
COURSE CORRECTIONS

Session Description

It's been said that churches have a life cycle from birth to death. That's hard to dispute in a nation that's expected to close 150,000 churches in the next decade ... and with 14 churches closing every day, it's hard to argue. Though it may be too late for some churches to turnaround, with strong leadership, guts, heart, and Spirit most churches can execute course corrections significant enough to make a U-Turn from decline to faithfulness, effectiveness, and sustainability.

Session Outline

If you make a U-Turn onto the wrong street, you're still not going in the right direction. Therefore, before you can make a course correction you've got to understand where you are – as opposed to where you *think* you are. Too many churches go for the quick fix for what seems like an obvious problem, but too often the solution simply exacerbates the situation. Diagnosis is beyond the scope of this session ... or any single session, for that matter. In many, if not most churches, it takes an outsider to pinpoint the issues. With that in mind, here are five coordinates for effective course corrections.

1. Renew the Congregational Spiritual Foundation

Start your diagnosis here. Do your leaders behave as spiritually centered models of faith? We're not talking "perfection," we're talking about those committed to and actively growing in the faith.

- Renew the spiritual habits using the Discipleship Development Questions.
- Faithful churches are led by spiritual leaders. Too often we put people into leadership who have no earthly business handling heavenly matters. Remember the Acts 6 model of leadership selection. When the church needed a course correction for their food pantry, they didn't look for food managers or those with distribution and organizational degrees. They insisted the leaders be wise and filled with the Spirit. How did they know who to choose? They chose those who had conspicuous and demonstrated spirituality.
- Hold your leaders accountable for their behavior. A good place to start is a meaningful leadership covenant.

2. Deal with Conflict, Bullies, and Terrorists

There's no such thing as a conflict-free church. But too many churches are too nice to address conflict, bullies, or terrorists when it gets out of hand – and it shouldn't ever get out of hand.

- Unresolved conflict doesn't just hinder a church, it cripples it. Most church leaders are conflict-averse. Remember, it takes leadership and guts to execute a successful course correction. Confront conflict and deal with it.

- Bullies and terrorists are responsible for much, if not most, of the church's sorry state. Most of the instructions for approaching those outside the kingdom are found in the gospels. However, Matthew's gospel is the one place you can find Jesus' instructions for dealing with troublemakers in the church (18:15–17) ... and Paul's epistles are replete with examples of putting those instructions into practice. Hold those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ accountable for their behavior. Period.

3. Ruthlessly Align Everything with Your DNA

Revisit your mission, values, and vision. If they don't give you your marching orders it's time to rework them. Mission: Why you exist (hint: to make disciples). Values: What's important to the church. Vision: Where you're going.

- Evaluate every existing ministry, every existing mission, and even every existing event. Does it show measurable results that are aligned with your DNA? If not, stop it.
- Do your values provide specific priorities for expending your resources? If not, then any good idea will be a good idea. And not every good idea is a good idea for *your* congregation.
- Is your vision inspiring? Is it a SMART vision by which you can measure progress ... and know when you've arrived?

4. Measure Which Process is Lacking

When it comes to making course corrections, most churches start here. Big mistake. Big. Huge. You should only tackle this course correction onramp after you've deal with all of the above first.

- **Invite:** Are you seeing a regular influx of first-time visitors? If not, begin by checking your congregation's self-esteem. Second, check the pastor's schedule. Third, check your marketing – and begin with your website.
- **Connect:** Do your visitors return? Are they still with you a year later? If not, check your hospitality practices, followed by your follow-up processes, and finally examine your low-commitment connection opportunities.
- **Apprentice:** Are your members and guests increasingly becoming faithful in ways that are demonstrable? If you can't tell for sure, you have a discipleship problem. Are you seeing more "new" leaders shouldering ministry and mission responsibilities? If not, you have an apprenticeship problem.
- **Send:** Is there growing personal involvement in missions beyond the church by your members and guests? We're not talking writing bigger checks or gathering more tuna for the food bank. We're talking about personal, get-your-hands-dirty involvement in outside-the-church-walls mission. If not, your church is probably inward focused.

5. Streamline Your Organizational Structure

Notice this is dead last. There's a reason for that. Tinkering with organizational structures can be, and generally is, a colossal distraction and time-waster. EXCEPT ... when it's keeping your church from breaking a "growth barrier." If you've found your attendance breaking 100, 200, 300, 400, 800, 1000, etc. and

all of the above seems to be basically in place, then it may be time to tweak or overhaul your organizational structure.

Discussion Questions

For discussion, visit each of the five points above and discuss each point, asking the group the questions posed in the points and/or “Are we on course here? If not, what needs to be addressed?”