

Reveal
What did we discover?
November 2, 2009
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Wow, how great is our God! I don't know what it's like out here when all that is going on but I'm telling you back there, it's exciting. This morning I baptized an entire family together that we met six years ago through my youngest son's soccer team. I remember him telling me, I'm not interested, don't talk to me; I'm Catholic. I thought okay, that's fine. It's been incredible all day long to watch these people and I want you to understand something, God is doing amazing work in this place. Last year we baptized 65 people which for most churches is a great number. In the last two and a half months we've baptized 62 people. So God is doing something just beyond our wildest dreams and we want to be part of it and we're excited about it. With all that to say, about eight weeks ago we started a series called Reveal. What we wanted to do there is to find out, God, this is what we want, this is who we are and for those of you who are new to The Avenue, let me kind of explain who we are as a church, what our vision and goal is. Our goal as a church is to go out there and to reach people who don't like church. To reach people who say, you know what...I went to church when I was young and it's not relevant to me. It's to reach people who don't think they'll step foot in a church. That's the people we target. That's the people we want to reach and minister to; people who think church is not for them. We get them here and they find out who God is and they find out the wonderful love of God. We want to take them through a process. We want them to be baptized; we want them to follow the Lord and to know God and grow together and to serve. We want them to turn into a what we call a fully devoted follower and so what we wanted to do, we know we attracted a crowd, we knew we were doing that. We knew that people were getting saved and baptized, but how were we doing helping them grow in Christ and listen, this Reveal thing has showed us a lot.

The first thing it showed us is we have a young, young church. When we got the statistic back from the thousands of churches that did this process we are young beyond our wildest dreams. Sixty percent of the people that attend this church are under 50 years old. Sixty percent! In most churches sixty to seventy percent are over sixty years old but in our church it is just completely the opposite which kind of scares me because pretty soon I'm going to be in the minority. I'm heading that way! It's a young church and sixty six percent of you have children less than 18 years of age. Churches don't have that. That's why we called Lee Coleman to be a Family Minister because we realized we had this unbelievable opportunity that most churches do not get to impact families with children. Like I said this morning when you get the man of the house, when you get the father of the home excited about God, when you get him following the Lord, guess what happens? The family follows. So that's who we go after. We target those young men and women and we let them know that their lives can be better with God and we want them to bring their children into this place and God is doing that. But now, anytime you do a survey, not only the positive things are revealed sometimes negative things are revealed. Have you ever had negative things revealed to you? Well Friday

night I decided my oldest grandson, I have two, could spend the night because he loves to spend the night with papa. He doesn't care too much about nana spending the night but papa he wants to spend the night with so we went to the football game and then we went home. Whenever he spends the night, nana gets kicked out of the bed and Chance and I hang out. We built a tent this last week and we had a great time playing and we're watching cartoons and it got to be 10:00 or 10:15 and papa was tired. By the way that's why they give children to young people. So I'm wore out and the cartoon that we're watching is holding his attention but it's not doing a lot for me so I'm sitting there watching this and I'm apparently going to sleep because all of a sudden I get tapped on the chest. Papa, the sweetest voice in the world, papa, don't make that noise. What noise? You know, snoring. So it's been revealed to me by a trustworthy source that on top of all my other problems, apparently I snore. You know this isn't that middle aged women kicking me and accusing me of keeping her up. This is honest; this is a three year old. Sometimes what gets revealed to us is something we don't want to hear. As we were looking at the church and we began to see some of the things that God was beginning to do in this place, we have all kinds of reasons to praise God. It's exciting around here. But there is a problem and we want you to understand that and see that because we're at the threshold of something that nobody can explain. We're at the threshold of being able to be a church that no one has seen south of Dallas. We have the opportunity when we move to this new location if we ban together and become the men and women that God calls us to be we can see God's movement in a way that people dream about. But we have to take care of business here. So this survey showed us in the next eight to nine months some things we have to do. I want to show you is they put is all into categories. The first category that we have shows that there is eleven percent of our church in this category. Eleven percent of our church is exploring Christ and that's exciting. What that means is there are eleven percent of people in this place who are thinking, I'm not sure, I believe God but I don't know about this Jesus thing but I'm going to check it out. There the people that believe there are a lot of ways to God and Jesus may not be the only way. The bible is not their authority in their life and they're looking at us and saying I'm going to come and see. The music brings them back and the preaching is not putting them to sleep so they come back week after week and that's a good number. Eleven percent is exciting, that's a good number of people. That means you're bringing people, you're reaching people and that's why we see all the baptisms.

The next stage is thirty seven percent of our people believe in Jesus and are working what it means to get to know him. That means half of our church is not totally committed to God. Half of our church does not believe that God may be the only way to heaven. Half of our church does not see the bible as the authority in their life. Half of our church is in this process of just getting to know who God is. Thirty four percent which is a great group; a high number more than most churches, thirty four percent feel really close to Christ and depend on him daily for guidance. But then this next jump is what was revealed to us where we're hurting. This is where we're hurting. That eighteen percent; these are the number of people who are fully devoted followers. These are the people who say my relationship with Jesus is the most important relationship in my life and it guides everything I do. That's where we are failing to bring people along and to get them to that point and so we've got to as a church look at what it takes to move people from accepting Christ, getting to know Christ and Christ being important in their life to Christ being the most important thing because we need a large percentage of our

people in this place to be mature, sold out, dedicated Christian people so that we can do what God has called us to do. So how do we do that? How do we move people along that continuum? How do we get people to make these changes? How do we get them there? Well one of the things we have to do is we have to explain the benefit and the joy and help them understand who God is. We've got to help you know that God is the most important thing in your life. Now that eighteen percent, the most dissatisfied people in the church, listen to that because it's confusing. That eighteen percent of people who say that God is the most important part of their life are the ones that are most dissatisfied with the church. They're the ones that are most likely to leave. Now this isn't just The Avenue, this is all churches and I'll tell you why. One of the things that happen in churches is when you grow up in church; several of you grew up in church right? You become dysfunctional. You really forget what church is about because that's what we've trained you to do. Now one of my big advantages is I didn't grow up in church. I didn't go to VBS and Sunday school and do all those things. That's been an advantage for me because I didn't know how church was supposed to be so when God called me to preach all I could do is go to the Word of God and say this is how he set up the church in the New Testament so let's set up our church like that. I didn't realize there were other rules, regulations and traditions you were supposed to follow. That's an advantage but to those folks who grew up in church this is what the church has taught you. The church has taught you that it is a place that meets all your needs. It is a place where you come in, you drop off your child and somebody's going to take care of them, you go into a class, you sit and listen to the teacher or you say what you want to say, you go into a worship service, you listen to the music, you listen to the sermon, you go back and pick up your kids and oh yeah if you like the preacher you put money in the plate and that's it. That's what we've taught you church is. It's a place where all your needs are met. The staff is there to serve you; everything needs to go your way. What we have done is we have made dysfunctional, mature Christians. That's not what the church is about. Now, the church is supposed to parent this forty eight percent. We're supposed to bring you in to love you, to host you, to greet you, to welcome you, to make you feel a part, to have programs that draw you in. We're supposed to do all of those things for you just like you do for an infant child and a young child. But there comes a day that the church has to stop being your parent and become your coach. There comes a day that we have to stop parenting you and we're there to coach you, we're there to help you, we're there to guide you, but we're not there to entertain you and do everything for you. That is your job. The bible says when you reach a point you're not to crave the milk of the Word, you're to crave the meat of the Word and you're to grow and look for ways to connect with other people and to keep this message flowing out of you not just in you. So as a church, the reason that eighteen percent is down is I've offended most of the dysfunctional Christians into leaving. You know what I'm talking about and they have. But now it's time for this generation to step up and be that spiritually mature person who's not looking for the church to meet all their needs. Who's not looking for the church to babysit their kids, who's not looking for the church to teach their kids about salvation? It comes time when you step up to the plate and you become on fire for God and you move in a way and the holy spirit is working in your life and your connected to God and we're going to do everything we can to help you along in that process but we're going to continue reaching those exploring Christ. We're going to continue growing in Christ and try to

give you the tools you need but folks you need to pick up the fork. It's up to you and so this is where the sermon comes today.

I'm going to tell you one of my greatest fears. Now, I love leading this kind of church. It's what I was born to do. Even from the youth ministry I always knew that I wanted to reach people that didn't like God. I wanted to reach people that didn't like church, I always knew that and I love this but this is what I fear. I fear that we gather people together and we get this great crowd and we get this great crowd of good people who love The Avenue but don't love God. Who come and are part of what we do but they've never been changed. Who they say, this is a good church with good things going on and they want to be part of that but they've never been regenerated, never been made new, they've never been born again to use the bible word. You've never been born from above. God has never done anything in your life. You're just going through the motions and you're being religious and godly so to speak and your following everybody else and your trying to pretend and I am so afraid that we're going to be in heaven one day and The Avenue is going to gather together as a huge church and we're going to worship together and we're going to enjoy each other and we're going to talk about what God did while we were on the earth and there is going to be a large portion of people who called The Avenue home that aren't there. It's my biggest fear. My biggest fear to be in heaven and there were people all around the church but they weren't changed. They weren't regenerated and today I use that word and I know it's a big word. Regeneration, it's actually a doctrine and I hate to use that word because I say doctrine and all of you freak out. Last week was a doctrinal sermon by the way on the atonement, that's doctrine. This is doctrine, regeneration. It's the core of what Christianity is about. It's the fact that we need to be made alive in God; that there is nothing in us that is good; that there is nothing in us that is righteous. It is not our choice, it is God's choice and he takes something dead and he wants to make it alive. How do you know today? Are you going to be in that crowd in heaven or are you going to be one of the ones that we miss? How do you know? How do you know if you're alive in Christ? Best example I can really give you is you walk out to the parking lot today and you try to start your car and you hear that clicking noise, you've all had that experience right and all of a sudden you look and thought oh no, I have car trouble, what's wrong? But your radio won't work and your lights won't come on and your door windows won't come down, what's probably the problem? Dead battery, batteries dead and nothing in the car works because it's dead. It's your lucky day because a friend comes by right behind you and says hey I have some jumper cables do you need some help? You say yes I do. They open up the hood, they take jumper cables from their live battery and hook them up to your dead battery and then the life from that battery flows from those cables into this dead battery and then all of a sudden in this dead car, what happens? There are visible signs that the battery is working. The door locks work, the windows work, the lights come on, the radio comes on, it's starts when you turn the key. You know that the car has come alive because of the power from the other battery and that is what regeneration is folks. It is a dead person, it is a person who is dead in sin, it is a person who is dead in Christ, it is a person who has spent their life satisfying their desires when one day God breaks into their life and says you were dead, now you're alive. There are signs. We are going to look at some of those today so you can get a handle on it. I want you to know that twenty three percent of this church said that they we're stalled in their Christian faith. One out of four of you stalled in your Christian faith. Let me tell you why you're stalled...you

may not be regenerated. Your battery may be dead. So today let's look at this verse in Ephesians 2, beautiful chapter, as for you, you were dead in your transgressions in sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air. The spirit who is now in work of those who are disobedient all of us live among them at one time. Gratifying the sins of the sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts, like the rest we were by nature objects of wrath. In Ephesians it's telling us that we are going to satisfy our desires. We're going to follow our own way; we're going to do what it takes for us to be happy. That is our goal in life. That is how we are made. We are by nature that way and we don't want to wait; we want to be gratified right now. It's kind of like my youngest son when he was little he would say daddy I'm hungry. Like all good dads I would say do you want me to heat up a corn dog? He'd would say don't heat it up daddy, I'm hungry. I'm like a corn dog sickle...gross! But he wanted to satisfy his hunger. He didn't want to wait for it to be heated up. He didn't want to wait for it to cool off; he wanted to satisfy his hungry right then and there. He did not want to delay it. Folks that is a picture of humanity. We do not want to wait on our desires. We do not want to wait to be gratified. We do not want to wait for God to fill us; we want it now so we go our way and try to find it. It's like the boy that sits at the table and the mom and dad say we're going to pray and he says I don't care what God says, I'm hungry and there is no correction and he's satisfying his cravings and he grows to satisfy more and more and more until you finally get to that point and I call that nightmare moment. Do you know what that nightmare moment is? It's when you find yourself satisfying your desires to a point that you find yourself in a place you should have never been. You find yourself doing something you'd never do. That's a nightmare moment when you begin to realize your dead. You're dead in Christ, he's not alive in you, and he is not in work in you. Something is dead. So how do you get regenerated?

The first step today is to look at the signs. To look at what's around you. If a car battery is alive the wipers work, the door locks work, the windows, radio and lights come on. You see those things so today I want to run through a list with you and if you're dead you'll know it. If you're alive, you'll know it. The first thing that we want to look at is the Word of God, this bible, this wonderful book. If you're dead in Christ, if you're following your own desires and you're satisfying your desires and you're not alive in Christ, then this is a book. It doesn't mean much to you, it's a good book. It's the Holy bible you have four of them at home, but you don't read them. You have four of them but you barely crack them open. There is dust on them. If you hear that someone's going to lead a bible study, you don't care, it's not important, it doesn't matter. If somebody says I'm going to share with you deeper things on Wednesday night, I'm going to take you deeper into the Word of God, so what, I've got something to watch on T.V. that night. It's not important to me. But if you're alive in Christ, this book is alive and this book has the words of life and you want to read it and study it and when you find something you don't understand, you search for somebody to help you explain it and if there's a bible study that's going to take you deeper, you want to be part of that bible study and you want to find out about it and you want to hold on to it and you want to bring it to church. Listen we are bringing up a generation of lazy people when it comes to the Word of God. I know I put it on the screen but people that eleven percent, they need to see people who love God holding on to this book. They need to see you reading this book. Stop being lazy, bring it

to church, let people see you open it, let people see you handle it. Love the Word of God. If you're alive in Christ, this is important. If you're dead in Christ, not that big a deal.

How about worship? If you're dead in Christ, worship is just something you do. Music's okay, preaching's okay, you go through life and you don't see God, you just go through life. But when God makes you alive, worship becomes something else. Worship begins to happen every day. Worship happens when you're driving home, when you see a sunset and you go, my gosh, that's beautiful. That's incredible, look at that and you're overwhelmed by the beauty of God. When you wake up on the roll back Sunday, don't you wish every Sunday was roll back your clock Sunday? I woke up praising God today, baby! I woke up and said I've got two more hours; I'm going right back to sleep. That's exciting and everything becomes a form of worship when you're alive in God. Let me tell you how this happens. This verse is so important I want you to see it. Look at verse four, I told you, you were dead in sin, you were dead in trespasses, some of these things that I'm revealing to you today you may say, you know what, I'm dead. I'm an object of wrath. But verse four, but, that's the most important word in the entire passage, but, I wanted to call the sermon the biggest but in the bible, but I thought some of you would be offended so I didn't. But, listen, because of his great love for us God who is rich in mercy made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions it is by grace you have been saved. This is what he is saying. You were dead; you did nothing to be alive. I made you alive, I regenerated you. You were an object of wrath, but because of my grace, I'm going to fire you up. Are you dead or are you alive? Listen, when you're dead in Christ, baptism is a nuisance. I'm not getting my hair wet, that's embarrassing. When you're alive in Christ and you see baptism, it brings tears to your eyes and there is a joy and you're running to be baptized if that's what God tells you to do.

What about church? If you're dead in Christ, church is a beat down. If you're alive in Christ, you can't wait to be connected with other people. You can't wait to come and to hear the Word of God. You can't wait to see what God's going to do next if you're alive. If you're dead in Christ, prayer, it's something you do before your meal and when you almost have a wreck, something you do when your credit card bill comes in. When you're alive in Christ, prayer becomes part of everything in your life. You begin to pray without ceasing. When you're dead in Christ, at night, you pray a prayer kind of like this, Father just forgive me for all the sins I committed today. That's incredible. In fact that's what I do whenever my wife and I have problems. I simply look at her and say, Dawn, this week if I've offended you in any way please forgive me. That works good doesn't it? Yeah I don't know what I did but I'm sure I did something, forgive me. Oh yeah, that works. Do you think that works? No, I have to look at her and say, you know what, that was really rude of me that was really not thoughtful of me. I really disrespected you and I'm sorry. See that's the difference in prayer, if it means something to you, you talk to God like you would your spouse and you let him know.

What about the poor? When you're dead in Christ, you see poor people and they bother you. You see poor people and you say things like why don't you get a job. When you see the sick people and see the hungry children on T.V. you change the channel quickly because they are messing up the ball game. You don't want to see it. But when you're alive in Christ and you see those poor people, your heart breaks because you think, God why have you given us so much? When you know that there are children going to bed hungry you feel guilty that you're going to bed stuffed because God put that in your heart when you're alive in him.

What about prompting? When you're dead in Christ, God is still trying to get you to do good things but you don't hear, it doesn't matter. When you're alive in Christ you hear that still, small voice say call that person, you hear that still, small voice say send that card or give them money, God prompts you and when you're alive you're alive to that prompting.

That's a pretty big list. I bet you'd like me to be finished but I'm not. You go on to the next page...Purity. When you're dead in Christ, purity simply means what makes me happy. Moral guidelines are just a guideline. You go in and out of the boundaries how you see fit. But when you're alive in Christ you realize that Christ hung on that cross because of your moral problems, because of your bad choices and you know that when you cross that line, it breaks his heart and it breaks your heart along with it.

Money, when you're dead in Christ money is the all mighty God. Money is the most important thing. You'll work for it, you'll steal, and you'll do whatever it takes. Money is the all mighty. When you're on fire for God money is just a tool.

Anxiety, when you don't have God, there are some anxious things going on. There are some problems in your life and you're stressed and you rely on drugs and alcohol and everything else to try to get you through the stress of life. But when you're alive, thank God you have somebody to lean into. You have somebody to lean into and you don't lean alone. He is there and I'll just be personal with you, since May anxiety and stress has mounted in my life and my family's life. It's been incredible, it's been probably one of the worst seasons, if not the worst season in our lives and if I didn't have God, and our family didn't have God to lean into, we wouldn't be here. If we didn't have God to lean into, they would have already carted me off in a stretcher. Our family would fall apart. But we have a God that we can lean into and it doesn't mean it's still not bad, I mean there are a lot of times God has to wrap his arms around you and say, you know what? You're right, your life sucks but I'm God and it's going to be better. Hang on to me and I'll hang on to you. If you're alive in Christ, you have somebody to lean into.

Conflict, man if you're dead in Christ conflicts come around and they bother you and eat you up and you're just angry all the time and you're mad and all these things are going on. When you're living for Christ, conflicts something that comes and goes and you know its part of life. I know tomorrow I'm going to get emails. I already know because I said big but and somebody's going to email me and I know and I'm going to get your email and I'm going to read it and then I'm going to print it off and I'm going to bring it into our 8:30 meeting and I'm going to laugh at you. That's what we're going to do. So just don't email me because that's just how we deal with conflict. I'll say what God tells me to say, I'll do what God tells me to do. if it offends you and it's my fault I am going to apologize, if it's not an offense that I feel that I'm responsible for, I'm just not going to be in conflict with you. Great thing I have people all the time want to argue with me about scriptures. Well do you believe, I don't know, what do you believe and they want to argue with me and they want our church to be defined by what they believe the scriptures say. Do you know what I do with those conflicts? I write back the fundamentals of the faith. I write back who Jesus is in our lives and what it means to us and I'm done. I'm not going to argue with you whether baptism saves you are not. I'm not going to argue with you whether salvation can be lost or not. I'm not going to argue with you whether we can dance or not. I can't dance, it's not a conviction, it's a rhythm problem. But I'm not going to argue. Conflict is not the same when you're alive in Christ.

Love, man, when you're dead in Christ love is a selfish thing. Love is I will love you if. Love is what you do for me, love is I will love you as long as you...but when you're alive in Christ, love is I will love you no matter what. I love you and I don't care what you do. I don't love you because of what you do for me; I will love you just because I love you.

Evangelism, you watch TV and you flip through the channels and you see some crazy haired guy kind of looks like Jon Pope, got hair all going back everywhere and you listen and he's going off and he's talking about Jesus and you're looking at that and you're going, that guys crazy and you change the channel. When you're alive in Christ you flip through those channels and you see that and you hear him talk about Jesus, and you say, that guys crazy and you change the channel but you hope that your uncle that's lost stays on the channel a little longer. And you're hoping that your family members that are lost can hear the message and you don't care how they hear it as long as they hear that Jesus saves.

Heaven, wow, if you're dead in Christ, heaven is a place that we're all going to sit on clouds and play harps and listen to organ music. I just defined hell. But when you're dead in Christ, heaven isn't a place you want to be because that means it's over. Man when you're alive in Christ, heaven is a place you look forward to because all the mistakes you've made, all the stupid things you've done, God's going to make them right. All the relationships you've destroyed, God's going to make them right. In heaven, we're going to be perfect and in his presence with no more tears. That's my kind of place folks.

So today, I have to ask you the question, have you been regenerated? Have you been made alive in Christ? Has God jump started your dead heart? As we go through that list which side do you fall on? Today I want to give you an opportunity, because it's by God's grace, listen to this last verse, for it is by grace you have been saved through faith and this not from yourself. It is a gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast. So today God is out there today and he's saying, listen, I want to put my life into you. You're dead, it's not working. You don't have the signs. You don't have the confirmation that I'm alive in your life. You're dead. This morning I want to make you alive and the only way to do that is my power in God. God's going to say, I'm going to transfer this into you. I'm going to make you alive. Are you ready for that? If you've truly been made alive in Christ, I'm going to ask you to do something for me. If you've truly been made alive in Christ and you know full well that he's the savior and the Lord of your life, I want you to start praying right now, just bow your head and I want you to start praying right now if you know that God has jump started your life I want you to pray. I want you to pray for those around you that the grace of God's going to fall today on them. The grace of God's going to fall on them and today I don't care how religious they are, I don't care how much they've been in church, today, they're going to find the grace and mercy to stand. Today if you're ready for God to change your life, if you're ready to make you alive and stop following this game and stop playing religion. If you're ready today to say, God is going to be the most important person in my life, I want it today. Would you stand? Last week I had people stand and I had people email me. Just stop emailing me. Had people email me saying don't make it so hard. Don't make it so hard, really? Jesus hung on a cross for my sin, I don't think it's too hard to ask you to stand to say I want Jesus, is it? I want Jesus. Now some of you, you know you've asked Jesus into your heart, but wow, you've become dead. Thank God he never leaves you. It's kind of like marriage problems, you can have problems but you're still married. But it's time to get things right. Today if you say I want to get things right, I want you to join these

others that are standing and say I want to commit again and I want to get my life back where it needs to be, stand up. I want to be on fire for God today. Those of you who are praying I want you to look around and see who you're praying for. I want you to give them a hand for being faithful and standing and letting you know. I want you to stand with them right now. I'm going to ask our ushers to come down and this offering, if you're a guest today, we're not passing this plate for you to put money in for the show, but our members need the opportunity to give a portion to God. Give him your first portion, then more than that say this prayer. Say God, fire me up. God make me alive. The word in the bible is quicken. Quicken me, make me alive again. It's kind of like the quick in your finger. Have you ever gotten to the quick when you've cut your fingernail? Whoo, you get alive quick! That's what he wants in your life today. When that plate passes you ask God to make you alive. Father God, we pray especially for those who stood today to proclaim you as their savior. God we want them to follow you through and be baptized and to move along to be that fully devoted follower. Others God we thank you that they are catching fire again. That they're going to get back to serving you and loving you and to be an example for you. Father we pray for all of us today, there are areas that we all need correction in. There are areas that we all need our fire lit again and we pray that revival happens. Listen church, we have an opportunity beyond anything anyone in here can imagine but as a family we've got to join together and we've got to get on fire but we've got to put our emotional problems and our relationship problems and all of those other problems aside so God can use us to do something incredible for this community. We're all in it together and we want you to be a part of one of the most exciting things God can do.