break through came when I made confession of my spiritual pride. I became broken in my spirit, and repented of my self-

centered attitudes. I repented of my lack of soul winning. God gave me a theme for my life and ministry, "I would rather blunder than falter for the sake of the Gospel."

Confession, repentance, and brokenness released new spiritual energy in my ministry. Lift off occurred as the Holy Spirit came with His burst of energy and Presence. Spiritual renewal occurred because I asked for help. I asked for the help of several individuals to come along side and assist me in my ministry. Free Methodist evangelists Charles Kingsley, Lucien Behar and Elmer Boileau gave me practical on-the-job training. I surrendered anew to the work of the Holy Spirit. In the Spring of my third year we saw 25 people make professions of faith in their homes. We experienced a spiritual of revival and revitalization.

There were several characteristics that we experienced as part of our local church revitalization:

- As pastor I began to practice and model the value of evangelism. I made it a practice to present the Gospel message to adults in their homes.
- We used all means to save some. Everything we did focused on bringing our congregation to having a great concern for ministry to the unchurched in our community.
- There was a contagiousness about our people and a sense of expectancy which attracts and holds newcomers.
- People began look forward to worship services each week.

Spiritual health and renewal are possible when we begin to seek the Lord with all our heart and allow the Holy Spirit to give us His vision and energize us as His leaders in the church. When we get out of the way and permit the Holy Spirit to lead, we can follow His vision for the church. Jesus is the Lord of the Church and he alone deserves the glory for the great things He is doing. A healthy, Spirit-filled local congregation grows naturally.

#### Writer

Ellis, Ray W. Address: 5371 Greenbank Ct., San Jose, CA 95118. Email: [raywellis@aol.com](mailto:raywellis@aol.com). Dr. Ellis received a B.A. degree in Philosophy Religion (1960) from Greenville College, Greenville, Illinois, and a M. Div. (1963) and D. Min. (1980) from Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY. Ray currently serves as Senior Pastor of the Willow Vale Community Church – Free Methodist in San Jose, CA and Director of the Consulting Network for the Free Methodist Church of North America, Indianapolis, IN.