

THE CHURCH AWAKENING: AN URGENT CALL FOR RENEWAL

THE CHURCH: LET'S START HERE

MATTHEW 16:13–18; ACTS 2:41–47



The Heart of the Matter

We are surrounded by churches. They are not only numerous; they are varied. Added to the many denominational and nondenominational distinctions is the fact that each local church has its own unique culture. “Media churches” can be seen on televisions and computers, where some of the characteristics of a “church” are present: music is sung, sermons are preached, offerings are taken, and people’s lives are influenced. But with no actual street address, people can’t assemble with others and participate together. Also, cults mimic churches and have loyal followers. Is it any wonder, in the midst of all this, that so much confusion exists regarding the church? Our idea of church needs renewal, so let’s start at the beginning.



Discovering the Way

1. Milestones: Looking at a Church . . . and Remembering

In 1998, Chuck started Stonebriar Community Church, which grew in membership to thousands in a short amount of time, offering many unique challenges.

2. Looking into Scripture . . . and Discovering Church (Matthew 16:13–18; Acts 2:41–47)

The idea of the church originated in Jesus’s prediction at Caesarea Philippi but was born in Jerusalem with Peter’s sermon and the people’s response.

3. Looking in on the Early Church . . . and Learning

What was present in the early church? What was absent? Who was leading the church then? And was it working?

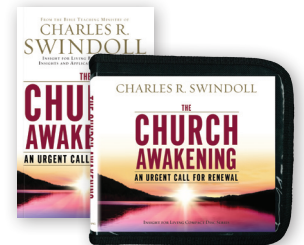


Starting Your Journey

Look around your own church and evaluate, according to the following three priorities. First, clear, biblical thinking must override secular planning and corporate mentality. *Think spiritually.* Second, studied, accurate decisions must originate from God’s Word, not human opinion. *Stay biblical.* Third, wise, essential changes must occur to counteract any and all signs of erosion. *Be flexible.*

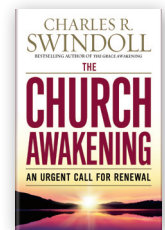


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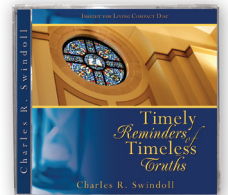
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THE CHURCH AWAKENING: AN URGENT CALL FOR RENEWAL

CHALLENGES, STRUGGLES, SOLUTIONS, PRIORITIES

ACTS 4:1-4, 8-14, 18-24, 29; 5:1-11, 14, 27-29, 40-42; 6:1-7



The Heart of the Matter

By examining the earliest church on record—the first-century church—we can find some insightful guidelines for our church in the twenty-first century. In spite of the differences in geography, culture, and some of the specific details of the Christian experience in their time period compared to ours, we're able to find some remarkable principles that apply. By doing so, we learn major lessons worth remembering and modeling.



Discovering the Way

1. Let's Recall Three Valuable Principles

Clear, biblical thinking must override secular planning and corporate mentality. Studied, accurate decisions must originate from God's Word not human opinion. Wise, essential changes must occur to counteract any evidence of erosion.

2. Let's Return to the First Church on Record (Selections from Acts 4 and 5)

The first church wasn't perfect. Though it experienced rapid growth, it also experienced strong resistance that called for a courageous response. And internal and external tests required appropriate reactions.

3. Let's Examine a Specific Issue (Acts 6:1-7)

As the church grew, so did its problems. One issue in particular brought a valid complaint and needed a wise solution: the church needed a godly team of servants. Once this problem was solved, the church continued to experience the blessing of God.

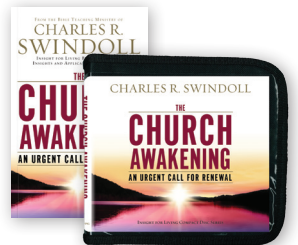


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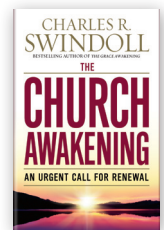
Let's always remember: the Adversary will stop at nothing to disrupt and destroy the church. But the Lord will honor and bless any plan that upholds His Word and promotes prayer!



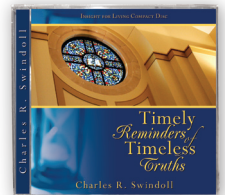
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DISTINCTIVES OF A CONTAGIOUS CHURCH

2 TIMOTHY 2:1-10



The Heart of the Matter

Why will some people drive past any number of churches to worship at one located farther from their home? What draws some people into a particular church, causing them to stay excited, to invest money, and to become actively involved in the life of that church? The best word to describe such a church is *contagious*—there is something about that church that is infectious. When a church is in this category, the word quickly travels. People witness passion and enthusiasm; they sense excitement and want to be a part of it. Churches like this have four distinctive qualities, as Paul listed in 2 Timothy.



Discovering the Way

1. A Mentor's Last Letter to His Friend

Second Timothy was Paul's last will and testament—his last words. Unlike some last words, Paul's are lasting because they are timeless and trustworthy.

2. Timeless Characteristics of a Contagious Church (2 Timothy 2:1-10)

A contagious church is a place of grace, a place of mentoring, a place of hardship and fellowship, and a place of selfless endurance.

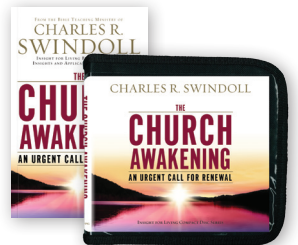


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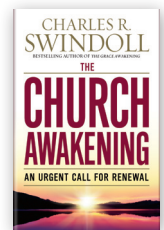
In order to be a contagious church, we must remember these distinctives and resist any signs of erosion.



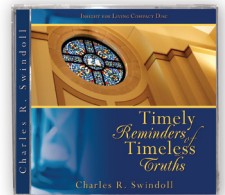
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THE CHURCH AWAKENING: AN URGENT CALL FOR RENEWAL

WORSHIP: A COMMITMENT . . . NOT A WAR, PART ONE

JOHN 4:16–23; ACTS 2:41–43



The Heart of the Matter

Each of us lives under a tyrannical master, though we hardly know it. Daily, we're subjected to the tyranny of the urgent. It demands our time and attention; it forces us to put off the truly important for another day. Only on occasion do we force ourselves to slow down and think of the toll it is taking on us, of how we have allowed circumstances and others too much control over our lives. The winds of other people's expectations and demands can drive us onto a reef of frustration, leaving us feeling shallow and desolate. We need to stop and reconsider what's important—as individuals and as churches. When we do, we'll quickly discover that we're missing the one, essential ingredient that we were made for: worship.



Discovering the Way

1. The Inescapable Conflict

A war is raging between two opposing forces, each vying for your time and attention: the urgent and the important.

2. The Irreplaceable Priority (John 4:16–23; Acts 2:41–43)

Worship must become our priority. But what is worship? Why is it so significant? How can we participate in it? And when is it paramount?

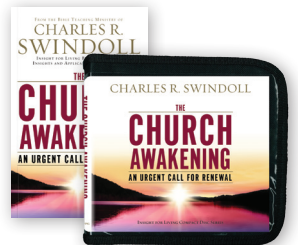


Starting Your Journey

As we approach worship, we must reexamine our hearts and redirect our lives toward Christ. When we do, the urgent will be eclipsed by the important, and worship will produce spiritual fruit within us.

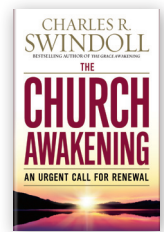


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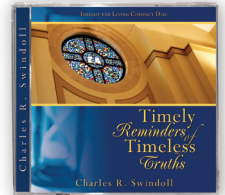
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WORSHIP: A COMMITMENT . . . NOT A WAR, PART TWO

MATTHEW 15:1–12; ROMANS 11:33–12:2



The Heart of the Matter

Can there be a more oxymoronic expression than *worship wars*? And yet that phrase aptly describes what is taking place in too many churches. How tragic! The unique privilege to deepen our walk with Christ through worship is no longer a matter of commitment but an ugly war. Surely, this must grieve the heart of God! In an attempt to come to an understanding of worship, it is helpful to realize there is a difference between the *essence* of worship and the *expression* of worship.



Discovering the Way

1. A Quick Review

Focusing on the worthiness of God is one of the truly important things in life, but if we aren't careful, the tyranny of the urgent can distract us.

2. What Worship Represents—Its Essence (Matthew 15:1–12; Romans 11:33–12:2)

The essence of worship is a commitment to God and Christ, a matter of the heart and mind, and a perspective on living and dying.

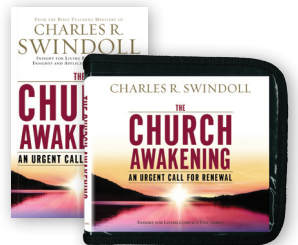


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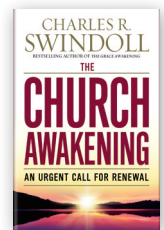
The expression of our worship must focus on glorifying God; it must be God-centered, Spirit-empowered, and Bible-based.



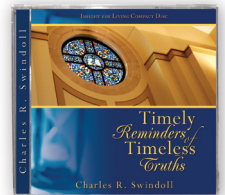
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WHAT MUST THE CHURCH REALIZE?

2 TIMOTHY 3:1-5



The Heart of the Matter

A church that fails to look within can start to drift without knowing it. However, we cannot stop after looking within. We also need to spend some time looking *around* to understand the times in which we live and the culture in which we minister. In order to carry this out, we must seek the counsel of the aging apostle Paul as he wrote to the young pastor Timothy. From Paul's pen, we'll glean the straightforward answer to this important question: "What must the church realize?"



Discovering the Way

1. Warnings We Dare Not Ignore

The New Testament is filled with warnings about the last days. Let's heed them.

2. Times in Which We Minister (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

The times in which we minister are both dark and dangerous because the people who populate the earth and who sometimes creep into our churches are self-lovers and not God-lovers.

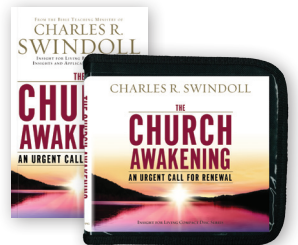


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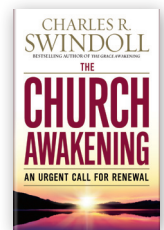
So what does all this mean? For now, hear and heed the warning: stay alert . . . and avoid treacherous people.



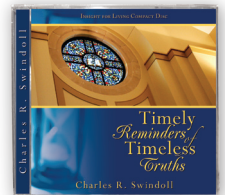
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HOW SHOULD THE CHURCH REACT?

2 TIMOTHY 3:13–17



The Heart of the Matter

Difficult days are ahead; in fact, they are already upon us. As we learned in the previous message, the biblical scene of 2 Timothy 3:1–5 isn't a pretty one; rather, it is raw and realistic. It serves as a warning as to where we find ourselves today. But what are we to do with such a warning? It's one thing to hear and believe the warning; it's altogether something else to heed that warning and act responsibly. What *should* we do, knowing that the days are evil? Let's answer that question.



Discovering the Way

1. Passionate Warnings We Must Heed

Hearing of danger is important, but alone it's incomplete. So, responding to warnings becomes each person's responsibility.

2. Scriptural Reactions We Must Follow (2 Timothy 3:13–17)

In consideration of the dark days upon us, we must stay realistic in the appraisal of our times (3:13), be convinced of the long-standing truth (3:14–15), stand firm on the inspired Word of God (3:16), and allow the truth to fulfill its purpose in our lives (3:16–17).

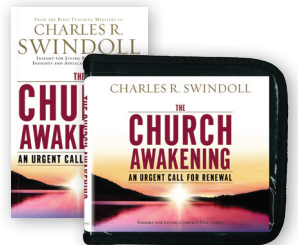


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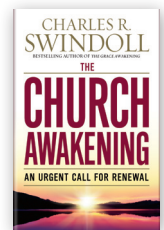
We must remember two practical principles. First, without the Bible, we would never find our way. Second, with the Bible, we should never lose our way.



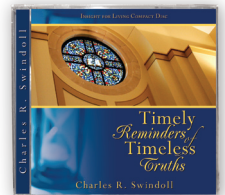
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THE CHURCH AWAKENING: AN URGENT CALL FOR RENEWAL

THE CHURCH ON A LONG DRIFT

ACTS 18:18–21; 19:1–41; 20:28–31; 1 TIMOTHY 4:12; 5:23; 2 TIMOTHY 1:6–7; REVELATION 2:1–4



The Heart of the Matter

Erosion is slow, silent, and subtle. Often, it happens in our presence without our being aware of it or the toll it is taking. Soil can erode so slowly that the farmer fails to realize how much of his fertile land he's losing. The same thing can happen in a church. A once-strong, well-nourished, and healthy body of believers can ignore the warnings and overlook the signals that reveal that the church is on a long drift. It happened to the church at Ephesus. Even though they were warned by the apostle Paul, they failed to be on guard and to remain alert. Tragically, within a matter of years, the erosion took such a toll on their spiritual lives, the Lord finally announced for all to hear, "You have left your first love" (Revelation 2:4).



Discovering the Way

1. Let's Consider a Twenty-First Century Example

Spiritual erosion in a church is heart-wrenching, whether in the first century or the twenty-first.

2. Let's Return to a First-Century Setting (Selected Scriptures)

Ephesus was a church founded on solid biblical teaching, but with its growth, it became a body tested in many different ways—leading to wise counsel from a mentor who urged and encouraged a timid colleague. However, over a period of thirty years, erosion crept in.

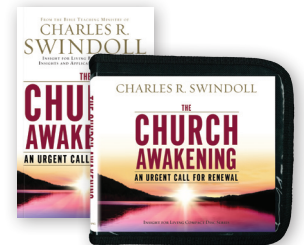


Starting Your Journey

Four never-to-be-forgotten lessons come from looking at the Ephesian church. First, erosion is happening in once-strong churches. Second, erosion *can* happen without a church realizing it. Third, erosion *will* happen in churches that fail to heed warnings and stay vigilant. Fourth, erosion *could* happen even in your church.

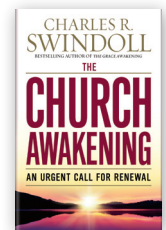


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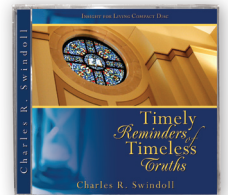
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IT'S TIME TO "RESTORE THE YEARS"

EZEKIEL 33:30-33; AMOS 8:11-12; JOEL 2:21-27



The Heart of the Matter

Churches are struggling to find their identities. Pastors, who once understood their responsibility and the roles they were called to fill, have ignored the scriptural guidelines and chosen to walk a different path. This has left congregations unsure of themselves, biblically illiterate, and starving for spiritual direction. The bold proclamation of God's Word that once characterized influential evangelical pulpits has been replaced with shallow and sometimes silly substitutes designed to entertain listeners rather than convict of sin, feed the soul, and equip the believer for a deeper walk and sacrificial service. It's as if a plague of locusts has invaded, resulting in a famine across the land. It's time to "restore the years" that the locusts have eaten.



Discovering the Way

1. Let's Hear the Complaint of a Lonely Pastor

Where have all the strong-hearted expositors gone? Looking back, there were many, but looking ahead, the ranks are terribly and embarrassingly few.

2. Let's Respect the Words of Three Bold Prophets

Ezekiel spoke to a fickle congregation (Ezekiel 33:30-33). Amos warned of a coming famine (Amos 8:11-12). And Joel promised a hopeful future (Joel 2:21-27).

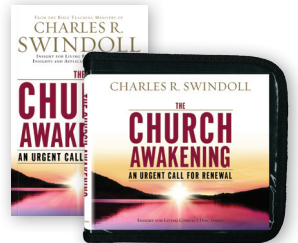


Starting Your Journey

Let's acknowledge the changes that must occur if the Lord is to "restore the years." First, the people of God must return to a hunger and thirst for righteousness. Second, the ministers of God must repent of their failure to fulfill God's calling. Third, the house of God must represent its biblical purpose for existence.

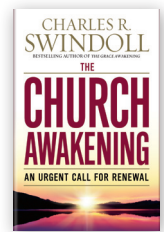


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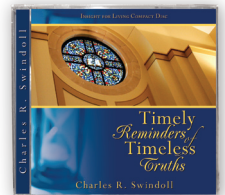
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