

Scott Ball: [00:00](#) Oftentimes, um, this idea, this resistance to change is actually masking fear. And if we can name that and say you're actually just afraid. You're afraid of what could be, you're afraid of what's new, you're afraid of making a difference. We can begin to break through those barriers and maximize your church's impact. Your church can change.

Intro: [00:23](#) Welcome to The 95 Podcast from the team at 95Network, where we host conversations specifically to support leaders in small and mid-sized churches.

Austin Savage: [00:35](#) Welcome to episode seven of The 95 podcast. My name is Austin Savage and I'm here with Dale Sellers and we are your hosts. Uh, Dale, about a week ago our team launched something new called called VisionDay. And why don't you take a moment just to kind of explain what that is. It's an exciting thing.

Dale Sellers: [00:51](#) Well, VisionDay is a strategic process to work churches through who've never really been to anything like that. It's specifically designed for smaller churches, uh, who just, they're stuck. It's interesting that you would ask, cause I, I've talked with two pastors, one today and one yesterday, and both of them have navigated their churches through the most difficult times and, but when they got on the back side of that, they're like, now what? And so I told them, I said, it's kind of like you guys were on a ship and you went through a hurricane and all the choppy water and all the big waves, and now you're just kinda sitting dead in the water and smooth water going, where do we go next? And so vision day kind of helps churches to kind of figure that out. Uh, we, uh, most churches who really are trying to solve problems and fix things, uh, try to fix too much. You and I've talked about this before, where they, they try to fix 20 things and they don't fix anything very well. And so what we've tried to do with that kind of concept is just to get them to focus on the really the most important thing that they need to do right now to get moving in the right direction. So in a nutshell, that's kind of what vision day is all about.

Austin Savage: [01:55](#) Yeah, yeah. So we're really excited about it. Um, and it's something new. So if you want to kind of check out the details of what that looks like, uh, you can find that on our website. Um, it's a great resource, um, that we'll have moving forward. We have an exciting podcast today. We'll be talking with Scott and A.J. from The Malphurs Group, some good friends of ours in ministry. Um, and we'll be talking about five deadly sins of a dying church. It's going to be a really great conversation. Um, before we get into that, as always, don't forget that you can get

access to a bonus conversation with Scott and A.J., and we'll be talking out about leading change in that bonus episode. So if you're a 95Network member, you can gain access to bonus episodes of our podcast along with some other really great resources and you can find the details of all of that at [95network.org/membership](http://95network.org/membership). Now to today's conversation: Scott and A.J., how are you guys doing? We've never had this many people on the podcast. This is awesome.

- A.J. Mathieu: [02:50](#) Yeah, it's great. It's great to be here. Scott and I are not normally together in the same room, so it's fun that we get to be together. I'm glad our timing all worked out.
- Austin Savage: [02:58](#) Absolutely. It's awesome. Just so people can kind of get to know each of your voices, why don't you take just a quick moment to introduce yourselves.
- A.J. Mathieu: [03:05](#) All right, well this is A.J. Mathieu, I'm the president of the Malphurs group. Uh, we are, so Scott and I are together, uh, filming some things for an upcoming resource and um, we're happy that this worked out that we can be with you guys today. So thanks for providing us the opportunity..
- Scott Ball: [03:20](#) I'm Scott Ball. I'm director of services and lead guide with the Malphurs group. And man, we just love helping, um, small and medium sized churches like 95Network works with really break through their barriers and maximize their impact. And so excited to be here with you guys today.
- Austin Savage: [03:38](#) Yeah, absolutely. And just take a quick moment. Um, who is the Malphurs group? What do you guys do? You highlighted a little bit of your heart, but what do you guys do to help churches?
- A.J. Mathieu: [03:47](#) Yeah, sure. Well, well, plain and simple. We help unhealthy and dying churches get their feet back under them and get back on mission, making a maturing disciples. It's really that simple. Um, it's, it's a process that, um, helps them develop a model for ministry that's sustainable. And you know what I mean? The idea is really, well our heart as the same as your heart, right? Churches are dying every day. And the more that we can do to stem that, that, that flow of a decline in the church, then you know, the, the better the kingdom is in the end and people are coming to know the Lord because you know that other church down the street is, it's there and it has a life and it's reaching the community. So that's why we love partnering with you guys because you know, we have the same, we have the same mission vision.

- Austin Savage: [04:36](#) Absolutely. Yeah. We love partnering with you guys as well. I should have mentioned that up front is that the Malphurs group is one of our partner organizations. Uh, we provide grant funds to help churches work with them. And so it's been really cool to be able to do ministry alongside you guys.
- A.J. Mathieu: [04:52](#) Yeah. So I mean, this is a great opportunity for us to say thank you for that too. I mean that has a big difference in the last, any churches over the last couple of years that we've worked with, they've benefited from our partnership and from the grant that you guys were able to provide. It's a game changer for small church.
- Scott Ball: [05:09](#) It's really interesting because oftentimes it's not about the money itself. It's about someone else other than us saying We believe in you. We believe you can go through this process. We believe you can be successful. Certainly the finances help get a yes within their board or their congregation. But I think more than that, it's a vote of confidence that they can be successful in a process. And so we appreciate the partnership and not only helping with the finances of that, but really believing in these churches and their ability to change.
- Austin Savage: [05:38](#) Yeah, that's one of the reasons we love doing that stuff as well. Um, oftentimes, you know, you mentioned it's not always about the finances, but it is about that encouragement to say, hey, we think that this is a great step for you. Uh, here, here's some support to make it happen.
- A.J. Mathieu: [05:52](#) And that's where the accountability, you know, I mean absolutely there accountability to the implementation process that we walk them through at the end, but also to you guys. And I think the church is their most honest in a desire to change are open to that level of accountability.
- Austin Savage: [06:07](#) Yeah, yeah. Well let's jump into this conversation guys. So you mentioned that you guys work with a lot of dying churches and that's really what we wanted to talk about today. Um, was five deadly sins of a dying church. And so the first one on the list that you guys sent over was the community doesn't know the church is there or that they care. What does that look like and how does that, uh, play into this conversation?
- Scott Ball: [06:31](#) Yeah. So here's the thing. A lot of these churches, when they were started in the community, the community makeup was different, right? It looked different, felt different, different populations. And so, um, people, uh, even the people who continue to attend the church oftentimes don't live in the

community anymore. They've since moved houses, but they've kept their church. And so, um, these churches look the same inside, but the neighborhood looks different. As a result, the community doesn't know that the church is there. It's just background noise. They're used to driving past it. They don't know that that church cares about them. And frankly sometimes that church doesn't really care about them. And so there's a level of honesty in a dying church that has to happen that says, you know, do we really care about the community where we are? And, um, if we do care, we need to change the way that we behave. If we don't care, maybe we need to move.

A.J. Mathieu: [07:32](#) I've had those conversations with pastors. I mean, just recently, actually it's a rare occasion that I talked with a pastor and in the end I say, I don't think it's, I don't think it's worth your time, your finance. I don't think it would be a good fit for you to try to do a revitalization process. And he really knew that going in. Um, but the church was in an area that wasn't at all like it used to be. Everybody drove into it. And really the discussion had already been, maybe we just need to move out of the city, out into the suburbs where we all live and take our church to where we are now. I mean, that's honest because he knew that the people weren't, they didn't want a change. It would have required wholesale change for them to become more of a, of an urban church.

A.J. Mathieu: [08:16](#) So that happens all the time, you know, I mean, churches don't, churches aren't working with us and you guys and others in this space, after they'd been open for five years and they closed, that's a plant that was not successful. Churches that are dying have been around for decades and that's enough time has past generations of past communities have completely gone through that cyclical thing of maybe being what's thriving to a completely different, um, surrounding them than it was before. So, um, you know, dying churches in 2019, a dying church has only recently realized it's dying. It's been happening probably for 20 years.

Dale Sellers: [08:54](#) Wow. Yeah. I was just thinking, uh, why wouldn't they want to change to restrict community pretty well?

A.J. Mathieu: [09:00](#) I mean, sometimes that's, that's just a hard thing. Um, and probably, I guess that's, that is brutal honesty with yourself I suppose. Because of, I mean, they love their tradition. They love the status quo. They love the comfort of, they know everybody there. It's predictable and you're pulling the rug out from under them. That's their point of view is that you're pulling the rug out from under them to do something different that now new

people are going to be in. Maybe my Sunday school class will look different. Maybe we won't have Sunday school anymore. Maybe the organ would go away. All these, what ifs, um, it's just a fear of change now. It's obviously possible to lead through that, but if you don't have at least some support of the people of the church recognizing the reality that they're in, then you're, you're gonna waste a lot of resources. If you can bring them to an understanding of their reality and then lead it, lead with vision in that there is a better tomorrow for us where we are now, then you have a chance of success.

Scott Ball: [09:54](#) What we've found is it's often a gut check question. You know, 99% of churches aren't going to say, yeah, you know what, let's just move. But to ask the question, are we going to reach this community or not? If we're not going to, maybe we should move. Most people find that offensive and they go, cause we're not gonna move. So then the, the immediate followup to that is then your community needs to know that you're there and that you care. So 99% of churches are not interested in moving. But you have to ask that question because you have to jar their perspective.

Dale Sellers: [10:26](#) Okay, so if a church is, let's just say they're on life support. And, you know, we're talking about seriously dead churches in this particular conversation or churches that, you know, th the writing on the wall says in the, in the coming 10 years, you're probably not going to be around, uh, they really only have two options. They either have to relaunch or pull the plug it, what do you, is that kinda what you guys think?

Scott Ball: [10:49](#) It depends on the size of the church. You know, you gotta have critical mass, right? So for us, we, we think that if you've got at least 35, 40 people and all of those people are really dedicated and want to see this thing turn around, you've got critical mass for change. If you fall under that, you just don't have the manpower to do it. So you are looking at that point at, you know, hiring someone who's a church planter to relaunch the church or maybe partnering with a larger Church to sort of donate your facility. Um, there's lots of options. That's not really our space. Um, you know, our space is that church that has critical mass and wants to change. And we have worked with churches that are 35, 40, 45 people and seen them turn around. Um, but there is a point where you kind of go, you know, we're looking at closing options.

Dale Sellers: [11:40](#) And that's sad that we're even having this conversation. But as you have already acknowledged today, I mean, there are hundreds of churches closing every month in America, you

know. Some statistics say upwards of 10,000 churches a year are closing, and so I think one of the cool things about, uh, what you guys do at Malphurs and what we do at 95 is that there are some of the churches that do have the 35 people who don't want to die. And so, uh, for those of you that are listening now, if you're in one of those churches, uh, reach out to us because we'd love to connect you with these guys, uh, because they can help you. If you really want to turn around and do the work, uh, they can help you. Hey, the second thing that you talked about in the, in the sins of the dying church is that, uh, the church lacks a process for turning guests into regular attenders. Kinda dive into that for us.

A.J. Mathieu:

[12:28](#)

Yeah. Well that's, I mean, that's a critical step. If, if you at least have the benefit of having guests come to your church, you're in a situation and you're not maximizing that resource, then you, you are really, I mean, that's perpetuating your downward cycle. So, and so this is why it's a frequent thing that we see. So we've got to have, we've got to be so intentional about how we handle guests. We've got, I mean, it just all has to be right. You know what I mean? This is 2019. It's the Twitter world. Um, it's, it's immediate gratification and, we're looking for any reason to say, oh, that's not good. That's not for me. We've got to strip away all of these things. Um, but anyway, turning them into regular attenders. I mean, this falls into our discipleship pathway. I mean, we've always got to be moving people into their next best step, so that they can make a deeper connection with the church, with the Lord and start growing in their faith. So, uh, yeah. This is, this is completely, um, important for any church to be focusing on.

Scott Ball:

[13:27](#)

Yeah, I would say most dying churches don't have a process for turning guests into regular attenders because they don't expect guests to show up. And so they kind of go, why, why, why worry about having a process and look at it as a chicken and an egg type situation. Do you need a process before you have the guests or are you the guests before we have the process? But you have to have the process in place or you won't be ready when the guests show up. It's very common for us to come before anyone in the church knows who we are, that we're a Malphurs group consultant and then they immediately will look at us and, uh, go look at us sideways and go, what are you doing here? I'm not expecting any other guests that week. And so we're really big even on using guest language instead of visitor language because a visitor is someone you don't expect to come back. Um, and a guest is someone that you've invited in.

Scott Ball:

[14:26](#)

And um, very simply that if a church is listening to this and they're going, well, what does that even look like? There's lots of mechanics to that that we're probably not going to go and do right now. Um, the simplest advice I could give you is treat the guests in your church the same way you would treat a guest in your home. All of those things you would do when a guest shows up at your house. Do those exact same things with a guest to your church. So you would greet them at the door, offer them a refreshment, right? You would help them find a place to sit, all those exact things that you would do in your house. Make sure you have a corresponding thing within your church up to and including greeting them as they leave, right? We expect in church. We just say, all right, see ya, you're dismissed. But you wouldn't do that to a guest in your home, you'd walk them to the door. So just think of it in the same way is the simplest place to start. If you say, well, we don't have a process.

Dale Sellers:

[15:18](#)

I've discovered that most churches think they're the friendliest church in America. And doing the secret shopper thing, kind of like what you guys do. Uh, what I discovered is they are very friendly with themselves, right? Yeah. Uh, you know, it's like, oh, Hey Scott hadn't seen you in a week and I get that. That's not negative. I mean, you, you, you are friends, you are catching up. But uh, they'll let guests just walk right by or not acknowledge them or, and, and as you were talking, it made me think of a service I was in once where there hadn't been first time guests in months or this particular church. And on this day, some, I guess family was there. And then a board member was like, he was like facilitating the, the flow of the service and someone brought it to his attention while he's on the stage and he didn't know what to do. And it was just like, Oh, uh, oh, well, uh, there's a, there's a guest here, I think we have a card for you. Oh, um, well, it was so embarrassing. And so that's why, you know, you talk about having the process before it happens. You can

Austin Savage:

[16:16](#)

Yeah. Yeah. I thought it was interesting that you guys highlighted the fact that, that most churches don't expect guests. And just like what you were saying, Dale, uh, it's so easy to fall into that trap of thinking of, of just like, hey, you know, it's, it's, it's Sunday, it's gonna be me and Bill and Nancy and everybody else who's always there on Sunday. Um, but if we are really going to become, like we talked about in the last point, uh, if we're going to care about our community, we need to expect them, uh, to, to come and we need to be prepared for them, uh, as they gain interest in our church. And so I think that's really, really important.

- Scott Ball: [16:47](#) You know, I think churches sometimes I'm make have the expectation when it comes to systems like assimilation, first impressions that um, if we're going to do it at all, we have to do it big. And that's just not true. The example I give with, um, with churches is that when you take your kids to go buy them shoes, you, you buy them shoes that, you don't get them shoes that just fit like where their toe gets to the end. You do the thumb test right, you press down and I can press down and not feel toe. I know that's the right size shoe for my kid, but there's room to grow. But I don't buy my son who's going to be tall. He's, he's six right now, about to turn seven. He doesn't wear a size 12 shoes right now, even though he probably will some day. If I put them in those, it would look ridiculous. But I do put him in shoes that are just big enough for him to grow. And you can do the same thing with your systems. So don't think you've got to do it like, like Elevation does or like, you know, just give yourself room in your system to grow and then as you grow into it, expand the system.
- Austin Savage: [17:49](#) Yeah. Um, so the third point, uh, on this, this list of deadly sins of a dying church is that they get addicted to programs. And that's something that we talk about a lot as well. But what does that look like in your experience?
- A.J. Mathieu: [18:01](#) Oh Gosh. You know, sometimes, uh, and we, we say this in the post, sometimes the smallest churches have the fullest calendars. There is stuff going on constantly. And it's been having, it's just gone. I mean, this is, this leaks into tradition. Certainly. Um, habits. I think we mentioned in this post. Um, and it's all, it all had something good to it, at least originally. And somebody still enjoys it. Probably the people that are still participating in it like it. They never consider what strategic advantage it has towards anything. But this of course, actually this is a symptom of a lack of strategy, a lack of an understanding of moving people through levels of maturity as believers. Because when you start thinking of this in a bigger picture scenario, then you realize, wow, what we're doing makes a difference. And if we're, if our calendar is just full of stuff, people obviously can't engage in all of it. So then people were making choices and if we're not telling them what the best choices are to make and giving them a smaller menu of options, then we're not able to manage the health and maturity of our church at all.
- Dale Sellers: [19:04](#) Yeah. But we've been doing those programs forever. I mean, Jesus told us to start them 45 years ago. Why would we stop them now? Jesus told us to do it. We got to do what he told us.

- A.J. Mathieu: [19:13](#) That's right. Jesus told us a lot of good things, but he also told us some main things. We're going to get into some themes that we think are really key for us to focus on and we're going to realign our programs around those major themes.
- Scott Ball: [19:26](#) That's right. What's interesting is that a lot of small church pastors don't realize that they are continuing the yeses of those who have gone before them. They have no obligation to do so. The only obligation they have is the great commission to make and mature disciples. And so they need, they have permission to start saying no to the accumulation of yeses of previous pastors over previous generations. They're not accountable to those people's yeses. They're only accountable to the, to the mission that God has given them. And so getting pastors to understand we need to create a positive feedback loop, a clear streamlined discipleship pathway that leads people to a deeper and deeper relationship with Jesus and that turns them into disciple makers themselves. That's the only yes that matters. And so it can be difficult. Um, and it can certainly be emotional, but, uh, we definitely are huge advocates of the ministry garage clean-out where you pull everything out of the garage and then only put back thing the things in that fit the system of making and maturing disciples and begin to say no to the things that are holding you back.
- Dale Sellers: [20:38](#) Okay. So I'm, I'm pastoring a church and I do what you just said and I say no to some things and then they say no to me and I'm planting a new church in two. That's what I'm hearing some guys right now thinking, you know. So how do you do that? Versus just, you can't just listen to a podcast and go, I'm saying no to some stuff because they're going to say, you know what? No to you buddy. Find a new job. So kind of dive in, dive a little deeper with that one.
- A.J. Mathieu: [21:02](#) Yeah. So for that reason, we don't start with this. I mean, the process, we don't start with let's change up all your ministries. There's a why behind everything. So I mean, that's why there's an order to a process. We established a great commission mission that gets us within a certain boundary right there that already gives us a measure where we say yes or no to things. What do we establish our core values? We added another layer of measurement and that's a yes or no. Our discipleship pathway is our next level of measurement, and of course our vision is out there.
- A.J. Mathieu: [21:33](#) When we develop a healthy church system. We we, it takes the pressure off of the leadership because throughout the process we're coming to agreement on some core and fundamental

things for our church. So when we get to the point of saying, okay, look everybody, we've got a great thing now that we know what we're supposed to be doing, really it's the last piece when we're talking about our strategies and aligning our ministries, that's where we're cleaning up the garage. By then, we've already come to a lot of agreement. So don't start with the end.

A.J. Mathieu: [22:08](#) Dale, you can't ever take leadership out of the equation though. There's, of course somebody is going to push back on things, but leadership means you're leading. If, if the congregation, if you turn, if it turns out your congregation is truly leading the pastor, we've got other deeper issues going on in the church.

Scott Ball: [22:25](#) I think two practical tips to keep in mind too. One is take the long view. So just because you say we need to start saying no to a program doesn't mean to me to cancel it tomorrow. It means we're creating a plan for phasing that ministry out. The second thing is we can starve a ministry so it can continue to meet, you know, that women's knitting circle that really isn't contributing to disciple making doesn't need to stop meeting. They can keep meeting on Tuesday nights in room three Oh one but we're not going to put their announcements in the bulletin anymore or not going, you know, the a hundred dollars a year they got for.

Scott Ball: [23:11](#) so long as you're not giving it attention or resources, let it continue to meet, um, and it will die off on its own when it's ready. Um, so you don't have to waste relational capital on closing the women's sitting circle while at the same time refocusing all of your energy, time and resources on those things, which are most important. So that's a practical way of phasing out a ministry without causing relational damage.

Dale Sellers: [23:39](#) So out of this Austin, I've got our new t-shirt. It says, if you start with the end, you're going to end. There you go. That'll be the next t-shirt we do. Okay. So with that thought in mind, let's move to your, your fourth point and that is the senior pastor's expected to visit everyone. I mean, that is his job, right?

A.J. Mathieu: [23:59](#) Oh my goodness. This one is so touchy in so many places as well. We have got to break out of this and you know, this is something, well, you know when, when churches are started, yeah. And even so we're talking again about dying church. They've been around for decades and there's different philosophical approaches to church, you know, 50, 60, 70 a hundred years ago. They weren't thinking through these discipleship systems in the same way maybe that we are today. And so it was fine and they probably weren't even thinking, Hey,

maybe we're going to be a hundred people or 800 people, you know, it was 15 or 20. Um, and, and that was fine. You know, everybody had that relationship. Um, but you know, I, I worked with a church once and

- A.J. Mathieu: [24:42](#) They still, they, they on one hand there were the same, we want to get back to our heyday, you know, which was like an 800 attendance. Um, but they're presently at like one 50, 200. But then there were still saying, but we really believe the pastors should be involved with hospital visits. We think the pastors should know people's faces and names. Then they took it a step further. They said, cause I was, I was saying look with their statistics so you can have relationships up to maybe like 150 people or so they said we think the pastor could memorize 200 people's faces and names. And then they said we could have a book with their faces and names. We used to call that a church directory. He could, he could use the book to memorize faces and names. I said, okay, so we've got 200 people now.
- A.J. Mathieu: [25:27](#) They'd get that relationship. When they leave the church, how do we decide which people get to become part of the 200 and what happens with the other 600 people that you want to grow to? He doesn't get to know them. Yes. It's insane. Sometimes we've got to break out of this mentality. The pastor is there to lead, to be casting vision, to be a building leaders, to be equipping the saints for the work of the ministry. And we've got to get back into that mindset, that biblical mindset that we followers of Christ are to be living out our ministry in our church and in our world. And it's not on the back of one person.
- Dale Sellers: [26:02](#) A.J., I worked with a pastor once who walked around with flip cards. He had this church run a thousand people and he had flipped cards with every family on it with their picture and their name, trying to pull that off. It was, it wasn't succesful.
- A.J. Mathieu: [26:14](#) God bless him for the efforts, but he could have used his time more wisely.
- Scott Ball: [26:17](#) You know, the thing is, um, that this, this idea of the senior pastor is expected to visit everyone. It's just a symptom of a deeper problem, right? It's just, it's the evidence that um, that church believes that they've hired a professional Christian, right? Is not the pastor or a leader. He's the chaplain of the church. And, um, certainly feel free to hire your, your church a chaplain, you know, a pastoral care guy, but that's not senior leaders job, especially not if you want to be effective and a great commission mission. And so yeah, as A.J. said, getting back to that Ephesians four mentality that these leadership gifts

are given to equip the saints for the work of ministry. It's, it's, it's a mindset shift for sure, but one that churches must make if they're going to be effective moving forward.

Dale Sellers: [27:04](#)

I want to ping off that with, we were talking with Karl Vaters about this point last week and one of the things Karl said was, he says, I believe it's the pastor's job to pastor everyone. He said, so equip your people. He said, you know, you can equip you. You equip your people to pastor through, you know, through them. So you yes you, that is your job in a sense. But it's not to do the work, it's to train the people to do the work. It goes exactly with what you guys are saying.

A.J. Mathieu: [27:29](#)

Exactly. The body of Christ caring for the body of Christ. That's the original design. We care for one another was. So if our church is not designed to have groups of people meeting, getting to know one another, doing life together, caring for each other's needs, again, we've got other issues going on in our church.

Scott Ball: [27:44](#)

You know, it's actually interesting to go back to scripture on this as we see this in the book of acts. uh, you know, we see this in the book of acts, right? Where the apostles realize we're doing a terrible job with the daily distribution of food. And so they, yeah, they set up a team and they empower other people do it. And what's interesting is those folks did it better. And that's the transition that, that churches need to realize is that when we empower more people to do pastoral care, we're not losing something. We're gaining something. And when we have to think of it in that positive light, if churches are going to make that transition, I think that they're going to be getting something second best. It's not as good when the pastor comes. It's not as good when the pastor visits, if it's not the past room visits. If we can start thinking of it differently. Churches won't make that change.

Dale Sellers: [28:47](#)

Wouldn't it make the pastor a hireling if he has to do everything for us? I mean, Jesus did talk about that a little bit. Yeah. Yes.

Austin Savage: [28:55](#)

Yeah. So Scott and A.J., I have a quick question before we move onto the last one here. Uh, Dale and I see a lot, and we, you guys talked about this, uh, in churches where the pastor is not empowered to lead, like we're talking about, he's, he's viewed as a hireling. Um, and, and so in, in a conversation that we had a few weeks ago on vision, uh, we talked a lot about how, you know, a lot of pastors feel just stifled because they don't have the authority, uh, to cast vision, uh, whether they're congregationally led or just have an overpowering board or

whatever it is. So for a pastor who is in that situation and recognizes that things need to change for the health of the church, how can they really start those conversations, uh, throughout their congregation or their elder board or whatever that is?

- Scott Ball: [29:40](#) I would say really, and I don't mean this is a sales pitch for us, it really pick, pick a process, ours or someone else's. When you do that, you're empowering a group of people who are specifically tasked to talk about vision of which the pastor is a part and they will just by default, because of positional leadership will actually begin to respect the pastor's voice in that. And as a part of that sort of external process or processes being led externally, you can begin to have that conversation about what is the pastor's role and what should it be moving forward. And that's generally received better than if the pastor says, Hey, I think we ought to do x because that feels self-serving. Like it feels like a power grab. So again, it doesn't have to be us. We'd love to work with you. But if you can rely on an external process that uses a team to focus on vision, it generally gives that sort of open door to have that discussion about the path after moving forward.
- Austin Savage: [30:39](#) Yeah. So that leads us to our last point in this discussion and that's that uh, lay leaders and pastors don't know where the church is heading. What does that look like?
- A.J. Mathieu: [30:50](#) Yeah. This is the big vision point. So, you know, tagging off of what we, we just had, you know, churches that don't have an understandable, unified common stated vision doesn't mean they're not operating under vision. Everybody has their own vision. So you can take your average weekly attendance divided by one. That's how many visions you have in your church right now. Throw an idea of where we're going. So when we come together under a unified vision, a stated vision, understandable. And then that's when everybody finally, the light bulb might go off and say, oh, now I get why we show up here every week. There's a purpose to this. So we've, we've got to get that established.
- A.J. Mathieu: [31:32](#) And, and you can't understate how key that is in unifying the church and driving towards accomplishing this big God size thing that we're, that we believe in the Bible states we should be doing.
- Scott Ball: [31:45](#) Yeah, it's really interesting. Um, you mentioned Dale earlier that every church that you talk to is the friendliest church in America. Um, they'll also talk about how they feel like a family. This is this place as a family. And um, and so I will, when we first

begin talking with the church, we'll let them know, we'll say, hey, I think that there might not be unity here. We have a lack of unity. And they find that offensive because we have the same views on baptism and we all really like each other. But that's not true unity. We don't have true unity unless we have clarity on a shared dream and plan for the future. And that comes up when we talk about changing the carpet or changing from pews to chairs or changing the music or fill in the blank. We reveal them that we don't have real unity in the church. And so we've got to achieve unity by developing a shared dream and plan for the future. And by asking some key questions, which is why a process is so valuable, uh, and walking through so that when you all sit down and say, hey, what is the vision for this church? Everyone has the same answer.

Austin Savage:

[32:58](#)

absolutely. Well, we like to end these conversations just with, with, uh, one last question for you guys, especially coming out of this whole conversation. Um, and that's, uh, you guys know the small church well, um, you worked with a lot of small and mid sized churches. You know that there's a lot of discouragement, um, for, for many pastors, um, not for all pastors and small churches, but there is a lot of it. Um, what is one word of encouragement, of advice, of support that you would like to end this conversation with for each of the pastors listening,

A.J. Mathieu:

[33:28](#)

encouragement, just, yeah, for that, for the pastor that maybe is in that situation we're the church is not healthy. I love encouraging pastors in an original vision that they had when they were called into ministry. And this could be somebody that, I mean maybe it's only 10 years, maybe they've been in it 50 years, but, and they feel like they don't have vision anymore. They just, they're just, you know, it's tough. Ministry's tough. I love helping them to bring themselves back to that place that they were starting seminary ending seminary called to their first church. They were so full of hope and life in and they saw something out there that God was calling them to do. And I think you can regain that. And so if you can quiet your mind and maybe it'll take you an hour, maybe it'll take you six months. But if he can take your mind back to when the Holy Spirit was so active and powerful and showing you a picture of the future in this big kingdom idea that you had, you can regain that you've lost track over the years because life is tough and ministry is tough, but there's help out there and there's people that care about you that what your vision won't. That original vision to become a reality for you. And so that, so that you can, you know, finish this race well and, and so it's out there. You had it and you can get it back.

- Scott Ball: [34:49](#) To piggyback off of that, to encourage the whole church, I just want to say, um, the heartbeat for us at the Malphurs group is that your church can change. Yeah. Everyone thinks it's our church is too far gone. You know, the situation is too hard. Your church can change. Oftentimes, um, this idea, this resistance to change is actually masking fear. And if we can name that and say, you're actually just afraid, we're afraid of what could be, we're afraid of what's new, we're afraid of, um, making a difference, we can begin to break through those barriers and maximize your churches. Impact your church can change, but you can't do it alone. And you need the support of all the people in your church to work together. And you might need an outside friend, Austin, Dale, me, Aja, find someone who believes in you will come alongside you and help you because your church can change.
- Austin Savage: [35:43](#) Yeah, absolutely. And last question guys. How can people connect with you? Um, if they'd like to learn more about what you guys are doing?
- A.J. Mathieu: [35:51](#) Yeah, well, the easiest way is just going to malphursgroup.com and we've got plenty of contact options there. We've got resources available. Um, we also will have a podcast coming up in the next few weeks. You could find the first couple of episodes out there. Now if you want to go find that it's the church revitalization podcast, you can find it on iTunes, castbox, and it's already showing up on a few others. We've got more access coming in the near future. So yeah, we're looking forward to bringing some more content here. Our heart is really, I need to provide resources that are attainable and affordable for churches. And so the podcast we think is going to be great. We think you guys as well for spurred us on into that.
- Scott Ball: [36:30](#) You know, it's similar to you guys. Like we're, we're always asking what can we just give away? You know, we're, we're, we're a nonprofit like you guys are. So we're not motivated by making a profit. We're motivated, motivated by helping churches and so we called it really boring name the church revitalization podcasts because that's what we're talking about. We're talking about the first couple episodes or you know, is our church ready for revitalization, how to build a revitalization team. Just these really basic topics, very practical, walking you through these steps because maybe you can't even afford vision day as, or visionbox, just start with the podcast. Just start wherever you are, get started with something.
- Austin Savage: [37:13](#) Absolutely. Well we'll put the links to both of those things that you guys mentioned, the podcast and also your website in the

the podcast notes. Um, if people are listening to this, you can find that on our website. Um, and there'll be the links there for you. So thank you so much for taking some time just to connect with us today. We really appreciate you investing into our ministry and the pastors listening today. Thank you.