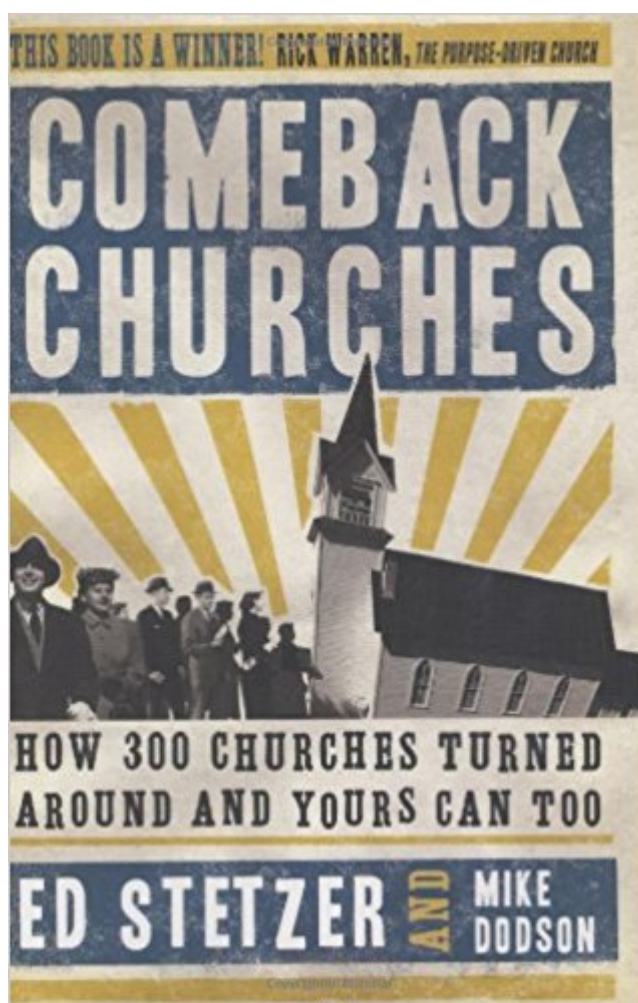


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# Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around And Yours Can, Too



## Synopsis

Research shows that over time, most churches plateau and then eventually decline. Typically, they start strong and experience periods of growth, then stagnate and lose members. Since 1991, the North American population has increased by 15 percent while the number of "unchurched" people has increased by 92 percent. Large church houses that were filled in the 1950s and '60s now hold a fraction of their capacity. To counter this trend, authors Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson surveyed 300 churches from across ten different denominations that recently achieved healthy evangelistic growth after a significant season of decline. What they have discovered is an exciting method of congregation reinvigoration that is shared in the new book entitled *Comeback Churches*.

As a successful pastor, church planter, researcher, and advisor to thousands of churches, Ed Stetzer speaks from a wealth of experience with all kinds of churches.

Now, in one volume, your church can benefit from his wisdom. This book is a winner!

• Dr. Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose-Driven Life* and *The Purpose-Driven Church*

“First and foremost, it is biblical. Second, it is well researched. And third, it is immensely practical and applicable . . . this book should be in the hands of hundreds of thousands of pastors, staff, and church leaders. Simply stated, it is just that good.

• Thom S. Rainer, author of *Simple Church*, president/CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources  
“Finally, a book of practical advice that is based on research. I have seen it both ways

• endless research with little advice, or, much advice with little facts. This book strikes the balance with perfection.

• Elmer Towns, Dean of Liberty University  
“This is the most helpful, practical book on church revitalization I

• Leonard Sweet, Drew Theological School, George Fox University  
“Comeback Churches is more than a pep talk. It

• is rooted in the right stuff to bring a congregation out of the dismal into the vital.

• Jack W. Hayford, President, International Foursquare Churches, Chancellor, The King

• is College and Seminary  
“No one, to my knowledge, has done the hard research, presented the facts, and offered such sound advice as Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson

• | *Comeback Churches* is the number-one book on turning around declining and plateauing church ministry.

• Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D., Biola University  
“A refreshing book by authors who know how to make research exciting and instructional. Leaders and members of non-growing evangelical churches should read this book (it wouldn't hurt mainliners either)!

• Bill Easum, Easum, Bandy & Associates

## Book Information

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"As a successful pastor, church planter, researcher, and advisor to thousands of churches, Ed Stetzer speaks from a wealth of experience with all kinds of churches. Now, in one volume, your church can benefit from his wisdom. This book is a winner!" -- Dr. Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose-Driven Life* and *The Purpose-Driven Church*"Comeback Churches is more than a pep talk. It's rooted in the 'right stuff' to bring a congregation out of the dismal into the vital." -- Jack W. Hayford, President, International Foursquare Churches, Chancellor, The King's College and Seminary"Finally, a book of practical advice that is based on research. I have seen it both ways-- endless research with little advice, or, much advice with little facts. This book strikes the balance with perfection." -- Elmer Towns, Dean of Liberty University "First and foremost, it is biblical. Second, it is well researched. And third, it is immensely practical and applicable . . . this book should be in the hands of hundreds of thousands of pastors, staff, and church leaders. Simply stated, it is just that good." -- Thom S. Rainer, author of *Simple Church*, president/CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources" This is the most helpful, practical book on church revitalization I've read this century." -- Leonard Sweet, Drew Theological School, George Fox University

"We don't want our church to die. The congregant's concern matches reliable data that shows the North American Church is, in fact, shrinking. The general adult population of the United States may have grown by a predictable fifteen percent in recent years, but the number of unchurched adults has also, meanwhile, increased by a more shocking

ninety-two percent (source: The Barna Group). Perhaps you've noticed: large church buildings that were filled in the 1950s and 60s now hold a fraction of their capacity. And recent research suggests that the perceived church growth of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s had more to do with a redistribution of believers than reaching the unchurched. Overall, our churches are stagnant, in need of a return to healthy evangelistic growth. Leading missiologist Ed Stetzer sheds new light on a crucial issue in *Comeback Churches*. Coauthored with pastor Mike Dodson, their exceptionally researched book reports on more than 300 formerly declining congregations across ten different denominations, ringing the bell about what it takes today to revitalize a weakened body of believers.

This book presents concrete evidence that failing churches can make a "comeback" and become dynamic once again. The book seeks to present a balance between numerical success and spiritual success, but does not fully accomplish that goal. The emphasis is clearly on numerical success as the primary criterion for whether or not a church has made a "comeback." The book does recognize that a few "traditional" churches have made a comeback, and have accomplished notable numerical growth. The emphasis, however, is on churches which have taken a more "contemporary" approach to ministry in order to achieve numerical growth. The book has many helpful ideas and suggestions scattered throughout it. My suggestion is that a person read it in the same manner that you'd eat at a smorgasbord: go down the serving line and choose that which is best for you.

Fantastic book. I am a first time bivocational pastor at a church that would have definitely been classified as a dead church. The people who were still there were anything but dead though. The content in this book has helped me as the leader guide the rest of the congregation to become a movement that is once again relevant to our community. Don't expect to see or read about specific programs that you should do (although some are given) but come here to get the biblical reasoning and foundation needed to stop the ball from moving in the wrong direction and turn around to becoming a disciple making growing biblical movement in Christ.

According to *Leadership Journal*, "85 percent of churches in the United States have plateaued or declining attendance." That's approximately 340,000 churches. Mine is one of them. During our heyday in the 1980s, we had two services in an auditorium that seats 760 people. Today, we have one service and an average of 100 people in attendance. We're almost 87-percent empty. But I'm not worried for two reasons. First, I know that God wants us grow. Second, God has provided plenty of tools to help us grow. One of those tools is *Comeback Churches* by Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson.

It identifies five crucial issues in revitalizing your church: leadership, vibrant faith, lay ministry, intentional evangelism, and celebrative but orderly worship. Church revitalization requires strong, change-oriented leadership from pulpit and pew. To make a comeback, your church needs the right people in the right jobs doing the right thing. But leadership is not everything. Members of comeback churches must also have a faith that is characterized by personal commitment to Jesus and the church's mission, a servant attitude, and strategic prayer. In revitalized churches, pastors have limited roles, and they invite the laity to exercise their God-given ministries. And the whole church is involved in intentional evangelism, gradually incorporating unbelievers into the community and then into the faith. Finally, comeback churches have celebrative (but orderly) worship services. More often than not, their musical style is contemporary, and they do everything with excellence. If, like me, you're the pastor of a church that's seen better days, read *Comeback Churches*, and discover that your church's best days are still in front of you.

Good book.

Solid read

a lot of statistics - not enough how to!

There were too many repetitive points throughout the book. I did receive several insights to help my church become a "comeback church" and actions for me to take to facilitate the process. I found the book to be rather slow reading.

*Comeback Churches* is an excellent resource for those eighty to ninety percent of churches that are plateaued or declining. In my eleven years of pastoral ministry I have served three churches in this category of needing to make a comeback and have read many books on the subject, and this is the best I have read. There are some books on this subject that are written from the perspective of how one pastor led his church to change and growth, and that is inspiring, but that isn't necessarily going to help me. This book is grounded in reality since the authors are both pastors, so they aren't just researching the subject, they are living it; and they studied 324 churches that have successfully made the comeback. These churches came from ten different denominations, of different sizes, locations and histories. Because of that broad background, the principles can be applied to most any church in need of a comeback. The book is thorough; covering a number of subjects from

worship to finances to evangelism to what books these comeback pastors are reading; as well as factors that hinder the comeback and how to address those. Comeback Churches is a great textbook on how to lead a church from a position of plateau or decline to growth, and it is also a great book on leadership. After reading the book it is not at all surprising that it is recommended by Rick Warren, Thom Rainer, Elmer Towns, Leonard Sweet, Jack Hayford and Gary McIntosh.

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