



HEALTHY BODY ↔ HEALTHY MEMBERS

WEEK 1: Introduction

We all want a healthy church. The problem is that sometimes we aren't sure what a healthy church looks like. To further complicate matters, sometimes we may want a healthy church but have no idea what role we play as individual members in pursuing that goal.

Does a church become healthy through a top-down approach—where the head dictates to the rest of the body what to do? Or does a church become healthy from the bottom-up—a sort of grassroots approach to flourishing and growth? Maybe it is both?

Renewing our View of Membership

What does membership in a church even mean to begin with? Is it like membership at a pool or a Rotary club? Is it like membership at Costco? Is it like membership in a political party?

How would you describe membership?

Before we can talk about being a healthy body, we have to recover the proper sense in which we are *members* of the church. The concept of church membership did not arise from the country club but from the anatomy theater. Membership has to do with being a member of the church *body*:

"Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (1 Corinthians 12:27)

If we are going to become healthy churches, then that means we aim to be healthy bodies. And healthy bodies require healthy body parts—healthy *members*.

Top-Down Approach to a Healthy Body

Let's pause for a moment in 1 Corinthians and look at another of Paul's letters. Writing to the Ephesians, Paul says,

"Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love...Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior." (4:15-16; 5:23)

In a very real sense, if the church is going to be healthy, then, it is going to start at the Head: Jesus Christ.

A healthy church recognizes Jesus Christ as her Savior and Lord. She submits to his Word in everything. He defines what healthy means; he gives each member its function and purpose; he provides the humble unity through his Spirit that helps the members to come together as a healthy unit.

Bottom-Up Approach to Healthy Members

If we return to 1 Corinthians 12, we find that although Christ rules, sustains, nurtures, leads, and gives health to his body, that doesn't excuse each member from personal responsibilities as a part of the body. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. This is key:

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose...The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you"...If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." (12:18,21,26)

Paul is explaining the interconnectedness and interdependence of the individual members of the body. Imagine for a minute if every part of your body was in tip-top shape, but you had pinkeye. One body part's sickness will affect everything else!

Your individual health as a member greatly affects the health of the whole body. Therefore, if we want to see a healthy church body, we have to strive with all our might to be healthy church members.

Healthy Members, Pastors, & Deacons

In Ephesians 4, Paul mentioned that the members build one another up in love by using their spiritual gifts. In his letters to Timothy and Titus—and in the example of the early church in Acts—we see two particular offices ordained in the body of Christ to help develop healthy churches: pastors and deacons.

In order to have a healthy body, we need healthy members, healthy pastors, and healthy deacons.



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OVERVIEW: 9 Marks in 15 Weeks

Our 15 weeks together breaks down into three sections: (1) healthy members, (2) healthy pastors, and (3) healthy deacons. We will explore 9 Marks¹ that indicate health for each, kind of like an annual physical. Let these sets of nine marks serve not only as an examination but an aspiration for your heart and life.

May these marks serve as correctives and encouragements to our churches, as well. As the body, it is essential for us to value in our members, pastors, and deacons the things that our head Jesus Christ shows us he values in his Word.

WEEKS 1-7: HEALTHY MEMBERS

- **Week 1: Introduction**
- **Week 2:** Mark 1—Genuinely Converted
Mark 2—Gospel Saturated
- **Week 3:** Mark 3—Growing Disciple
Mark 4—Expositional Listener
- **Week 4:** Mark 5—Biblical Theologian
Mark 6—Biblical Evangelist
- **Week 5:** Mark 7—Committed Member
- **Week 6:** Mark 8—Discipline Seeker
Mark 9—Humble Follower
- **Week 7:** Mark 10—Prayer Warrior

WEEKS 8-12: HEALTHY PASTORS

- **Week 8:** Mark 1—Biblically Qualified
Mark 2—Above Reproach
- **Week 9:** Mark 3—Sound in Doctrine
Mark 4—Able to Teach
- **Week 10:** Mark 5—Shepherd-hearted
Mark 6—Humble Leader
- **Week 11:** Mark 7—Accountable
Mark 8—Prayer Warrior
- **Week 12:** Mark 9—Plurality

WEEKS 13-15: HEALTHY DEACONS

- **Week 13:** Mark 1—Biblically Qualified
Mark 2—Dignified in Speech
Mark 3—Full of Faith
- **Week 14:** Mark 4—Need Oriented
Mark 5—Servant-Hearted
Mark 6—Full of Spiritual Wisdom
- **Week 15:** Mark 7—Unifying
Mark 8—Jealous for Christ
Mark 9—Not an Elder

¹This study is indebted to two resources from 9Marks Ministries: *What is a Healthy Church Member?* by Thabiti Anyabwile (Crossway, 2008) and *Church Elders* by Jeramie Rinne (Crossway, 2014). This study is in no way meant to replace these books but is best taught in conjunction with these resources.



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WEEK 2: Genuinely Converted and Gospel Saturated

The pastor finishes his sermon with a passionate gospel presentation. The organist begins playing as the congregation sings through several stanzas of “Just As I Am.” A new family shuffles down the aisle. After a few minutes of quiet conversation down front, the organist finishes, the husband fills out a notecard, and after the announcements the family is presented immediately to be voted in as members. The church claps and goes home.

Taking Nothing for Granted

Nothing will tear the body of Christ apart quicker than adding unregenerate members to it. Unfortunately, many churches are filled with “nice” non-Christians. As uncomfortable as it may be, it is imperative for the health of the church—and the love of others—to ask probing questions of any prospective new members to help them discern if they have experienced genuine conversion.

What is genuine conversion?

Conversion is the doorway to all God’s gracious gifts in Christ’s Church. As Paul writes, “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:8). Jesus tells Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Conversion is essential for healthy members and a healthy church.

MARK 1: GENUINELY CONVERTED

In order to understand conversion, we have to understand the state of all men apart from Christ. Ephesians 2 tells us:

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” (2:1-3)

Conversion then means being brought back to life, born again, and transferred to a new kingdom ruled by a new King.

“It is a change so dramatic that it requires the intervention of God the Holy Spirit. In conversion the Spirit of God grants the twin graces of repentance and faith to sinners who turn from sin and turn to God through faith in Jesus Christ.” (50)

Knowing Our Own Souls

Have you been genuinely converted? In 2 Corinthians 3:15, Paul holds us personally responsible to look into our own hearts:

“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”

What evidence should be found in the heart of a genuinely converted individual? John tells us that true followers of Jesus walk in the light and not in the darkness (1 John 1:6-7). They are grieved by their sin, hate it, and long for Jesus to cleanse it away. 1 John also tells us that the true children of God love him as Father, rather than loving the world (1 John 2:15). Thirdly, this love of the Father bears fruit in love for brothers and sisters in Christ (1 John 3:18-19).

The church is a body that has been raised to life in Christ. To be healthy, all of its members must be genuinely converted. This means our objective in evangelism is not simply to use gimmicks, entertainment, or ploys to draw people and keep people at church. The only way into the body of Christ is Spirit-wrought repentance and faith.

MARK 2: GOSPEL SATURATED

Thabiti Anyabwile writes, “Apart from the gospel, the church has nothing to say—that is, nothing to say that cannot be said by some other human agency” (40). A healthy church is filled with people for whom the gospel is not something they picked up once and left behind, but something that fills and shapes every part of their daily life.

Perhaps this seems like overkill, but in order for the gospel to saturate our lives, we must first actually *know* the gospel.

What is the gospel?

The word *gospel* means “good news”—and it is news that concerns Jesus Christ, our Crucified and Risen King. In the book of Acts, six sermons lay out the gospel in this way (cf. Acts 2:22-41; 4:8-12; 10:34-48; 13:26-43; 26:15-29):

- God planned salvation from start to finish.
- After man’s fall into sin, God promised he would send us a Savior from judgment and death.
- God sent his only Son Jesus.
- Wicked men put Jesus to death on a cross.
- God raised Jesus from the dead, and the apostles are witnesses to his resurrection.
- Jesus is now enthroned as eternal King.
- All men are called to repent and believe.
- If we do, he will forgive our sins and give us eternal life through his Spirit.

Cultivate a hunger for the gospel.

It is our responsibility to cultivate an appetite for the good news of Jesus Christ. This begins with regularly hearing the gospel—particularly in the preaching of God’s Word. This will deepen our knowledge and understanding of the gospel, our love and affection for Jesus, and our ability to share the gospel.

Thabiti Anyabwile encourages us, “So we should listen actively for the gospel and gospel implications in sermons. Don’t turn off your ears when the pastor begins to appeal to non-Christians with the gospel message. Listen to it afresh. Reaffirm your belief in its truth, promises, and power for your life...See *your* sins nailed to the cross as you hear the good news” (41).

What intentional ways are you keeping your hunger for the gospel alive?

Order your life around the gospel.

A gospel-saturated church member lives as though the gospel is really true. The crucified and resurrected Jesus is not some figure of the past; he is the reigning King *today*. Life in his kingdom should look different than life in the kingdom of this world.

Certainly, this begins with making Sunday gatherings of the church a priority in your weekly schedule. While the rest of the world may enjoy “lazy Sundays,” we come together to worship and find true rest in our Savior Christ and the presence of his people.

This also means being intentional throughout the week in our habits and schedules to make the priorities of Christ our priorities. This might mean:

- Starting a new small group Bible study in your living room for college students or neighbors
- Using vacation time to take a short term mission trip
- Inviting neighbors over for dinner
- Joining clubs or sports leagues with the intention to build new relationships to show the love of Christ and share the gospel
- Volunteer time at the local school, nursing home, or pregnancy center to care for the least of these

A life ordered around the gospel will also carve out intentional time to share the gospel with others.

Guard the gospel.

Gospel-saturated church members take seriously their responsibility to guard the purity of the faith. They will not tolerate false teaching or preaching that dilutes, ignores, or makes light of the gospel.

Jude exhorts us to “contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (1:3). In addition to reading your Bible, knowing and understanding your church’s statement of faith is a great place to start.

Do you know what your church believes? When was the last time you read your church’s statement of faith?

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WEEK 3: Growing Disciple and Expositional Listener

Many churches have plateaued with no new growth for years. Members scratch their heads wondering what the problem may be. Sadly, they never think to look at themselves: A *growing* body requires *growing* members.

MARK 3: GROWING DISCIPLE

It is tricky to talk about growing in the faith, especially in a goal-oriented world that focuses on external and visible results. “We’re far too vulnerable to settling for being thought of as mature rather than actually being mature” (85).

What does growth look like in the life of a disciple?

Jesus shows us the difference between false and true growth by placing them side-by-side in a parable:

“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:10-14)

There are three problems with the Pharisee’s concept of growth. First, he has fallen into the *performance trap*. He believes that his outward performances are a sign of true growth.

What ways are we tempted to measure ourselves by our Christian “stats”?

The Pharisee also judged himself by the wrong standard: others. He deemed himself a deeply righteous person because his external sin paled in comparison to what he saw in the life of the tax collector. When we justify ourselves by looking down on others, we betray deep-seated pride:

“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble’...Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.” (James 4:6,10)

Finally, the Pharisee mistook the source of spiritual growth: “As far as he is concerned, all that should commend him before God is a result of his effort and ability” (87). This is the opposite of the attitude we see, for instance, in the Apostle Paul who tells the Colossians he is “struggling with all His energy that He powerfully works within me.” (Col. 1:29)

Growing to be like Christ

There are several passages in the Bible that explain the goal of Christian growth. For instance, Galatians 5:22-25 lists fruit of the Spirit which we should strive to produce. 2 Peter 3:18 exhorts us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Ultimately, we could sum up Christian discipleship as growing in holiness and godliness: “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2).

What does *holiness* and *godliness* look like? What characteristics are true of *holy* men and women?

Jesus came to show us what true holiness looks like. He says to his disciples, “Follow me” (Matt. 9:9). Growing as a disciple means day-by-day becoming more and more like Jesus:

“A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.” (Luke 6:40)

Jesus tells his disciples, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). It is impossible for us to become like Jesus without a deep, abiding relationship with him.

“Many Christians seem to believe advancement in spiritual maturity must come through some extraordinary or ‘break-through’ experience” (90). On the contrary, its actually in the daily—seemingly ‘ordinary’—means of grace that we grow deeper in our relationship with the Lord Jesus:

- **Reading God’s Word**
- **Prayer**
- **Gathering with the saints regularly**
- **Participating in Baptism and the Lord’s Supper**

Contrary to the independent mindset of many American evangelicals, the apostles indicate that the main way Christians grow in maturity is through intentional, dedicated participation in a local church (cf. Eph. 4:11-16). Lastly, we grow to be more like Christ as we set our eyes on his return:

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" (1 John 3:2-3).

MARK 4: EXPOSITIONAL LISTENER

If time in God's Word is an essential means of growth in Christ, then it is important that we are listening to the preaching of God's Word.

Are there right and wrong ways to listen to a sermon?

Expositional preaching seeks to communicate the gospel truth God has placed in his Word for his people, drawing its message from the passage. Expositional listening, then, is listening for the voice and message of God as revealed in His Word for his glory and our blessing (20).

Expositional listening is not passive. It is active; it is engaged; it is hard work! There are several ways you can train your ears to give heed to God's Word with intentionality and purpose.

#1: Meditate on the sermon passage during your quiet time.

If your pastor is preaching through a book of the Bible, it is easy to read ahead. Spend time during the week before Sunday reading the passage for yourself, meditating on its meaning and praying that God would prepare your heart to receive and apply his truth.

#2: Invest in a Set of Commentaries

You can enrich your experience in God's Word by adding additional Christian voices from the past and present to help provide various new facets and doorways of application and understanding. They can also help answer lingering questions you may

have about the text. *The Bible Speaks Today* and *Preaching the Word* series edited by R. Kent Hughes are good commentaries series to get you started.

#3: Talk and pray with friends about the sermon after church.

Expositional listening continues long after the sermon is finished. "Develop the habit of talking about the sermon with people after church. Start spiritual conversations by asking, 'How did the Scripture challenge or speak to you today?' Or 'What about God's character most surprised or encouraged you?'" (23).

A small group or the family dinner table can be great places to begin to ask these questions.

#4: Listen to and act on the sermon throughout the week.

Come to Sunday worship with the intention of taking home at least one practical way you can live out what you have heard in the sermon. If your church posts sermons online, you can revisit it during the week on a morning commute or while exercising to further focus on the message.

#5: Cultivate humility.

Pride is the biggest stumbling block to listening. Pride convinces us to tolerate the sermon and go home. Pride says, "You don't need to change. You're basically okay." Instead, we need to cultivate a humility that resists defensiveness and says, "I am a sinner. I expect God to show me sin today, to have mercy through Christ to forgive, and to give me grace to change." A time of personal prayer or prayer with the family in the car before entering church on Sunday can cultivate humble hearts.

Expositional listeners will find themselves hungrier for God's Word. They will develop a greater focus on the will of God and the gospel's purpose in their lives. A church full of expositional listeners will grow in unity and will become a great encouragement to faithful expositional pastors!

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WEEK 4: Biblical Theologian and Biblical Evangelist

Consider this statement: Every church member is meant to be a theologian. But isn't that the pastor's job? Shouldn't we just stick with the basics?

It's strange how we expect our faith to remain rudimentary and easy, but we never expect that anywhere else. We are not surprised by complex spreadsheets at work or algebra expressions in school but we balk at pouring mental energy into understanding words like *sanctification* and *propitiation* at church. Sadly, "too many Christians have neglected their first great calling: *to know their God*" (27).

MARK 5: BIBLICAL THEOLOGIAN

The word *theology* means "words about God." Pure and simple, "*to practice theology is to know God himself*" (28). Every person does theology the moment they say, "I think of God as..." Even the person who ignores God or says, "God does not exist," is doing theology. All men are theologians; the difference for Christians is that all of our theology—all of our thoughts about God—are drawn from the Bible.

What are other places people look to in order to form their concept of God?

More specifically, the term *biblical theology* refers to grasping the grand narrative of God's redemption of mankind through Jesus Christ as revealed in the pages of Scripture. A biblical theologian seeks to know and understand the great themes of God's Word and how they fit together. "In other words, healthy church members give themselves to understanding the unity and progression of the Bible as a whole—not just isolated or favorite passages" (28).

Regular healthy doses of theology

When we labor to rightly understand God as he reveals himself in the Word, we grow in reverence for him. "We see that God is, always has been, and always will be the same creating, holy faithful, loving, and sovereign God for us that he has been

for others, [and] we are stirred to faith and awe in God" (29).

Secondly, biblical theology helps us to overcome our wrong ideas. Pride can subconsciously lead us to cherry-pick verses that affirm our preconceptions and to ignore verses that challenge, provoke, or confront us in sin and error. Tracing themes through the whole Scriptures forces us to grapple with hard truths we would otherwise avoid.

Thirdly, a church full of biblical theologians will be less prone to doctrinal arguments. Most heresies and false teachings in the history of the church came not from direct denials of the faith but a failure to understand the *whole* counsel of Scripture.

Finally, biblical theology is necessary to fulfill the Great Commission. Biblical theology helps us understand our place in salvation history and the role of the Church at this point in God's plan.

Ways to grow as a healthy theologian

Begin by reading a good book on biblical theology! 9Marks has an accessible, short one: *Biblical Theology* by Nick Roark and Robert Cline (Crossway, 2018).

Spend some time studying themes in the Bible. Pick an attribute of God—his justice, his love, or his forgiveness—and try to find ways it is displayed in various books of the Bible. You can trace almost any topic: hospitality, sacrifice, marriage, gender, and money.

Maybe you are reading through the whole Bible in a year. What topic could you constantly look for and note as you read?

Read the Old Testament the way the New Testament authors and apostles do. Constantly ask how Jesus fulfills the shadows and prophecies found there. Ask yourself:

- Where does this passage fit in the timeline of the Bible?
- How does this passage point to Jesus?
- How does this truth relate to New Testament churches?

Know and agree to support your church's statement of faith. Study it. Is it doctrinally sound? Affirmation of a healthy confession or statement of faith can provide guardrails as we read the Bible and promote doctrinal unity among the members. "A healthy church member...will work to know the difference between beliefs that are essential to Biblical Christianity and beliefs that are nonessential to the integrity and continuance of the faith" (35).

MARK 6: BIBLICAL EVANGELIST

Healthy church members who are growing in their knowledge of biblical theology will know their role as New Testament believers: *to take the good news of Jesus to the ends of the earth!* The problem is that many Christians today go about evangelizing in very *unbiblical* ways.

"Evangelism does not depend on eloquence, using the correct mood lighting, emotionally sappy stories and songs, or high-pressure sales pitches. We are free to simply and deeply trust God and the power of the gospel to produce the fruit he desires" (58).

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." (Romans 1:16)

As we seek to become biblical evangelists, we have to realize that our responsibility is not conversion but faithfulness:

"This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful." (1Co 4:1-2)

"Biblical evangelism requires sharing the wonderful news that Christ died for sinners and then calling our hearers to repent and believe" (59). The gospel does not need to be dressed up or altered. We deliver it unmolested to unbelievers persuasively and lovingly.

Can a church be healthy if only a few of its members are biblical evangelists? Some? Most?

Things to remember in personal evangelism

While the task is simple and straightforward, the circumstances and opportunities for evangelism can present complex challenges. Mark Dever gives these six suggestions:

- 1) **Tell people with honesty that if they repent and believe they will be saved—but it will be costly.**
- 2) **Tell people with urgency that if they repent and believe they will be saved—but they must decide now.**
- 3) **Tell people with joy that if they repent and believe the good news they will be saved. However, difficult it may be, it is all worth it!**
- 4) **Use the Bible.**
- 5) **Realize that the lives of the individual Christian and of the church as a whole are a central part of evangelism. Both should give credibility to the gospel we proclaim.**
- 6) **Remember to pray.**

When we evangelize, we must communicate that the gospel calls us not merely to a change of belief but a change of life. "The last thing we should communicate is that by merely saying yes to a proposition, they can be assured of eternal life" (60).

Make sure to emphasize the seriousness of sin and guilt before God, and use biblical language like "repent and believe" or "turn from your sin and accept forgiveness in Jesus's death for you" instead of common confusing phrases like "pray to receive Christ" or "invite Jesus into your heart" which mean well but aren't found in the Scriptures.

The local church in evangelism

"Inviting our non-Christian friends to church services is an excellent way to expand on the personal conversations you have had with them about the gospel" (60). It can be very helpful for a person interested in the faith to see it "fleshed out" in the lives of believers. Remember, fellow church members are allies in evangelism!



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WEEK 5: Committed Member

"When I graduated from my church's high school youth group, I started visiting around. I loved God and had big dreams for how I wanted to serve Him, but I didn't see any reason to get too involved in one church. By then, I thought I knew all there was to know about church, and I wasn't impressed. Most churches struck me as out-of-date and out-of-touch. There had to be better, more efficient ways to accomplish great things for God."

-Joshua Harris

Sadly, this is a perspective shared by many young Christians. However, the disconnect isn't entirely their fault. Young Christians do not become committed church members partly because they see churches filled with older Christians who don't seem to take church membership seriously either!

MARK 5: COMMITTED MEMBER

There are many reasons why Christians—both old and young—are not committed members of a local church. Some of them include:

- **Indifference:** "It doesn't really matter."
- **Ignorance:** "I didn't know it mattered."
- **Indecisiveness:** "I can't decide."
- **Independence:** "I don't need to."
- **Inversion:** "I have a church back home."

"People don't become committed church members—and therefore healthy Christians—because they don't understand that such a commitment is precisely how God intends his people to live out the faith and experience Christian love" (64).

Is church membership in the Bible?

Church membership is not so much *commanded* in the New Testament, as it is *assumed*. From the very beginning, the book of Acts indicates that the church was keeping record of the "number" who belonged to the church (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 6:2).

Additionally, in his letters to the local churches, Paul gives commands that were meant to be carried out when the whole church was gathered. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul speaks strongly

about removing a man in open, unrepentant immorality from church membership (1 Cor. 5:4-5).

Further, Paul speaks about "outsiders" and "insiders", with regard to the church:

"For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. 'Purge the evil person from among you.'" (1 Corinthians 5:12-13)

In order for the Corinthians to guard the body, they had to know who the members of that body were.

Peter assumes church membership when he gives this command to pastors: "Shepherd the flock of God *that is among you*" (1 Peter 5:2). Hebrews 13:17 indicates that pastors will be held accountable for the souls under their care. This is only reasonable if those pastors know the names of the sheep they are responsible to shepherd.

The essence of membership

There is one defining mark of the disciples of Jesus:

A new commandment I give you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

"A healthy Christian is one who is committed to expressing this kind of love toward other Christians. And the best place for Christians to love this way is in the assembly of God's people called the local church" (67).

A local church gives us a specific people among whom we can live out Christ's command as a witness to the world through our committed love.

#1: Attend regularly

A body is not healthy if it is missing members—a hand, a foot, an eye. Presence at the gatherings of the church body is basic, essential, and foundational for any semblance of health. The author of Hebrews warns against a common temptation: "Not neglecting to meet together, *as is the habit of some*, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:25).

Can you think of specific duties that become impossible for a church body to accomplish if its members do not attend regularly?

#2: Seek peace and reconciliation

Paul encourages each member, "Let us pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding" (Romans 14:19). Our unity in the church is actually an essential testimony to the power of the gospel. This is why Paul encourages the Ephesians,

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:1-3)

Where there is division in the body, members don't ignore it or hope it blows over, they seek reconciliation and healing: "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18).

#3: Edify and admonish others

When we gather together, we come with the objective to edify one another—whether through our teaching, singing, service, humility, or listening (Ephesians 4:16). This is why many of our churches call the Sunday gathering a worship *service*:

"What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up." (1 Cor. 14:26)

Additionally, when they see other members going astray, they get involved in bringing them back to the way of the Lord (Gal. 6:1).

What danger lurks in a church that will not confront one another in sin? For the body? For the members?

#4: Bear others' burdens

Commitment forms patience and meekness in the body. We do not run from others when they rub us the wrong way or when crises arise. Instead, "bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you" (Colossians 3:13).

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Our lives are filled with responsibilities and trials to be juggled. Satan divides the members of a church by convincing them that they don't have room on their plate for other people's problems, too. However, it's in the sharing of blessings and burdens that Christ intends to unite his church:

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Gal 6:2)

#5: Prepare for the ordinances

Sadly, in many modern churches, Baptism and the Lord's Supper have become optional afterthoughts. Committed church members rejoice at the privilege to witness baptism.

"Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." (Luke 15:7)

They also examine their hearts seriously each time they prepare to feast with the church family at the Lord's Table, making sure there is no unrepentant sin or grudges in their heart:

"For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you...Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup." (1Cor. 11:18,28)

#6: Support the work of the ministry

Committed members invest the financial resources entrusted to their care for the furtherance of Christ's Kingdom. "[They] should follow the example of the Macedonians, who committed to a financial giving strategy that was sacrificial, generous, increasing over time, and fueled by faith in God despite present circumstances (2 Cor. 8-9)" (70).

"It is by the grace of God that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly in this world to share God's Word and sacrament...Therefore, let him who until now has had the privilege of living in common Christian life with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of his heart. Let him thank God on his knees and declare: It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren." –Dietrich Bonhoeffer



HEALTHY BODY ↔ HEALTHY MEMBERS

WEEK 6: Humble Follower and Discipline Seeker

The relationship between the pastors and church members is vital for the endurance of a local body.

Can you think of specific instances when churches fell apart because of issues between the pastor and members? What dynamics create potential for disunity?

“In the final analysis, church members are the people who generally make or break a local church. And making or breaking a church has a lot to do with the membership’s attitudes and actions towards its leaders” (95).

MARK 8: HUMBLE FOLLOWER

Church members who want to be a part of a healthy body will pursue humility in both their attitudes and actions toward their leaders. Humble members recognize that faithful leaders are a gift from God:

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...” (Ephesians 4:11-12)

A healthy church member’s *attitude* toward leadership

Attitude has to do with the heart. The Scriptures call us to cultivate at least three things in our hearts toward the leaders in our church. First, we need to *honor* our elders:

“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.” (1 Timothy 5:17)

The word *elders* indicates the pastors and shepherds who “rule” and labor in preaching and teaching—not simply the *old* people in the church. Paul says that one way members honor a pastor is by providing for his financial and physical needs with sufficient wages, particularly for those who are in full-time ministry.

Additionally, honoring leaders means protecting their reputations:

“Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.” (1 Timothy 5:19)

It’s important to realize that guarding the pastoral office in the church also means publicly rebuking pastors who are guilty of repetitive sin:

“As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.” (1 Timothy 5:20)

Secondly, we show our leaders open-hearted love. “There should be a sweet exchange of affection between pastor and congregation. As they live, grow, and labor together, their hearts are to open increasingly wide to each other” (97). In a healthy church, the pastors shouldn’t have to plead like the Apostle Paul:

“Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one.” (2 Corinthians 7:2)

We give ourselves to our pastors not because they have a winsome and warm personality, but because we have given ourselves to the Lord and by the will of God to their leaders (2 Cor. 8:5).

Thirdly, we seek to be teachable as we sit under the preaching and teaching of the Word.

What does a teachable spirit have to do with humility?

Essentially, a pastor’s primary means of shepherding the members of the church is this: *teaching*. Members of the church make a pastor’s job a joy instead of a burden by being receptive to the teaching of the Word.

Pastors are commanded to be patient and correct with gentleness (2 Tim. 2:24-26). Healthy members will not seek to take advantage of their pastors, mistaking meekness for weakness.

A healthy church member’s *actions* toward leadership

The first act members take toward leaders is playing an active role in selecting them! The church is not a business. Leader selection should be done patiently and prayerfully. What is more, there are biblical qualifications for the office of pastor—if ignored, it

will spell disaster for a church body (cf. 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-16).

Secondly, the Bible calls members of the church to obey and submit to their leaders:

"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you." (Hebrews 13:17)

"Our obedience redounds to our benefit, since it would be of no advantage to us to call men as leaders and then disobey them" (100).

Healthy church members must be careful selecting leaders, because they are appointing examples for all the members to follow, as Peter commands them, "[Be] examples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:3). "A healthy church member patterns his or her life after the godly lifestyle of the elders of the church" (101).

Fourthly, a healthy church member prays for their pastors. Consider all of the responsibilities and decisions your pastors must face. Add to that the responsibility to guard and proclaim the gospel. It's too much for a man to bear in the flesh. Pray for the Spirit's emboldening power! (Col. 4:2-4).

Finally, healthy church members will not be possessive of or insecure about their pastor's ministry outside the walls of the church. "Pastors without outside stimulation and refreshment from fellow pastors and leaders, tends to dry and shrivel on the vine...A healthy church member wants to see the gospel advanced and wants to contribute to the health of other congregations if possible" (102).

In what ways can a church see a pastor's gifts as an opportunity to serve other churches and the greater Kingdom of God?

Humility begets humility. Consider how you can model what it looks like to be a humble follower to others in your church.

MARK 9: DISCIPLINE SEEKER

This mark follows directly from the last. True humility recognizes that discipline is the best thing

for a believer seeking to grow in maturity. "Chaos is the enemy of growth...Order must reign if growth is to occur. It's a fact of life" (73).

Often, we think of discipline as mere punishment. Is God's discipline toward his children punishment?

The words *discipline* and *disciple* share the same Latin root. It should come as no surprise then that the Bible commands and expects discipline both in the gathering of the church and in the life of individual believers. Jay Adams says, "When we are baptized into the church, we thereby matriculate into Christ's school...This education is with force, education backed up by the discipline of good order that is necessary for learning to take place" (75).

Discipline in the Life of a Believer

There are two forms of discipline:

- **formative discipline:** "how Scripture shapes and molds the Christian as he or she imbibes its teaching and is trained to live for God"
- **corrective discipline:** "how the Word of God confronts and turns us away from error to righteousness" (76).

Paul includes both forms of discipline when he tells Timothy, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

Here are some specific ways you can cultivate a heart that receives discipline with joy:

- Receive the word with meekness. (Is your listening posture during sermons defensive and combative or ready and willing?)
- Recognize discipline as evidence of God's love (Hebrews 12:6—"For the Lord disciplines the one he loves.")
- Humbly accept correction from others (Prov. 27:5-6—"Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend.")
- Take seriously your responsibility to discipline others (Both 1 Corinthians 5 and Matthew 18 end with discipline from the *congregation*.)

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HEALTHY BODY ↔ HEALTHY MEMBERS

WEEK 7: Prayer Warrior

I know we promised 9 marks, but there's a bonus! A 10th mark: Every healthy church member is a *prayer warrior*.

What does a healthy prayer life look like? Why would it be important for the church body as a whole that every member is spending regular time in prayer?

In the Old Testament, foreigners, eunuchs, sick, unclean, and invalids—just to name a few—were not allowed into the temple. However, Isaiah prophesied of a day when all people from all nations would be gathered into the Lord's presence in his house.

When Jesus came into Jerusalem, he cleaned house in the temple, and quoted from Isaiah:

"He said to them, 'It is written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer," but you make it a den of robbers."

Then something strange happened:

"And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them." (Matthew 21:13-14)

This is a picture of what the church was to become: A house where blind and lame people like us have access before the throne of King Jesus to bring our requests—and find healing.

MARK 10: PRAYER WARRIOR

When we look at the early church in the New Testament, we find a praying people:

"All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14)

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42)

What exactly is prayer? There are a lot of misconceptions about prayer. Some people may think that our prayerlessness actually prevents God from acting in the world. Others fall off the horse on the other side, assuming that since God is sovereign, there is no point in prayer. Still others may think God is too busy to listen to their prayers, or may think they themselves are too busy to pray.

A healthy understanding of prayer

"At root, most misunderstandings about prayer stem from a misunderstanding about the nature of God and our relationship to him" (107). The gospel tells us that something fundamental has changed about our identity in Christ: We who were once outsiders, rebels, and slaves have become the sons and daughters of God. Jesus shed his blood so that he might be able to summon us with these words:

"Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16)

Our prayer life is really about our relationship with the Heavenly Father. We can't forget the first words Jesus taught his disciples when they asked him how to pray: "Our Father..." (Matthew 9:6).

The Heavenly Father invites us to speak to him—often and about whatever we want. What are reasons we don't?

"Prayer is our response to God as He speaks to us...we involve ourselves in the business that God has with the world by praying towards the fulfillment of God's revealed purposes for the whole universe through the gospel" (108).

How and when shall we pray?

When the apostle Paul wrote to the churches, he was often encouraging them to be constant in prayer. For instance, he exhorts the Thessalonians to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). In Colossian 4:2, he commands us, "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving."

What does it mean to pray continually?

Only when we have a proper understanding of our own feebleness, the magnitude of the dangers and temptations we face, and of the love our Father has for us will we find ourselves continually approaching his face with prayer.

It is also important that we pray in the Spirit. Paul tells us that God knew that prayer would be a weakness for us, which is why he gave us his Spirit:

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." (Romans 8:26-27)

"Prayer in the Spirit is prayer *controlled* by the Spirit. And prayer controlled by the Spirit is prayer according to the will of God" (110). When we pray, we should always defer to the Spirit, trusting that even when we ask for what's not best for us, the Spirit inside is asking God for the right thing according to God's will, for his glory and our eternal benefit.

For what and for whom shall we pray?

There are many places in Scripture where we are commanded to pray for specific things. First, Christians can pray for the pastors who shepherd and labor among the flock of God. When Jesus saw the crowds of people harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd, he said:

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (Matthew 9:37-38)

Paul also encourages believers to pray for missionaries and ministers who suffer through distress, danger, and weakness to spread the gospel far and wide (Phil. 1:19-20). Christians can also pray that God would prosper the ministry of the word so that people repent and believe when they hear the gospel (Colossians 4:3-4).

Pray about how God is calling you to be a laborer! We are all called to enter the harvest—who is he calling you to share the gospel with this week?

Secondly, we are to pray for other Christians (Eph. 6:18). "The Christian life is a family life, and our prayers are to focus on the entire family, esteeming others more highly than ourselves. One way to do this is to pray regularly through your local church's membership directory" (112).

We also should pray for saints in other churches. We can pray for their unity, watchfulness against temptation, and Spiritual guidance. We can pray for their growth both in number and in maturity in Christ (Colossians 4:12).

Thirdly, we are commanded to pray for those in authority:

"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:1-4)

"Healthy church members regularly remember in their prayers elected officials, government employees, school teachers, their own employers, parents, and others with authority. It's helpful to keep a list of such persons in your Bible or your prayer journal as an organized reminder" (112-113).

Finally, we are commanded by Jesus himself to pray for our enemies. Even unbelievers say well wishes and prayers for those they love. But only those changed by the gospel of a God who loved his enemies are compelled to fight persecution and abuse with prayer:

"Bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you...If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them...But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6:28,32,35-36)

If there is someone you find very hard to love, pray for him or her. As you do, the Spirit will melt the hatred in your heart.

Consider your prayer life. Is it healthy? What ways will you make intentional strides to grow in your time seeking the face of the Lord?

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