

WACO REGIONAL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

THE BODY OF CHRIST

CHURCH STRENGTHENING PROCESS

MUSCULAR SYSTEM

Work Together

INTEGUMENTARY SYSTEM

Unity and Identity

URINARY/EXCRETORY SYSTEM

Eliminate Distractions

SKELETAL SYSTEM

Organizational Framework

RESPIRATORY SYSTEM

Breathe the Spirit

CIRCULATORY SYSTEM

Transport Nutrients

DIGESTIVE SYSTEM

Hunger for Righteousness

LYMPHATIC SYSTEM

Spiritual Disciplines

ENDOCRINE SYSTEM

Body Movement Coordination

NERVOUS SYSTEM

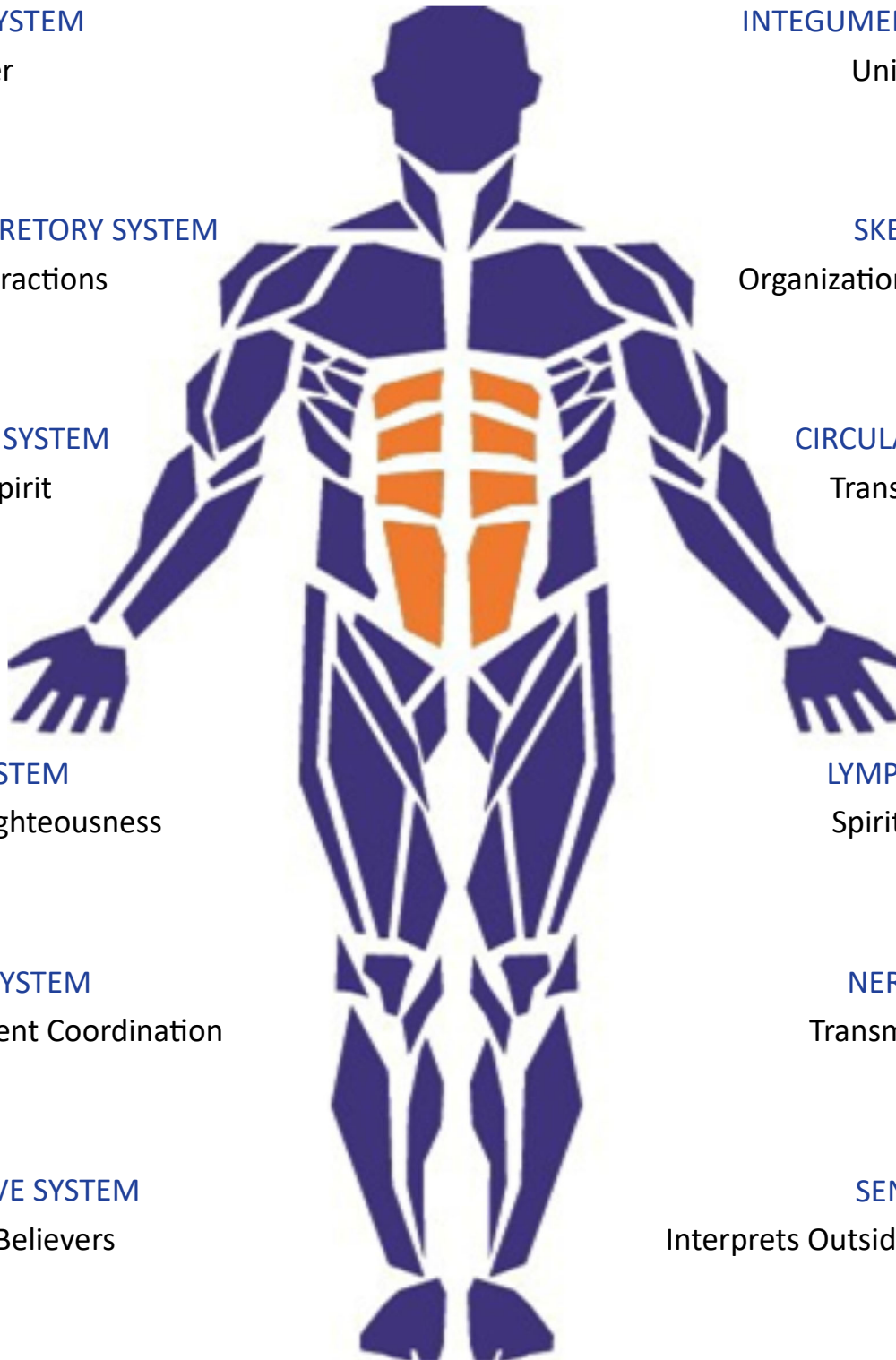
Transmit Information

REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM

Birth to New Believers

SENSORY SYSTEM

Interprets Outside Environment



Acknowledgements

This set of resources has been the prayerful product of a wonderful team of dedicated men and women who love the Lord and His church. They are the members of the Waco Regional Baptist Association's Church Strengthening Team. Our Association functions through the various ministry teams comprised of members from diverse churches who share a passion, expertise, and experience in the mission of that ministry team. The following members worked and prayed and met for a year to compile these resources with the desire that they would bless the Lord's churches here in Central Texas and beyond. We dream of seeing every Body of Christ full of vitality, energy, unity, and fruitfulness. In other words, we hope these tools help your church to be healthy!

Team members: Charlie Dodd, Hulitt Gloer, Matt Snowden, Marcy Smith, Judy Staples, Mario Sandoval, Gary Williams, and Director of Missions, Tim Randolph.

Strengthening the Church: An Introduction

“What is the Church?” It’s a question that children in Sunday School have addressed for generations. The discussion usually results in the following answers:

- The Church is a building.
- The Church is a group of people who gather together locally to worship.
- The Church is a large group of people who share common beliefs, such as Baptists or Methodists.
- The Church is all Christians worldwide; it is all those who have accepted Christ as their Savior and Lord, regardless of where they may worship.

While the answers above are all useful, they miss the truest definition, as stated by Paul in the New Testament: The Church is the Body of Christ.

Paul used the “Body of Christ” description to help his readers understand the nature of God’s Church more fully and practically. He pointed out that:

- All members of the Church were useful.
- The Church had many members, but all were one body.
- Individual members of the Church had different purposes.
- Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it.
- Christ’s love for the Church serves as our example to love one another.

In all his writings about the Church, Paul emphasized the necessity of maintaining the health of the Church. As the first “church planter”, Paul’s letters helped the local churches he had started to focus on growth and vitality as the Body of Christ.

Paul’s model of the Church as the Body of Christ is still relevant today. Bill and Gloria Gaither’s great song, “The Family of God”, stated the nature of the Church using these words: “When one has a heartache, we all share the tears, and rejoice in the victories in this family so dear.” As in the New Testament days, the Church (especially the local church) remains a vital part of God’s plan for the redemption of mankind.

The health of Christ’s body cannot be taken for granted. The Church, whether as the local body, a denomination, or a worldwide fellowship, must work to assess and enhance the health of the Body. It must identify and evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, and it must work together to promote healthy behavior. As an organization, the Waco Regional Baptist Association is dedicated to helping its members (local churches) to achieve these goals. It is in support of this end that the Church Strengthening Team offers this document. It is the purpose of these materials to provide local churches tools to help them evaluate their local body, identify strengths and weaknesses, and implement strategies that will empower and enable them to achieve and maintain healthy church bodies. The Team stands ready and dedicated to helping churches put these materials to use.

The Church as the Body of Christ

Of the many images employed by the writers of the New Testament to describe the church, no image is more prominent than Paul's image of the church as the Body of Christ. The image was so important to Paul that he uses it in both the letter to the Romans (12:3-8) and the first letter to Corinth (12:4-13:13). The image captures the essence of the notion that Christ is still active in the world in the church. Luke, a traveling companion of Paul who must have been familiar with Paul's use of this image, suggests this clearly in the beginning of the Acts narrative. In Acts 1:1-2, Luke introduces his narrative of the early church with these words, "In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen." The clear implication of Luke's words is that the rest of his story is about what Jesus *continues* to do and teach through His church which is now His presence, i.e., His Body, in the world.

Paul's use of the body image suggests that he saw the church as a living organism rather than an organization or institution. The health of any organism is essential to its growth and the fulfillment of its reason for being. For example, a healthy plant will be a growing plant and, as such, it will fulfill its reason for being. So it is with the church. A healthy church is a growing church and as such, it will fulfill its reason for being. By the same token, an unhealthy church is not likely to be a growing church or a church that is fulfilling its reason for being. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to be ever vigilant about the health of the body by regularly asking, "Is the Body healthy?" and if not, why not? This question is absolutely crucial for each and every church. Everyone knows that a body that is not healthy cannot live up to its full potential. Neither can a church that is not healthy live up to its full potential. The fact that Paul chose the image of the human body as analogous to the church as the Body of Christ is suggestive of the possibility that, given the right tools, we can assess the health of the church (i.e., the Body of Christ) just as we assess the health of our human bodies. In order to be certain that we are using the right tools, we must keep Paul's teaching about this body ever before us.

1) The body is one – "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ." (1 Cor. 12:12) and "As it is, there are many parts, but one body." (1 Cor. 12:20) and "For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." (Rom. 12:4-5). Here it is clear that Paul is drawing an analogy between the Church, the Body of Christ and the human body.

The “members” are the parts and systems of the human body. In a healthy human body, there are a multitude of parts (arms, legs, eyes, etc.) and systems (e.g., the blood system, the nervous system, etc.). All these parts and systems work together to make the one body function. The body is healthy when all the parts are working together in unity.

2) The body is made up of many members – “Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.” (1 Cor. 12:14) and “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” (1 Cor. 12:27) and “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function...” (Rom. 12:4). Once again, the analogy is between the Church, the Body of Christ, and the human body. Just as there are “many members (parts and systems) in the human body, so there are many members (individuals) in the Church, the Body of Christ.

3) Each member/system of the body has a special function – Paul goes to great lengths to affirm the special significance of each and every member of the body. Indeed, “Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.” (1 Cor. 12:14) and “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” (1 Cor. 12:7) and “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.” (1 Cor. 12:11) and “so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith;” (Rom. 12:5-6). In 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, Paul gives a sampling of the gifts: prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, compassion, wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, discernment of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. This list is not meant to be exhaustive but only illustrative of the manifold gifts that might be given to individual members of the body.

4) Each and every member is significant – "Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it." (1 Cor. 12:14-26).

5) When one member of the body suffers, the whole body suffers – In the human body, the individual parts/systems are so inextricably related to one another that an injury to one part/system of the body affects the whole body's ability to function as it should. So it is with the Church, the Body of Christ. "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it." (1 Cor. 12:26). In other words, if one member (part or system of the body) is affected, the whole body is affected. In short, it's one for all and all for one. With regard to our human bodies, the loss of a limb affects the function of the entire body. Try spending a day with one arm tied behind your back and this truth becomes readily apparent. Similarly, the loss of sight has huge implications for the body as a whole. The same could be said for the systems of the body: nervous, blood, digestive, etc. In any of these cases, we seek an assessment, a diagnosis, and the treatment needed to restore the "broken" part and thus, the Church, to full health. We need to care for our human bodies so that our bodies are functioning at maximum capacity and we can enjoy life to the fullest. Regular checkups enable us to identify existing or potential problem areas and take the necessary actions to seek to prevent and/or remedy the situation. Similarly, the health of the church, the Body of Christ, is essential to the fulfillment of her mission. Problem areas must be identified and treated with all deliberate speed. Regular checkups are as important for the church body as they are to the human body. With this assessment, we seek to identify those parts/systems of the Body of Christ that may need attention and careful treatment.

--By Hulitt Gloer

Introduction to an understanding of the Church as a Body

Below are the major systems identified by some human anatomy textbooks and a listing of their major components. There is apparently some disagreement over how many systems with which to discuss and study the human body. Twelve seems to be a fair number. The brief statement (after the list of organs) of what that system does is my own amateur explanation of what that system does for the whole body. By viewing the church as a human body and identifying the parallel systems that probably exist in a church, perhaps we can better understand how to assess and help churches become healthy and reproducing. The table below of the twelve systems of the human body is my beginning of rambling thoughts about which church parts/functions might be equated with the systems in the human body. This is where I think our team could begin to think of the church in new ways. Even though we joked about the use of Wikipedia, that may be a good starting point to gain more information about each system and then how to view the Church Body.

There are twelve major systems in the human body. In addition is the collection of organs (**Sensory System**) through which we understand and interpret the outside environment.

Muscular (Muscles - Smooth, Cardiac, and Skeletal Muscles). Movement and work are possible through this system.

Excretory (Urinary - Kidneys, Gallbladder, Ureter, Urethra). This system regularly cleans the entire body of waste and removes unnecessary elements.

Respiratory (Nose, Mouth, Pharynx, Larynx, Trachea, Bronchi, Lungs). This allows oxygen to freely be exchanged for the used Carbon Dioxide giving the body life.

Digestive (Mouth, Esophagus, Stomach, Small intestine, Large intestine, and Anus). This system nourishes the body with calories and essential energy and nutrients.

Endocrine (Pituitary, Thyroid, Parathyroid, Adrenals, Pancreas, Ovaries and Testes). This collection of glands secretes hormones into the circulatory system to be carried towards a target organ. It is a system of information signals.

Reproductive Male (Penis and Testes) Female (Vagina, Uterus, Ovaries). This system creates new life.

Integumentary (Skin, Hair, Nails, Sweat Glands). This system gives identity to the body and protects and keeps the other systems within the boundaries of the body.

Skeletal (Bones, Bone Marrow, Joints, Teeth, Ligaments, Cartilage). Internal framework of the body. It provides support, movement, protection as well as producing blood cells.

Circulatory (Heart, Blood, Vessels). Circulates and transports nutrients, oxygen, carbon dioxide and hormones to the entire body.

Lymphatic (Ducts and Lymph Nodes - Palatine Tonsil, Thymus Gland). This system serves the immune system and the circulatory system by removing waste, chemicals and toxins from circulating in the body.

Nervous (Brain, Spinal Cord, Nerves). This system provides communication and decision making for the rest of the body. It processes signals from every part and then gives direction to the whole.

Sensory System (Senses of sight, hearing, feeling, smelling, tasting, and balance). These are the organs through which the body perceives and understands the environment around the body.

A comparison of functions in the church body might be:

Human Body System	Related Parts in a Church	Functions of these parts in the church
Respiratory System	Prayer (corporate & private), worship and fruit of the spirit in leadership – spiritual vitality.	The breath of God is the life of the church. Faith, joy, love, gratitude, trust are all symptoms of spiritual vitality.
Nervous System	Newsletters, announcements, prayer chains, database, website, social media, bulletins, councils and meetings where information is shared. Top down and bottom up.	Communications (in all directions). Ability of divergent parts to know what is happening around the body.
Skeletal System	Bylaws and constitution, policies, traditions, business practices, accounting systems (the business side of church life), building & grounds, budgets.	This system provides stability and support for the life of the church. Somewhat stable, but not rigid. Permits ministry and movement. When broken can cause paralysis or great pain.
Reproductive System	Mission teams, evangelists, training new witnesses, mentoring church planters and new pastors/leaders.	Missions, evangelism, bringing new believers into faith, birthing new churches, new groups, new mission endeavors.
Muscular System	The informal volunteers who mobilize and make events happen, execute projects, change the building, the environment, and community.	These systems get things done. The muscles move things, execute the plans of the church.

Excretory System	Strategic thinkers and leaders, as well as daily workers who quickly identify energy and space and resource wasters. They appropriately put an end to the perpetuation of things that are in the way of the mission.	These systems close down unwanted, unneeded and unhelpful programs, projects, and keep the storage of useless stuff at a minimum.
Digestive System	Bible teachers & preachers, writers, and prophetic voices who speak relevant truths in love.	Systems that bring regular spiritual nourishment and energy and sustenance to the body.
Endocrine System	These channels of communication and coordination ensure a timely response of the whole body to events, needs, and concerns.	System that commands and controls the body and coordinates appropriate body movement and activity for the well-being of the entire body.
Integumentary System	The building and trappings as well as the “style” of the church seen uniformly from the website, to on-site, to inside.	Gives identity to the body and protects it and keeps all the systems “together” in one body (the skin).
Circulatory System	Small group leaders, homebound teams, pastoral care teams, prayer teams, church secretaries, and other caregivers.	Transports nutrients and oxygen to all parts of the body, delivering life and love to all members.
Lymphatic System	These are the key supporters and defenders of ministry leaders who squelch gossip and negativism. These key people can deal with church problems regularly without becoming negative themselves.	Connects the circulatory and immune systems. It absorbs all manner of toxins and waste and moves it out of the body before serious damage can occur.
Sensory System	Individuals who perceive and interpret the outside world to the inside body so timely adjustments are made. A prophetic voice. A regular strategy planning process or community discovery process.	The body’s connection to the outside world through sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing. Allows the body to move and react in positive ways to external changes.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

40 Daily Devotionals

Church Strengthening Process



How to use this section: 40 Daily Devotionals

Included in this process are forty different devotionals that were written by church leaders across Central Texas. These all focus on the Church as the Body of Christ with a view toward what the twelve human body systems do for the entire body. These devotionals may be printed and handed out to your participants in a booklet form with all forty days bound together or may be distributed in packets of five or seven each Sunday as participants come together. They may also be distributed by email once a day to congregants so that a fresh challenge from Scripture arrives in their inbox each morning. This process may be a good way to gather email addresses and begin a regular communication with members. The church's small groups might want to discuss some of the questions from the week's devotional readings at their weekly meeting.

Finally, a choice devotional from each week may be adapted for a children's message during the worship service.

STRONG CHURCHES NEED STRONG FAITH MUSCLES

I marvel at the energy and constant movement of my young grandchildren. They rarely just walk, choosing running as a favorite way to get around. They navigate steps without even noticing hand rails and seem to prefer standing on their heads on the couch rather than sitting on it. Everything about their movements demonstrate the power of muscles that are fully activated and fully obedient to a child's imagination.

Before painful experience and less capacity make movement wiser, children model what happens when physical muscles fulfill the Creator's intent—connecting bone and organs; delivering oxygen and blood; and transforming intention into reality. Children also model what happens when movement and trust operate together. A child's muscles are free to do their job because the child can trust parents and their world around them. Movement is not yet restricted by fear. This child-like trust develops faith muscle, liberating physical muscle to deliver joy in running, playing, and dancing.

What does this attention to a child's physical and faith muscles have to do with strong churches? As you already know, the Church is the Body of Christ, having specialized parts, ideally working together to do kingdom work in the world (I Corinthians 12: 12-19). In the spiritual sense, the church depends on having all its parts working together. Faith muscles do the connecting, sustaining, and activating work for the church just as physical muscles do for the child. The exuberance and vitality of children illustrate what can happen in a church when faith muscles are powerfully doing what the Creator designed them to do.

Children build physical muscle by using them and by having parents provide a safe and healthy home. Churches build spiritual muscle by practicing faith in God (II Corinthians 5:7 - "For we live by faith, not by sight.") and trusting God's provision. Now here is the lesson: The kind of work a child's physical muscles do is dependent upon each individual muscle making movement possible. Likewise, the kind of work that spiritual muscle does for the church is dependent upon each individual member building their faith muscle and applying their spiritual strength to kingdom work.

The more faith muscle shows up in the congregation, the more the Holy Spirit can do the work of redemption and transformation. Just like with children, the more we can trust God, the more the church will move in boldness to do what God says. Nonexistent or atrophied faith muscles mean an ineffectual church. So, the take-away is that strong churches need members with strong faith muscles, moving together to be the Church. Here are some practices that build your faith muscle so the church can **MOVE** into her high calling:

- 1) **Meditate** - Be in constant relationship with God. For most of us this happens when our physical muscles are at rest - when we center ourselves in waiting and listening. Isaiah 40:31 reminds us that, *"but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."* It seems like a contradiction, but it is an eternal truth. Deep relational connection and quiet time with our Lord and with His Word are the key to stronger spiritual muscle.
- 2) **Obey** - Take the instruction delivered by the Holy Spirit in the quietness of meditation. Align your direction and intention with this guidance, keeping your eyes on Jesus (Hebrews 12:2).
- 3) **Validate** - Acknowledge daily your utter powerlessness to live a committed life and validate the power of God to strengthen you (Ephesians 6:10).
- 4) **Engage** - Become involved with ministries that pay attention to a hurting world. Your journey outside the walls of the church will be just what is needed to strengthen your trust in God and to grow your faith muscle.

Are you ready to move into God's plan for building your faith muscle? Ask God for a child-like trust (Matthew 18:3) that energizes your faith muscle and strengthens the church.

"But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Lord, I am tired of trying to serve You without fully trusting You. I confess my habit of relying on my own strength and acknowledge my total dependence on You. Guide me as I move into Your will for my life. Grace me with the kind of faith that will strengthen Your church and bring all into relationship with You. Amen.

Dennis Myers

EVERYONE HAS A PLACE IN THE WORK OF THE CHURCH

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 4:10-11a).

Church growth and health are not possible without faith. No one would dispute that. But the literal working out of that very faith--stretching the muscular system, building stamina, staying toned—is also imperative in order for a congregation to remain vibrant. In other words, doing just what the scripture says: speaking and serving.

That might consist of using your large muscles to prayer walk, help repair a neighbor's roof, take meals to a home-bound person. It could mean employing the most powerful muscle of your body, your tongue, to witness to a co-worker, teach a Sunday school class, or share your expertise in a committee. There are hundreds of other tasks in the church and outside of it that require real, physical muscles and that bless individuals and the body of believers.

The book of James urges Christians to flex their muscles, adding action to their belief system. *"Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds."* (James 2:18b). *Do* is the key concept throughout James's writing, and it expresses the necessity of putting feet to faith.

Just as human muscles will atrophy when they aren't used and stretched, so will the vitality of the larger body—the Church. It's through practice that athletes keep their bodies in good health, an apt analogy for the local, corporate body of believers.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a pastor, theologian, and teacher who lived in Germany during World War II. He called upon Christians to step up, to speak, and to act against the atrocities of the Nazis. His words still make sense today in the life of our churches: "Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act." Our very inaction casts a decisive vote for the opposite of what we want our churches to be—a blessing to God.

The good news is that church members don't have to be master carpenters or prayer warriors. The beauty of the church body is that there is a place for everyone and a way for all to serve according to their talents and abilities.

Ask Yourself:

1. Am I using my muscles to work for the Lord and my church?
2. Am I staying toned by stretching my faith muscles in new and different ways within the church?

"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." Galatians 6:10.

Lord, place opportunities in my path and show me how You would have me serve in practical ways that will bless You, bless the people around me, and bless my church. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Vicky Kendig

THE HEALTHY CHURCH IS WORKING OUT

Philippians 3:10-14 – *“I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”*

Paul reminds us in these verses that there is something strenuous about the Christian life, and about the life of the healthy congregation. There is a “pressing on” toward our goal that involves both “reaching forward” and “forgetting” what's behind. Paul uses this athletic imagery to communicate his conviction that there is a kind of spiritual exertion involved in our calling as believers, and as churches. The prize of our spiritual competition is nothing less than Christ who has called us: “to know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings,” that after “being conformed to his death” we will “attain to the resurrection of the dead.” With such an incredible prize before us, the Church is called to stretch up and push on toward the call of Christ. That's a lifelong workout!

Of course, any exertion requires a little muscle. My wife Brittany and I have returned to working out in the last few months. We learned early on what little muscle we had to work with! In the months (or longer!) since we had regularly worked out, we had experienced muscle atrophy from lack of use: tissues in our legs, arms, abs, and elsewhere had broken down since they were apparently not needed.

Soon however, we started to notice signs of growth. Each week Brittany returns from the gym with reports of increases in weights lifted and reps done, running is starting to feel fun for me, and we both feel much less sore. Where there was atrophy in our muscle tissues, now a process called hypertrophy is taking place: tissues are being torn and stretched and then rebuilt with greater mass and tenacity.

It doesn't take much imagination to see similar processes at work in our churches. Without stretching forward, pressing on, and exerting the muscles of our callings, gifts and resources, spiritual atrophy takes place. When a congregation becomes content or even apathetic towards its continuing mission, or about its worship or discipleship, those very “tissues” begin to break down, negatively affecting other areas of the body of Christ as well.

When, on the other hand, a congregation (as a whole and individually) exerts itself to witness more faithfully, worship more authentically, and disciple more intentionally, then the Body is functioning well and growing. There has to be a forward, upward, and outward movement if our congregations are truly healthy. This is not because the goal is to make our churches bigger, hipper, or more productive. This is instead because we share an incredible prize that's worth pressing for: Christ himself!

Let's consider today where there is spiritual atrophy in our lives as believers and together in our churches. Let's ask the Spirit to show us where He is leading us onward toward our goal, so that Christ is reflected more in our churches, and His Kingdom comes in our communities. Let's ask for grace to press on together. And then let's be prepared for a little soreness.

Lord, thank You for the marvelous invitation You have given us to share in Your life, death, and resurrection. Challenge us to press on in this great calling and enable Your Church to pursue our goal with renewed strength. We ask this for the sake of Your name, and by the power of the Spirit. Amen.

Chase B. Caldwell

A HEALTHY CHURCH ELIMINATES UNNECESSARY DISTRACTIONS

When I was in junior high and high school, I was blessed to work on large working ranches and wheat farms in Northwest Texas. Some of the wheat fields were 300 to 400 acres in size! It was my job to clean these fields of old crops and prepare them for the new planting season. It was important to begin to plow those large fields in a way that would be efficient, so as not to waste fuel or time.

I could begin by driving the tractor along the fence line on all four borders. I had to be very careful not to clip a fence post with the large equipment, plowing the ground to disturb the settled soil to receive rain and moisture, making sure weeds and trash were cleared.

Another way to begin to plow the field would be to cut across the field, plowing the ground from one side of the field to the other in a straight path. Once I reached the opposite fence row, I could turn the tractor and plow back alongside the ground I'd just plowed. This was a focused and efficient way to accomplish the task of preparing the field for the next harvest.

To keep the path of the tractor and plow straight, I was taught by a wise older man to find an object to place my focus on the opposite side of the field. I was told to keep my eyes on that focus point and that I should not turn the tractor to the left or to the right all the way across the field. When I would get to the opposite side of the field, I would look back on a straight path of freshly plowed ground!

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." (Hebrews 12:1-3).

So, we can place our focus on Jesus! He will work through us to prepare the earth for His harvest! We can clear the way for the gospel, seizing every moment of the day to be tools in the hands of God! We are allowing Him to use us for His Kingdom and glory!

"Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near." (James 5:7-8).

Lord, I am tired of trying to serve You without fully trusting You. I confess my habit of relying on my own strength and acknowledge my total dependence on You. Guide me as I move into Your will for my life. Grace me with the kind of faith that will strengthen Your church and bring all into relationship with You. Amen

Charlie Dodd

IN A HEALTHY CHURCH, THERE ARE NO “LONE RANGERS” ALLOWED

This title refers to a church that is growing and vibrant, with no “Lone Ranger” members that cause dissension. All members should support one another, whatever their talents might be.

1 Corinthians 12:25-27 states that the church body should have no discord. The verses read: “so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” However, harmony in the church is not always the case. Even in Waco, churches have split over different principles and/or reasons. Whenever a member decides to do his or her own thing, discord can and probably will happen.

The fictional character, the Lone Ranger, who was popular when I was about ten years old, was a champion for truth, justice, and equality. His name was somewhat of a misnomer. He was the only survivor of six Texas Rangers who were ambushed. His mission in life was to bring peace and keep order in the American Wild West. And to help him do so, he was accompanied by his faithful friend, Tonto. So, as you can see, the Lone Ranger did not work alone!

His creed included:

1. I believe that to have a friend, a man must be one.
2. That all men are created equal.
3. That God put the firewood there, but that every man must gather and light it himself.
4. In being prepared physically, mentally, and morally to fight when necessary for what is right.
5. In my Creator, my country, my fellow man.

So, in terms of the “Body of Christ”, like our bodies, all our functions need to work together. Yet, when “junk” is accumulated, proper elimination is required, much like our urinary/excretory system is designed to do.

Ponder these words from Titus 3:9 – *“But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.”*

In conclusion, the title of this devotional seems to imply that a church will not function correctly if some members go off on a tangent and cause disruptions or divisions among their congregation. I would rather see members who put church above self, seek out their own “Tonto's”, and work with faithful friends for the overall good of their fellowships. Then, by giving well thought-out recommendations through your administrative leadership, these improvements will be heard and acted on more responsibly, and you, like the “Lone Ranger” of the Wild West, will not be acting alone, but be more appreciated and respected by your peers for promoting peace, unity, and harmony for your church’s future. I offer you this prayer in poetic form:

Lord, I pray

That we be of one accord.

Void of distractions

That lead to discord.

Be our help and guide

Each and every day.

To find our place of service

That we will always follow your way!

In Christ's name, Amen.

Ben Hagins

IN A HEALTHY CHURCH, THE ORGANIZATIONAL FUNCTIONS ARE FOCUSED

"Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:34-40).

Have you ever noticed the human tendency to complicate things? After God delivered His people out of slavery in Egypt, he gave them Ten Commandments. All the people were present for the reading of the commandments: one per finger.

Let us fast forward to the New Testament. Somehow the original ten had become 613 laws. The religious leaders meant well; they wanted additional laws in place to ensure the keeping of the original ten. But how can anyone remember and keep 613 laws?

One day a religious leader decided to test Jesus by asking Him to name the most important commandment. And here is where Jesus did His thing, which is the opposite of what the religious leaders had done over time. Jesus took all the commands and simplified them into two all-encompassing commands: Love God, love your neighbor. Once again, their minds were blown.

There is a lesson here for the church. We tend to make church more complicated than it needs to be. When Jesus ascended into heaven, he gave the Church this assignment: *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus said it in two sentences. Is it possible we have made church more complicated than Jesus intended?

Sometimes when I look at our church calendar, I am certain we have made it harder, and busier, than necessary. There seems to be so much going on within our walls that I wonder if any of our members have time to reach out to their neighbors and friends. Are we giving our congregation time to go make disciples?

Take time to evaluate your church programming. Ask yourself a few questions:

1. Does this activity/event fall in line with Jesus' assignment to the church?
2. If not, can it (and should it) be redesigned?
3. Or, does this program need to be eliminated?

These same questions can be asked of us as individuals, regarding the way we spend our time. Are we spending time doing unessential things? Are these things keeping us from our mission?

It will not be easy to eliminate programs that have been in place for a number of years. But if we want to be about Jesus' mission, we will do what it takes to focus on the essentials.

Lord, help me to evaluate my own life. Show me things that are distracting me from Your mission. Give me the courage and determination to eliminate those things. Show me the things I am to focus on in order to stay true to Your mission. Help us, as a church, to evaluate our programs. May we be willing to redesign or eliminate programs that do not serve our purpose of reaching the world for Your Kingdom. May we work together in this endeavor to follow Your leadership in all we do as Your church. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Marcy Smith

IN A HEALTHY CHURCH, SPIRITUAL VITALITY IS EVIDENT IN WORSHIP

"Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.... Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; ..." (Psalm 95:1,2,6).

Worship is to the Body of Christ as breathing is to the human body. Breathing is a two-part process - inhaling and exhaling - opposite, yet equally vital parts of the respiratory cycle. So too does worship consist of two components. The Body of Christ comes together to offer praise - to participate in worship. That worship (exhaling) is expressed in prayers of thanksgiving, through music, and through the giving of offerings. Worship is the personal act of reconnection - completing the cycle that was begun when *"the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."* (Genesis 2:7). Just as exhaling follows inhaling for the human body, worship when seen as exhaling, is the natural response by members of the Body of Christ to having received (inhaled) grace and blessings from God, the Father. The healthy body of Christ will no more attempt to suppress worship than even the strongest human will attempt to refrain from exhaling. It is a church marked by enthusiastic worship that experiences the outpouring of God's bountiful blessings.

Ask yourself:

1. How does my exhaling (worship) compare to my inhaling (blessings from God)?
2. Am I sharing with others the many ways that God can and does bless our lives?
3. Does my participation in worship bring glory and honor to God?

Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods." (Psalm 96:1-4).

Lord, breath into my spirit so that I might express gratitude with words, songs, and offerings. Help me to respond to Your blessings with thanksgiving. Guide me to pour my whole heart into the expression of that gratitude as I fellowship with others so that they may learn of the bounty that is theirs to receive. I ask this in the holy and righteous name of Your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Jewel Lockridge

A HEALTHY PRAYER LIFE LEADS TO A HEALTHY CHURCH BODY

"A chain is only as strong as its weakest link." – English Proverb

What a concept. Being only as strong as the weakest part of something. If that weak part gives out, the rest of the entity cannot stand. The human body acts the same way – if any system is not working properly, the body is not complete (nor is it truly healthy). The church body behaves similarly – when one "system", or aspect, is not functioning as it should, the "body" is not healthy. Period.

Prayer is vital to the church body. It is the essence of what keeps the body going – we breathe in the presence of the Holy Spirit, we breathe out praises and prayers. Without the oxygen to keep the body going, the body will disintegrate. Without prayer, the church body will collapse. Prayer is the lifeline to life. It is our communication with the Father who fulfills all our needs. Without it, the church will surely perish.

Are you longing for a "surviving" church or a "thriving" church body? One person cannot carry the burden to pray for your church body. We all know who I'm talking about – we all have those people in our church. We ask them to pray because they pray "well" or are "blessed" with the gift of prayer. Unfortunately for those of us who may not be blessed with the "right words", everyone must be held responsible to pray for themselves and each other. The Father LOVES to hear the prayers of His children, even if we feel they sound trite and ridiculous. Just hearing us speak to Him, cry out to Him, love Him, and praise Him brings Him great joy! Philippians 4:6 gives us the reminder, *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."* We should pray about and for all things.

Just as the Respiratory System works for the human body, prayer works for the church body. Breathing comes naturally. Prayer does not. But they are both important to the survival of the body. Prayer is something we have to constantly practice. If you saw the movie, "War Room", you would have noticed that they wrote out their prayers – what a unique way to strengthen your prayer life! Led to pray for others? Ask them specifically how you can pray for them. Or just pray for them, even if it feels generic. Pray out loud in your car – there is something about vocalizing a prayer that makes it more real (at least it does to me). Just talk to God. I promise, you won't regret it.

Ask yourself:

- 1) Am I satisfied with my current prayer life?
- 2) What small step can I do to "improve" my current prayer life?
- 3) In what ways can I pray for the body of Christ at my church?

Matthew 6:9-13 - This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one." Amen.

Mary Beth Talley

BREATH OF GOD IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

One of the basic necessities of human life is our need to breathe. Although we often take it for granted, our bodies cannot survive without oxygen rich air filling our lungs. This invisible imperative is the key to health, growth, energy, and sustenance.

In the same way, the role of the Spirit is vital to the life of the church and those who lead it. As Baptists, we tend to get a nervous twitch when people start talking about the Holy Spirit. However, we must be careful not to allow negative past experiences, or present personal preferences, to diminish the clear desire of God to lead His church through the power of His Spirit.

On the night before Jesus went to the cross, He gathered His disciples and spoke His final words of instruction. There are many nuggets in that farewell discourse that are worth considering but let us not miss these three regarding the Spirit.

1. *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." (John 14:18).*

Child of God, you are not a spiritual orphan! God has not left you to fight your battles alone. He has not abandoned you to figure out the church without His help. The Father sent One who is like Jesus. He will guide you in truth, inspire you in worship, and empower you to serve.

2. *But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. (John 16:7).*

How could Jesus make this bold statement to His disciples? It seems hard to imagine a scenario where the Son of God's departure could be a blessing. But Jesus knew the Spirit would provide a presence and a power that went beyond His physical earthly limits. The Spirit was clearly a game changer in the mind of Christ. I wonder ... Do we live with this same mentality? Is the Holy Spirit's presence a game changer in our life and church?

3. *"Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." (John 14:12).*

I can't help but smile when I read those words. Jesus saw a future that we could not imagine. He saw a church beyond the cross. He saw a future beyond the grave. This is all because of the work of the Spirit! Although Jesus did incredible things, the work of the church through the power of the Spirit is an unstoppable force. Will you rely on the Spirit to do a greater work in your community and church?

As the spirit of God blows into our lives, scripture is clear that there will be implications. Sin will be revealed, salvation will be made known, and lives will be changed. Galatians 5:22-23 says, *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."*

Lord, give me a deep sensitivity to Your Spirit. Help me to live with an expectation of Your movement and love with a heart to obey. Breathe Your life into our churches and replace our self-sufficiency with an utter dependency on You! Inspire us to do more than our feeble hands can achieve and empower us to accomplish it for Your glory! May the fruit of my life always be a reflection of my faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Chris Sammons

A HEALTHY CHURCH IS FILLED WITH THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”
(Matthew 5:6).*

A healthy church, being the Body of Christ, recognizes that our individual and corporate focus should be on filling our hearts and minds with the truth of the gospel. We should all be hungry to fill that God-sized void. We need to first fill ourselves with spiritual nourishment so that we are healthy enough to offer that same life-saving manna to others.

By keeping a balanced diet of Scripture, prayer, worship, fellowship, and discipleship, we then have the energy, stamina, and determination to share the gospel with our neighbors, our friends, our co-workers, and others we encounter as we walk life’s journey.

One of my favorite thoughts is this: “Live in such a way that those who know you, but don’t know God, will come to know God because they know you.” Our “hungering and thirsting” for righteousness will be evident to others as we live for Him. Our appetites will be satisfied while we also encourage others to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Ask yourself:

1. Am I digesting a healthy, balanced diet of regular spiritual disciplines?
2. Am I using my energy to feed the world by sharing the gospel with those I meet?
3. Am I contributing to the overall spiritual nourishment of my church?

“For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. “Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.” Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. (John 6:33-35).

Lord, help me to hunger and thirst for Your righteousness. Give me the desire to be filled with Your love, grace, and peace in such a way that others will come to know You because I am sharing my love for You with them. Guide me to become an effective, contributing member of Your body as I fellowship and serve with other believers. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Judith Staples

A CHURCH IS STRONG WHEN IT IS HUNGRY

*"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."
(Matthew 5:6) (NIV)*

"You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat." Matthew 5:6 (MSG)

A strong church, a healthy church, is filled with men and women and children who have a hearty appetite for truth, the Gospel and the fullness of God's counsel found in Scripture. That spiritual appetite is stirred as the leaders, the pastors, the spiritual fathers and spiritual mothers, the teachers and mentors point to all people in the local Body the sufficiency of God. All in our congregation and all in our city are hungry – and humanity is constantly on the hunt to look for something that will truly satisfy and meet the deep, human need. We see the effects of the Fall from Genesis 3 in this constant drive to find something that will fill us. And in Christ, in the presence of God, we can find that true satisfaction – the manna and springs that bring life. Christ is our Bread and He is our Living Water.

By keeping a strong diet of time in the Word, of pressing into Jesus, of worship before a great God, of fellowship and connection with other believers, and of the obedience of discipleship, we will have spiritual energy, endurance, and determination to live a life that others will want to share in. Hungry people don't ask hungry people where to find food, but hungry people will run to the satisfied to find the source.

Ask yourself:

1. What are my spiritual disciplines and are they filled with a hunger for Jesus, relationally-driven and not programmatically-driven?
2. Am I using my spiritual energy to feed and to point others to the gospel of Jesus?
3. Am I contributing to the overall spiritual nourishment of my church or am I just a consumer and never a server?

*"For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."
"Sir," they said, "always give us this bread." Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life.
Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."
(John 6:33-35).*

Father, my prayer today is that You would give me the grace to hunger and thirst for Your righteousness alone. Give me the grace to desire to be filled with Your life. I want others today to see the deep satisfaction I have found in You. I have tasted and seen that You indeed are good, and generous in Your grace. I don't want to always eat when I gather with the Body, I want to be a servant. I want to set the table that all may see that my God saves and satisfies. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.

John Durham

A HEALTHY CHURCH EATS FREELY OF SPIRITUAL FOOD

1 Peter 2:2-3 "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."

As a fairly new mother, this passage of scripture greatly resonates with me. Over the past year I have observed my nearly one-year-old literally "cry out" for her nourishment. She has consistently cried out for this nourishment with expectancy that her mother would provide. Because of this continual "crying out," she has had continual growth. As her mother, watching her growth and development has been joyous and rewarding. From her first smile, to her first giggle, from the first time she rolled over, to the first time she crawled, and now as we watch her walk...we have been overjoyed at the development in her life.

As members of the Body of Christ, it is vital that we expectantly seek this nourishment and growth. I picture our Father in Heaven looking down and smiling as He sees His children develop in their spiritual growth. As His children, we must trust that as we seek Him, He will continually provide the nourishment we need to grow. The Lord desires for His children to grow into all that He has for them. He sees our potential, and He desires that we will continue to develop as we freely and expectantly go to Him for our fuel and sustenance.

The fear is that our development might plateau, and that we may not progress into all that God has for us...into the "full experience of salvation." As the body of Christ, may we never become stagnant in our growth. May we crave continually. May we grow consistently, as we seek to be more like Christ.

When we have tasted the goodness of God, we cannot help but crave for more and more of Him.

Psalm 34:8 "Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him."

Ask yourself:

1. Am I craving nourishment from the Lord through the disciplines of the study of scripture, the meditation on His word, through solitude and prayer, and through fellowship?
2. Am I consistently growing in these areas, or have I become stagnant in my development?
3. How am I assisting others as they seek to grow in Christ?

Heavenly Father, ignite a craving within my soul for more of You. Empower me as I seek to grow in You through Your word, through prayer, worship, and fellowship with other believers. Show me ways that I might assist others in their growth in You. Open my eyes to opportunities around me to help other believers in their spiritual development. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Tricia Patterson

THE HEALTHY CHURCH IS CONSTANTLY MOVING FORWARD

When I was in the military, I visited the city of Rome. It is a city full of ancient history and significant ties to Christianity. While in Rome, my buddies and I decided to rent a taxi to visit some of the city on our own. The four of us crammed inside the little Fiat and the driver proceeded to race through the city. He would point out various important sites and hardly ever stopped at an intersection, instead he would just honk his horn.

I noticed on the drive that he did not have a rearview mirror in his car, so I asked him why he did not have a mirror. He stated, "First rule in driving in Rome. What's behind me does not matter." We survived our little excursion, but his words have continued to speak to me all these years. Though the words may not be applicable for driving, when it comes to the Body of Christ these words are relevant.

Paul stated in Philippians 3:13-14, *"Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."*

Elsewhere Paul told the elders at Ephesus in Acts 20:24, *"However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace."*

The Christian life and the church as the Body of Christ is about moving forward. Even the Great Commission starts with the phrase "Go." The Lord Jesus as the head of the church has already given the command to the church, but too often we are looking in our rearview mirror to determine where we have been instead of looking at where we are going. Jesus makes this truth clear in his teachings. Luke 9:62 - "Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." The lesson is clear if we want to move forward, we cannot keep looking back because if we do, we will not see where we are going.

God has given us the command. He is the head of the church, so to not follow His command would be disobedience. The Bible says that if we love Him, we will obey Him.

Ask yourself:

1. Are there rituals, rules and regulations that keep the church from moving forward?
2. What is the vision that God has given me?
3. What must I do to implement that vision?
4. What must the members of the body do to move forward?
5. What are some obstacles that keep the church shackled to the past?

Lord, we pray that Your church will constantly be following Your commands and advancing forward for Your Kingdom. Help us to lay aside our past and look forward to what You have in store for us. Lord, we want to follow You! Show us Your path so that we may follow. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Bruce Worley

A SENSE OF AGREEMENT MOBILIZES THE MOVEMENT OF THE CHURCH

"I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought." (1 Corinthians 1:10).

As members of Christ's church, we are not called to agree on all aspects of worship, government or life. We are called, however, to be unified in two of the church's central purposes – glorifying our Lord and sharing Christ with a lost world. Agreement around a common purpose creates a bond and motivation found on most any successful team, whether the organization is religious, business, athletic, military or civic.

These two purposes are a direct product of Jesus' words in Matthew 22, where He identifies the greatest commandments:

"Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37-40).

Simplified, we are commanded to love God and love others. These selfless commands focus our energy outwardly and cut across all denominations, styles of worship, political affiliations and even sports allegiances!

Ask yourself:

1. Am I glorifying the Lord in my home, work and church?
2. Do I love and value others above myself?
3. Am I sharing Christ in the world around me?

"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 15:5-6).

Lord, help me to live my life following Your command to love You and love others. Give me the desire to glorify You in my life and the courage to share Jesus in the world around me. Bring unity to Your church that will mobilize us to accomplish Your will. And help that sense of agreement to start with me! In Jesus' name, Amen.

Eric Shero

A HEALTHY CHURCH HAS A SENSE OF WELL-BEING

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 15:5-6).

When you attend an event like a concert or a big game, it is easy to be wowed by the showy stuff: the military flyover beforehand, the fireworks show afterwards, even the size of the venue. These are the elements of the show designed to grab your attention, to make your eyes widen with astonishment and your mouth smile with glee.

But when you step behind the curtain and see what it takes to make it all come together, you suddenly find yourself far more impressed with all it takes to make these shows happen than you are with the shows themselves. To see so many people working as a team, from upper management to food vendors, and to see the sheer number of details attended to is more astonishing than even the most explosive pyrotechnic display.

In the human body, the Endocrine System serves this function, coordinating the movement and activity of the body and ensuring that its many actions and reactions serve the body's overall well-being. By making sure that every part of the body does its job in conjunction with the others, the endocrine system keeps the show running smoothly.

The church body is composed of many members, but the Bible commands and encourages each of those members to work in harmony, striving for the same central goals instead of pushing for individual agendas. Like the human body's Endocrine System, the church's functions should be administered not by one member or one group, but by all the members, acting as a coordinated and capable team. The church that wants to do well with the big work of the kingdom of God must first learn to work together behind the scenes.

Ask yourself:

1. Am I contributing to the harmony and unity of my church?
2. Am I prioritizing peace with others in my relationships?
3. Am I using my spiritual gifts to build up the church?

“Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.” 2 Corinthians 13:11.

Lord, I thank You for every member of my church and for the ways they all contribute to its health and mission. Help me to work alongside them in love and harmony for the good of Your church. Give me the strength and discipline to be an encouragement to all I encounter and a force for peace and togetherness. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Daniel Camp

THE HEALTHY CHURCH: THAT YOU MAY MULTIPLY GREATLY

“Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors promised you. “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” (Deuteronomy 6:3-7).

Many of us understand God’s command for us to lead our families in Christ. As God cares for our individual families, He also cares for the church - His Body and Bride. He has given the church the gift of pastors, teachers, and leaders in order to *“to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up”* (Ephesians 4:12). Thus, the members of the church are called and led to do the work of Christian ministry, building up the current body, and multiplying disciples for church growth.

Just as we have been commanded by God to teach our families how to love Him with all their heart, soul, and might, we have also been commissioned by God to *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:19-20). Furthermore, God has provided a pattern for multiplying disciples in the church when Jesus declared that His disciples would be *“my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* (Acts 1:8). For the disciples, Jerusalem was their starting point and home base. Judea was the larger region and Samaria was a neighboring region. Jesus’ pattern for reaching the world starts at home and goes out from there into all the nations.

God’s Word transforms our hearts and very lives. We teach our families to follow God as we follow Him. We are trained by pastors to minister in the church. We go into our city, state, nation, and world with the gospel. And we multiply the church by making disciples to do as we do, taking the gospel with them as they go.

Ask yourself:

1. Am I following Christ in loving the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, and might?
2. Am I leading my family to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, and might?
3. Am I ministering in my church, encouraging members to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, and might?
4. Am I sharing the gospel of Christ with others so that they may know to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, and might?

Lord, may we always love You with all our heart, soul, and might. You have prepared good works for us to walk in; we pray that we would follow You in these works. Specifically, we pray that we would follow You in leading our families and churches into the work of ministry. We pray that we would take advantage of opportunities to share the gospel. And we pray that we would be persistent in teaching our disciples to make their own disciples. Amen.

Doris and P.J. King

A HEALTHY CHURCH MAKES DISCIPLES WHO MAKE DISCIPLES

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.” (2 Tim 2:2).

Healthy churches are reproducing churches. God has chosen the church to make His name known around the world. The great commission to go and make disciples is not only for a limited few. As a disciple of Jesus, we are all called to go and make disciples.

How do we do this? We follow Jesus. The knowledge we gain from reading scripture, from sermons or Bible studies or our prayer time is not for us alone. What God is teaching us we are to pass this information on to others, and to encourage them to pass on what God is teaching them to others, who then teach others...

There are nearly seven billion people on the earth. How long will it take for each of them to hear the name of Jesus and of His saving grace? How many people die every day without the hope that we have of eternal life?

Waco has a population of approximately 129,030 people. If I share with one person a day every day for a week, I would share with seven people. But what if I shared with five people and encouraged each of them to share with five people? In those same seven days 78,125 people would have heard the gospel.

Granted not all those people will believe but the growth would be exponential. More people could be reached if we make disciples who make disciples.

Ask yourself:

1. What is God teaching me?
2. What does God want me to do with what He is teaching me?
3. Who does God want me to share this with?

“Again, Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” (John 20:21).

Lord, help me to be faithful to share the gospel along with the things You are teaching me every day with those people You put in my life. Give me the eyes to see lost people. Help me not be so busy with my own life that I miss those opportunities to share the gospel with those You bring into my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Michelle Cagle

A HEALTHY CHURCH IS A CHURCH THAT IS REACHING AND REPRODUCING PEOPLE FOR CHRIST

The Reproductive System of the Body of Christ

"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" (John 14:6).

A healthy church is focused on reaching people for Christ through the power of the gospel. After reaching people for Christ, it must teach members the ways of Christ, the truths of Christ, and make sure that its members possess the life of Christ. It is the life conformed to Him, and transformed by Him, that is authentic in possessing the power of His resurrection life in us.

By focusing on the spiritual disciplines of personal growth and discipleship in small groups, members should be challenged to share the life-changing gospel with those around them as a lifestyle. They should be equipped to proclaim what they have come to know personally in their relationship with Jesus with others. "As they go" they should share the good news of their Savior and Lord and let His life shine through their words and actions. The goal of our Lord is to reproduce His life in us and others.

"...If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5).

Ask yourself:

1. Is Jesus really the way, the truth and the life for me?
2. Am I abiding in Him?
3. Am I sharing consistently His life with others?
4. Am I prepared to share the good news?

"Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction." (2 Timothy 4:2).

Lord, help me to seek Your way, Your truth and Your life that I might truly know You and the power of a changed life. Help me to walk with You daily as I seek to grow in the disciplines that will cause me to mature and be equipped so that Your life flows abundantly through me. Lord, help me to share Your good news in Your power with Your words so that others can come to know You and be equipped to share Your life with others as well. May You be glorified, and Your Kingdom come through me and through the lives of others. Amen.

Jim Ingram

THE HEALTHY CHURCH HAS A SENSE OF IDENTITY AND UNITY

"I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought." (1 Corinthians 1:10).

"Is Christ divided?" (1 Corinthians 1:13).

"Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves." (Philippians 2:1-3).

Often people and organizations face an identity crisis in which they lose sight of their original purpose and have difficulty functioning. In several letters to churches, Paul encourages church members to search for the unique skills God had gifted them with and contribute those to the work of the church. However, if either the individual member or the church as a whole has lost its sense of identity and unity, even the most professional skill assessment will not allow the church to meet its mission.

In verse 13 of the Corinthian passage, the question is raised: "Is Christ divided?" The resounding answer is, "Of course not." If that is true and if Christ is the founder and head of the church, how can the church be divided and still call itself "the Body of Christ"? In the Philippians passage, Paul suggests that Christians should be "like-minded." How can that ever be possible in a congregation that has a mixture of ages, political leanings and personalities? Is it even possible for two members of a church to be "like-minded" about anything? Probably not. However, Paul is not suggesting that we have to adopt all the same beliefs about a myriad of topics in general. His idea is that on the Lordship of Christ and the positioning of His church as the instrument through which the world learns about Christ, we must be of "one mind." In addition, if there is any group of people on earth who have the necessary ingredients to be united in purpose, it is the church. It is only when we are united together in Christ that we are able to appreciate and encourage the individual and unique gifts each member brings to the fellowship.

Our Father, we are aware that for any organization to be successful, there must be unity. The scriptures emphasize that the body is to be "fitly joined together and each member functioning in oneness." Help us to recognize our gifts and do our part in helping to make the church what You would have it be. Let us, Your children, use this privilege to build the Kingdom up by building up the church. This prayer we make in Jesus' name, Amen.

Bill and Marlene Reed

A HEALTHY CHURCH HAS CHURCH LEADERS WHO KNOW HOW TO MAINTAIN VALUES AND VISION

“... to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Ephesians 4:12-13

The healthy church, being a healthy body of believers, is recognized and identified by the values and vision Christ has bestowed on its leaders. Leaders who intentionally live out Christ's values each day, who continuously proclaim Christ's vision for the church so the body of believers can bind themselves in unity of purpose. Leaders act as watchmen ensuring nothing, no person, no philosophy, no doctrine or deceit can enter in to the body of believers that would distract from achieving Christ's vision for the church.

In the gospel of Mark, chapter 8, Jesus demonstrates his determination to live His Father's plan by living a value-based vision of conquering sin for His Father's kingdom. When Peter tried to comfort his King, Jesus rebuked him saying *“Get behind me, Satan!”*, *“You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”*

Jesus teaches us that strong healthy leaders must:

- Correct others who wander from the vision.
- Help the team lay aside personal agendas in order to achieve the vision.
- Pay the price to reach their vision.

“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.” (Ephesians 4:14-15).

Robert Duke

THE SHADES AND HUES OF A HEALTHY CHURCH

Did you know that the skin is the largest organ of the body? It seems simple on the surface, but it is actually a very complex organ. It offers protection from infection and disease, helps maintain body temperature, and gives beautiful color. If we break down the skin, it has three complex layers that have many functions. When viewed under a microscope, it illustrates an elaborate, awe-inspiring design beyond rendition. Why is this important? It shows design. Job writes: *"Did you not...clothe me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews?" (Job 10:10-11)*. Not only do we see God's love and mercy, we see Him fashioning us. David writes in Psalm 139:13-14, *"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made."* The idea here is the process of "weaving". Dr. Alan Gillen writes: "Like the wondrous weaving of the skin into the blueprint of the body's covering, God's plan (for His church) often appears like a woven tapestry" (from "The Wonderfully Made Design of the Skin and Its Microbiome").

Through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, God has established His church. In doing so, God says that each one of us has a role. Like our skin, we are to be woven together as a group of believers. Galatians 6:1-2 states: *"Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."* The ideas of transparency and accountability shout loud. The Gospel does not call us to autonomy and isolation. It calls us to unity and integration. We, like our skin, are called to be a tightly-woven group; one that shares our hearts, struggles, joys, and fears. We are called to remind each other of the grace of God. Let us ponder on Romans 2:4 and remember that the wondrous beauty of Christ is what leads us to repentance.

Finally, just as skin has many beautiful, attractive hues, the church also should be attractive. Our unity, encouragement, and love should be attractive to the world. We should glow with the beauty of Jesus. We should give off a pleasing sight with our words and actions. Like those who seek Jesus in John 12:21, the world should see the church and desire Jesus. How can you, as a believer in Christ, shine as a beautiful hue to the world to create a desire to see Jesus? How can you, as a church, embrace the Gospel and share your hearts to be refined through confession, repentance, and accountability?

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Kindness, Your desire to have an intimate relationship with us, and the gift of Jesus Christ. Thank You that we have fellowship as a church and can run to Christ in the midst of our sin. May we live in a way that reflects His love so others will be drawn to the beauty of Jesus. In His name we pray, Amen.

Joshua Miller

IN A HEALTHY CHURCH, THE BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS ARE WELL ORGANIZED BUT FLEXIBLE FOR MINISTRY

Jane used to run at least three times a week, but increasingly it had become difficult because her bones had become too frail. Her doctor said it was because she had failed to eat calcium-rich foods that would have strengthened the bones in her body. Although her workout clothes and shoes were ready to go, her body was not. In fact, her back had started to curve and because of the excruciating pain she experienced while running, Jane had given up the sport altogether.

The human body is much like the church. It needs a strong skeletal system to give support and structure to the body. Working with muscles, the skeletal system assists in free and pain-free movement. While bones are hard, they can be broken and weakened if not cared for properly. The skeletal system in the church is the business and financial operations of the church. Its philosophy should be guided first by biblical principles and God's Spirit, and secondly by business "wisdom". Once a biblical philosophy is in place, then business principles ensure that strong operations will support and protect the activities of the church throughout its lifetime.

Scripture is full of business principles. For example, Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, advises him to delegate authority by empowering others to handle the minor issues (Exodus 18); and Jesus tells a parable with a planning theme about building a tower. *"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?" (Luke 14:28)*. These passages show the importance of organization and planning, making good hiring decisions, putting people into roles that fit their strengths, developing a plan to carry out clear objectives, and organizing a group to accomplish a desired goal.

The self-check below provides eight principles that every church should consider. Has your church . . .

- Kept current its articles of incorporation and/or bylaws, and are they followed?
- Established a strong administrative process with appropriate leadership boards and/or committees in place?
- Developed a mission and vision statement that helps focus priorities, with which every member is familiar?
- Identified strategic objectives and developed a plan to achieve them?
- Created responsible financial oversight (e.g., budgeting, monitoring, timely reporting, reviewing of spending, and so forth)?

- Developed a strong leadership team and a purposeful employee and volunteer management system that defines clear expectations and creates an environment which motivates and engages them?
- Developed an improvement process which includes soliciting feedback from members, volunteers and employees?
- Created a culture of excellence and accountability which are sensitive to the realities of sometimes limited resources.

Heavenly Father, help us to have a strong but flexible church skeletal system so that we can run with perseverance and endurance the race that you have set before us in building Your kingdom (Mathew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15). Amen.

Evelyn Ofong

THE HEALTHY CHURCH: MANY MEMBERS BUT ONE BODY

“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.” (1 Corinthians 12:12-14).

In 2002, I sustained an injury while working for a mobile home manufacturer. One of the axles I was installing, on which the weight of the mobile home rested, slipped out of my grip and fell onto my right foot. The 200 plus pound axle severely lacerated, crushed and fractured my right pinky toe.

I was amazed how the pain from an injury to such a small part of my body affected just about everything I did and needed to do. One injured toe which is connected to a foot, which is connected to an ankle, and so forth, effected so many other things. I couldn't run and I couldn't walk without assistance. I was reminded that oftentimes we tend to take our abilities, what we have and who we have in our lives, for granted until they're no longer present.

To make matters worse, I was new to the city and didn't know very many people. I was new to the church I was attending and wasn't very talkative as a result. It was obvious I had an injured foot as I showed up to church one day with my foot wrapped. I was asked what had happened by a few members of the church and as I was explaining the accident, several of them said to be sure I contacted them if I needed help with anything. I tend to resist being dependent on others, so I wasn't quick to take them up on their offers.

My toe injury reminded me that all body parts must work together so the body functions well as a whole. As followers of Christ, we are connected to every other believer within His body. As unique as we may all be, we are still dependent on each other. As all of our body parts work together as a whole; as church members we must work together in unity and oneness of purpose. Paul says, “The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don't need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don't need you!” (1 Corinthians 12:21).

In the same manner, no one in the body of Christ can say to another member that they are not needed. God has equipped each of us with gifts, talents, and abilities for the edification of the body. No one is more, or less than the other, and everything we do is important.

We are all one in Christ. We're called to serve Him, each other, and the world He gave His life for.

May we embrace this truth, Lord, and be a blessing to one another in Jesus' name,
Amen.

Orlando A. Pizarro

IN A HEALTHY CHURCH, THE BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS ARE WELL MAINTAINED TO SERVE THE CHURCH'S LIFE AND MINISTRY

Some might wonder why a devotional would be written about the importance of a healthy church taking good care of its buildings and grounds. Much like a healthy body, the church facilities need to be groomed and maintained so that the organization is well represented in its mission and ministry.

1 Corinthians 14:40 says it best: *"But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way."* Whether the cleaning and maintenance functions are completed by paid or volunteer staff members, we are being good stewards of God's resources when we take care of things properly. Fewer repairs and replacements are needed when the facilities are consistently following a well-developed maintenance and custodial plan.

What is the place of the church building in terms of ministry? It's a regular place for the Body of Christ to worship, learn, and fellowship, as well as to disciple people to become mature followers of Jesus Christ. An attractive location lets the community know that this church takes its faith journey very seriously. The location looks inviting for others to seek the Lord in a safe and healthy environment.

Throughout the ages, God has led His people to erect suitable places of worship and service. We are reminded in 1 Peter 2:9 that we are *"a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light."* Just as the body has many parts, the giftings of the church include preachers of the Word, worship leaders, teachers, and a whole variety of servers including those who maintain the buildings and grounds. When each part is done well, the church is not only healthy, but it is thriving.

Colossians 3:23 reminds us that *"whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters."* The workers who beautify the buildings, clean them up, and prepare them for services and events are an extremely important part of the Body of Christ. Appreciate them and support them in their ministry of service to advance and enhance the message of Jesus Christ to a needy world.

Ask yourself:

1. Do I treat my church facilities in a manner respectful of God and fellow believers?
2. Do I leave things better off than I found them?
3. Can I see ways I can help improve my church's buildings and grounds?

Lord, thank you for the opportunity to gather with a community of believers in a place of worship that You have provided. Help me remember what an important witness our facilities are to draw others in where they can learn about You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Craig Finley

IN A HEALTHY CHURCH, AN AWAKENING, PASSION AND HUNGER FOR GOD IS EVIDENT

The olfactory system is the sensory system used for olfaction, the sense of smell. As a church with an awakened passion and hunger for God's presence in all areas of ministry, the fruit of its efforts comes as an aroma of the loving Spirit of God in its leadership, producing a feeling of family and expectancy.

"And walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Ephesians 5:2).

The Body of Christ as a Healthy Church

How does the Olfactory System come into play within the Body of Christ?

Our sense of smell affects several areas of our daily lives. Awakened in the morning by the smell of coffee brewing and bacon cooking, smell says that there is something good. Be it breakfast, lunch, or something being grilled, your ability to smell causes your mouth to water, to hunger. A desire stirs up, "I need some of that!" You know that it's good. You can smell it, your mouth waters, and your appetite becomes insatiable.

The same with the church, generating more of the same love God showed us through Christ, a sweet-smelling aroma to God, we also do the same one to another within the Body. We help nourish the Church. To consume the bread of life produced by desire, passion and an awakening to the sweet-smelling aroma of the love of Christ.

Taste is even affected by smell. As the psalmist said, *"Taste and see that the Lord is good"*. Our spiritual olfactory system needs to be healthy to produce the taste of God's love. How often have we not been able to taste due to a head cold with a stopped-up nose? Appetite is not there, desire to eat is gone. Why? There is no flavor, no aroma.

2 Corinthians 2:14 says to the church, *"spread the aroma of the knowledge of Him everywhere."* In Him we become a fragrance that is diffused throughout the world. God doesn't only see what we do but He smells the scent produced by our lives.

Ask yourself:

1. Am I experiencing a desire of more of God's word that I may grow in Christ and share God's love?
2. Am I passionate to work and create an interest in others and see the church advance through my efforts?
3. Am I encountering anything that would hinder my taste for more of God in my daily walk?

Father, Today as You desire to have before You that sweet-smelling aroma of Christ's love for us, so may I be awakened with a passion and desire to see You work in my life in ways only You can. In my life, remove anything that would hinder the loss of appetite or hunger to worship You in spirit and truth. In the mighty name of Jesus, Amen.

Tom Gutierrez

IN A HEALTHY CHURCH, MEMBERS GIVE ONE ANOTHER SUPPORT WHEN THEY ARE IN NEED

Galatians 6:10b – *“let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”*

The hymn, *The Church’s One Foundation*, echoes “With His own blood He bought her and for her life He died.” That’s the Church He’s talking about – the gridiron of Christian soldiers, armed with the Word. What in the world do people do without the church? -- without someone to reach out a helping hand, to listen to their hurting hearts and bear their silent questions? Where else is a safe zone in the midst of fires all around? Inside the church, that’s where. There everyone struggles, but not alone.

Who does not, at some time, need a phone call, a note in the mail, a visit? You do. I do. Let us do good. May I be ready – ready to share my faith, my time, my gleanings from the Word. May I be passionate and compassionate in the service I render. In his book, *On the Anvil*, Max Lucado points out that either you are on the anvil, about to be placed on the anvil, or in the discard pile. Soldiers in battle pick up fellow soldiers, stand by them in the crucible. May I never lose sight of my marching orders, to love others as Christ loves me. May I never ask, ‘who is the soldier?’, or “who is my neighbor?” I am. You are.

Ask yourself:

1. Who in my church has a need that I can meet?
2. Could a group of church members gather together to meet a fellow church member’s need?
3. How is God leading me to give support to a fellow church member?

“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ.” Galatians 6:2

Father, help me see more clearly the needs of others even before they ask. Help me to love more dearly those who march beside me and those who are holding me up. Help me to love others more nearly like You love me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Reita Rea Hawthorne

IN A HEALTHY CHURCH, MEMBERS ENCOURAGE AND ASSIST IN EACH OTHER'S AREA OF SERVICE

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10a, 12: "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.....Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

The heart of the human body pumps blood into the circulatory system. This system then transports nutrients and oxygen to all parts of the body. If a blockage occurs in that system, a vital organ or limb dies, and the body weakens.

In the same way, every member of a healthy church supports the other members in their lives and in their ministries. For example, a Bible teacher opens the Word of God each week to help class members learn how to apply its truth to their lives. In turn, those class members pray for the teacher and encourage each other. A choir member leads out in worship as the congregation lifts their voices in praise to God each week.

Each member of a successful church supports every other member. As an old song expresses about love and marriage, "You can't have one without the other." Small groups, homebound teams, pastoral care teams, prayer teams, and other caregiving ministries provide many avenues of service.

As the writer of Ecclesiastes contends, we are stronger together, we raise each other up when we fall, and we can defend ourselves against those who strive to weaken our mission and our ministry. Not only will we, thus, strengthen the body, but the blessings will return to us.

Ask yourself:

1. What gifts and talents can I contribute to the Body of Christ?
2. What ministries and programs in the church need these gifts and talents?
3. How can I pray for these ministries, church leaders, and other church members?
4. Who do I know that I can help up and encourage this week?

"Ship your grain across the sea; after many days you may receive a return." (Ecclesiastes 11:1).

Father God, reveal to me the talents and gifts You would have me use to encourage, strengthen, and defend Your church and its members. Show me where and how to use these gifts and talents for Your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Gayle Shipp

IN A HEALTHY CHURCH, SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES ARE TAUGHT, PRACTICED, AND EXPECTED

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matt. 28:19-20).

Healthy churches go beyond evangelism to the last part of the Great Commission – teaching new believers as well as mature believers to obey all that Christ taught. In a healthy church the disciplines of Bible study, prayer, private and corporate worship, ministry to others, witnessing, and giving are regularly and faithfully taught.

These basics provide a foundation for believers to build lives of real discipleship. Continued growth and leadership also involve the “everything” Jesus commanded, such as loving your neighbor and your enemy, mastering your speech, removing the plank from your own eye first, or not hiding your light under a basket. It becomes a continuous, life-long process of becoming more Christ-like.

In healthy churches, relationships are built that provide for accountability to each other and there is an expectation of growth in Christian maturity, continuously moving toward the example of Christ. Such teaching happens in formal settings such as from the pulpit and classes, but also informally in committee meetings, conversations, and in serving side by side in ministry activities.

This sanctifying or purifying process is somewhat like the function of the lymphatic system in the human body. This largely unknown system connects the circulatory and immune systems. It absorbs all manner of toxins and wastes and moves them out of the body. It is a continuous and very important system to the total health as well as protection of the body.

Maturing disciples also seek to protect and nurture the church for which Christ died. Leaders (always growing, never fully arriving) actively take actions in their own lives, and in the life of the church, that function as the “lymphatic system”. They stop gossip and seek truth, heal conflict and develop unity. They seek forgiveness and reconciliation when fellowship is disrupted. They work toward a shared vision in humility, not pushing their own agenda. They make suggestions rather than offering criticisms. A checkup of our discipleship “lymphatic system” might include:

1. Am I neglecting any of the commands Jesus taught?
2. If so, what needs to change in my life?
3. How is my church handling potential hindrances to its health?
4. How can I prayerfully change to be beneficial to the health of my church?

“The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.” (Luke 6:40).

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.” (2 Timothy 2:2).

Larry Burrow

IN A HEALTHY CHURCH, EFFORTS ARE MADE TO STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH TO BE STRONG IN THE LORD

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9).

Could it be that God's call for strength and courage is actually a call to discipleship: a more mature Christian reaching out a hand of strength to a novice, and the novice having the courage to take it and hold on?

Discipleship is key to the strength and vigor of a healthy church. But discipleship is not just about someone with more spiritual insight pouring themselves into a newer follower. God is divinely personal, and each member of the body has the opportunity to listen to God and learn from him. "My sheep hear My Voice..." Any true believer has the joy of hearing the strong voice of the Father because each has a strong and individual relationship with Him. We see this in families, where each child interprets a parent's love and guidance through the lens of their own personality and individual makeup. Therefore, discipleship is a two-way teaching opportunity as long as both parties are teachable. One encourages the other with years of depth and understanding; one with the vigor of youthful discovery. Like a beating heart, there is an ebb and flow to the Life being shared.

When God tells us in Philippians 4:13, that we *"can do all this through Him who gives me strength"*, a new believer would see that as a promise to leap buildings in a single bound or score a touchdown on every play. A more mature believer sees the reference back to verse 12, where Paul says that we learn to be content in EVERY circumstance, whether we walk through the building or over it; whether we score or punt. Both views are important to keep the church's heart beating properly. Referring once again to Joshua 1:9,

Ask yourself:

1. Do I feel the strength and courage of the Spirit leading me into a discipleship relationship, either as a new believer or as a seasoned saint?
2. Am I ready to listen to the voice of my Father and let Him lead me into vulnerability and openness with another believer?
3. Can I make a list right now of the people in my life whom I have both taught and gained knowledge from and thank God for the impact they have had on my life?

"You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message." (2 Timothy 2:15).

Dear God, You are absolute strength and power. Nothing is too great for You. I open my heart and soul to You knowing that You will give me the strength and courage to be everything my church needs me to be. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Chris K. Wommack

A HEALTHY CHURCH DETECTS EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL ATTACKS AND ADDRESSES THEM

“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:1-2).

Attacks are inevitable. Petty controversies, stubborn dissension, and competing factions are symptoms of a system under attack. Attacks are inevitable...even on healthy churches. Effective defense is *not* inevitable.

Just as a healthy body recognizes and fights off attacks, so also a healthy church...and healthy church leaders...recognize threats and act to remove them. How are they recognized? If an idea, personality, opportunity, strategy or decision begins to fragment the “unity of the Spirit” at work in the hearts and minds of the people, then a potential attack is underway. That does not mean that everyone must agree on every decision. It means that any act, idea or direction that carries potential for division should be prayerfully and gracefully considered. As the Scripture says, humility, gentleness, patience and acceptance must mark out the path we walk. If these markers are not present in us, then we may be leading the attack rather than the defense.

How are threats removed? Follow the example of Paul. First, surrender to Jesus, “I, a prisoner for the Lord...” Then you won’t be susceptible to surrendering to the attack. Second, confront the threat, idea, or person directly “urging” them to live worthy of their calling not from you or your church but from God Himself. Third, move toward “peace”. Don’t wait for things to blow over or resolve on their own. Be a “peacemaker,” and you will discover why Jesus calls you a “son of God”.

Attacks are inevitable. Effective defense is not. “Keep the unity of the Spirit with the peace that binds us.”

Ask Yourself:

1. What is threatening the “unity of the Spirit” in my church right now?
2. Of these four markers (humility, gentleness, patience and acceptance), which is most difficult for me to demonstrate?
3. How can I be a peacemaker in this situation?

Father, you called me to this church for Your agenda, purpose, and plan. Would You help me to say and do only what will contribute to keeping the unity of the Spirit? Please protect that unity in Your church today. In Jesus’ name I pray this. Amen.

Josh Vaughan

IN A HEALTHY CHURCH, INFORMATION IS SHARED THROUGH VARIOUS MEDIA AND METHODS

Ephesians 4:4-6 – *“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”*

Reflect on the body’s nervous system and how its design has implications for the entire Body:

- Communication.
- Feeling – pain, discomfort, energy and drive.
- Coordination.
- Response.

Have you ever witnessed a person whose central nervous system was not working in cooperation with the rest of their body? How did you notice their reaction to be? Did this cause their body to work more effectively or less productively?

Consider the church, both locally and globally, and how its mission is impacted positively by a common sense of purpose and focus. How does a lack of healthy communication affect the church and its mission? In what ways can “the enemy” distort our communication? How can we combat the attacks of “the enemy” against our common goal and mission? Ephesians 6:11 – *“Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”*

It also says in Philippians 1:27: *“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.”* Explore ways that your personal and corporate communication can be found acceptable before God.

Ask yourself:

1. In what ways does your spiritual walk need to change in order to better provide the effective communication God will bless?
2. How will others see this change play out in your everyday life?

Heavenly Father, give us godly hearts, that our communications will be strong and glorify You. May our sense of purpose and focus help others come to know Jesus Christ because we communicate our love and devotion to Him. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Kip Osborne

IN A HEALTHY CHURCH, MEMBERS KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON

Our bodies communicate in various ways. When you stub your toe, the nervous system sends a message to your brain: "Ouch! I'm in pain!" In the same way, when you take a bite of your favorite dessert (chocolate cake, anyone?), the same nervous system sends a message from the taste buds to the brain: "Yum-good!" The nerves in our bodies send us instant messages, allowing us to react quickly and appropriately to a variety of signals. The Bible teaches us that the church is a body. As a body, it also has a nervous system that communicates with the other parts (members) of the church body.

Reflect for a moment: How is your church body communicating to its members? Do you have worship folders that are handed out on Sunday morning? What do they tell you? Do you have a regular newsletter that is sent to the members? What message is it sending? Do the members of your church communicate via e-mail or text? How about old-fashioned telephone or word of mouth? What kind of messages or signals is your church body's "nervous system" sending? Are the messages informative, uplifting, and in keeping with the church's mission? If we are not vigilant, our messages can slip into the "business as usual," mundane kind of communications that do not encourage and build up the body.

Churches are made up of all sorts of people: young and old, married and single, regular attendees and sporadic ones, those who are heavily involved and those whose participation is limited to sitting in the pew on Sunday morning. Regardless of their level of involvement, all church members should be informed about the church, its message and its activities. Paul told the Colossian church, *"Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."* Colossians 4:6

Ask yourself:

1. Is our conversation (communication) full of grace? Grace is the great and matchless gift that God gave to mankind through Jesus Christ.
2. Is our conversation (communication) seasoned with salt? In Paul's day, salt preserved food, especially meat. Things seasoned with salt would last; things that were not so treated would soon spoil. Our messages should contain lasting truths.
3. Is our conversation (communication) suitable for everyone? Regardless of the person's status in the church, our messages should be helpful to all.

In closing, think about this: No religion on earth emphasizes joy as much as Christianity. In the Bible, in our songs and hymns, in our messages to the world, Christians proclaim joy. Christianity is safe as long as Christians are characterized by joy. Pray that the life and message of your church is infused with joy.

Heavenly Father, may our conversations be filled with grace and seasoned with salt. Fill our hearts with joy that we may proclaim Your message to others and glorify You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Gary Williams

IN A HEALTHY CHURCH, THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS INCLUDES AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CONGREGATIONAL INPUT

“For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers.” (Proverbs 11:14).

I am currently undergoing rehab after a knee surgery. My therapist, in trying to help me understand the importance of my discipline in doing the exercises, explained to me the role of the nerves that run through my knee. He told me that they provide the necessary signals to my central nervous system that help to coordinate all the movement of my leg. If those nerves aren't healthy, it prevents important information from getting to that central nervous system. The result is that my knee and leg do not work at their full potential. Just like our bodies need the information and input from every part of the body to make it function properly, so the church needs input from every member. Just like the body has been carefully designed by God to be able to give that information in a healthy and structured way, so the church needs to have a purposeful and structured way in which members are able to participate in the functioning of the church and its ministry. There are a lot of ways that church members can be involved in decision-making in the church and not all of them are healthy for sure.

If a church does not intentionally design a healthy process for congregational input and involvement there will be processes that emerge that may not be healthy. Every church is made up of people with different gifts and abilities. Every person has an important part to play in making sure that the church fulfills its full potential of ministry. This is not something that will happen naturally or accidentally. If there is no design that acknowledges this truth, then only those who are the loudest or the strongest or the boldest will be heard in the decision-making process. Many churches have fallen victim to this dangerous trend just by not being proactive and faithful in understanding and carrying out the New Testament design for the church.

Ask yourself:

1. Do I have a healthy understanding of the way the New Testament church functions as the Body of Christ in the world?
2. Do I believe that what I have to offer the church is worth being heard?
3. Am I willing to step out of my comfort zone to insert my ideas and gifts in a positive way into the ministry of my church?

Lord, help me not to be content to sit by and watch others serve while I observe. Give me the courage and confidence to offer myself and my ideas in healthy and productive ways that Your name may be glorified, and Your Kingdom expanded. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Richard Rust

IN A HEALTHY CHURCH, LEADERS AND MEMBERS SEEM TO SENSE WHEN THERE IS A NEED FOR CHANGE

Jeremiah 29:11- *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper You and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*

Romans 12:1-2- *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is —his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

A healthy church is a church that experiences changes just as the human body undergoes different stages and the earth has its different seasons. Changes are a part of life. Daniel 2:21 says, *“He changes times and seasons...”* Changes are not often well received because we tend to get comfortable and conformed to the way things have been. Other people fear changes, but in Deuteronomy 31:6, we are encouraged to, *“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”* God has a plan and purpose for His church. The Bible says His will is good, acceptable and perfect. Therefore, we can step into the changes knowing that they will lead us into God’s perfect will. Changes are what take us to the next level of growth and maturity. One season prepares us for the next one. The human body automatically knows when it is time to change or grow. It was created by God to work that way. Likewise, leaders and members of the local church should be able to sense when there is a need for change by the constant renewal of their minds to the mind of Christ. This constant renewal of the mind can be accomplished as we abide in Him and in His Word.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 – *“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.”*

Ask yourself:

1. Am I submitting my mind to be renewed constantly to the mind of Christ?
2. Am I allowing the present season to prepare me for the upcoming one?
3. Am I causing a positive effect when it comes to God’s changes in the local church?

Heavenly Father, I pray that You help me to embrace the change of times and seasons that are meant to prepare me and take me to the next level in life. I will not fear nor doubt the changes that You place before me. From this day forward I will submit my mind to be renewed to the mind of Christ by Your Word that I may be able to sense the need for change in the local church. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Anna Miriam Sandoval

IN A HEALTHY CHURCH, ATTENTION IS GIVEN TO ENGAGING HUMAN SENSES IN WORSHIP AND SERVICE

*"Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him."
(Psalm 34:8).*

God made us to worship Him with all our senses. Although our tradition has been bent toward worshipping primarily through our ears – music and sermons – God intends for us to worship with our whole beings.

Ask yourself:

1. How is it that we can start to worship God more fully?
2. How can our senses be engaged in new ways?

For starters, we can intentionally be aware of what is around us and acknowledge that all our senses are important – they too can be channels through which we can encounter God and through which God can commune with us.

- Visually, we can enjoy the beauty of the people gathered around us in worship, we can acknowledge the beauty of the room in which we worship – color, windows, flowers, art, instruments, seasonal displays, and other visuals, and we can fully engage with images that may be projected.
- Through hearing we can listen to the music, the timbre of the instruments, the voices around us, the varied tones and articulations of those who speak, the sounds outside the room, and the voices of children in a nearby room.
- Our sense of touch can be worshipful as we are aware of the texture of the paper on which the worship order may be printed, the feel of the wood of the pew in front of us, the grasp of a hand of someone nearby, the comfort of a hug during a greeting, the sensation of a child asleep in our lap, and the feel of a hymnal or Bible in our hands.
- Smell can be engaged as we sniff the faint smell of communion bread and juice, walk into a worship room and feel at home by the familiar smell of a space we visit each Sunday, inhale the scent of candles during Advent or Christmas, breathe in the scent of Easter lilies or funeral flowers, or smell a meal cooking in another part of the building.
- Our tastes are enlivened in worship as we taste bread and juice during the Lord's Supper, share in a communal meal with those we love, experience food prepared sacrificially by someone from another culture or locale, or experience tastes that transport us to sacred times in our past with those we love and those who love us.

- Our full-bodied movements are meant to worship. We are meant to sway, to lift our hands, move our bodies rhythmically, and more. Every child responds to the beat of music with his/her whole body – the musical beats translate into the motion of the child's movements. Somewhere along the way, we unlearn this natural movement tendency, and it needs to be relearned in order to experience God more fully.

God, help us to worship You more fully. Give us a sense of freedom to forget ourselves and allow Your full-bodied love to overwhelm us with Your grace. Amen.

Randall Bradley

IN A HEALTHY CHURCH, PERCEPTION AND REALITY OF CHURCH MEMBERS MATCH UP

Colossians 1:9-11a - *"For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience..."*

How do we as individual Christians, and as the church, perceive reality? How important are the five senses in this process? Paul references our God-given senses in describing the Body of Christ in his letter to the church at Corinth.

1 Cor 12:14-18 - *"Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be."*

Unfortunately, our five senses are not always reliable. People often see or hear things differently. And for many persons their perception of reality becomes their reality whether they are accurate or not in their understanding. So, what hope do we have that the perceived reality among church members is the true reality? Fortunately, God has made a special provision for His followers which may be termed the sixth sense. The Merriam Webster dictionary defines "sixth sense" as "a special ability to know something that cannot be learned by using the five senses (such as sight or hearing)". What is this sixth sense for the Christian? The Word of God reveals that the Spirit of God guides us in all truth.

1 Corinthians 2:14 - *"The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit."*

Revelation 3:22 - *"Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

Ask yourself:

Are you and the other members of your church family willing to use not only the God-given senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste in discovering reality but more importantly to rely on the sixth sense of the Holy Spirit and God's Word to discern what is truly real and what is genuinely God's will?

Philippians 1:9-11 - *"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God." Amen.*

Charles Dixon

IN A HEALTHY CHURCH, MEMBERS PRESENT THEMSELVES AS A LIVING SACRIFICE TO THE LORD

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:1-2).

A healthy church, being the Body of Christ, is clearly identified by their unity in Christ and a culture of worship that affects all of one’s life. Paul appeals to the members of the church to corporately worship as they individually offer their bodies as a sacrifice to the Lord – many bodies, but one sacrifice to the Lord.

“For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” (Romans 12:4-5).

In a healthy church, all members of the Body of Christ offer a spiritual act of worship that is established upon a foundation of *sacrifice* and *transformation*. This act of worship involves the whole person – putting to death your sinful nature and coming into the new life that God brings in Christ as you renew your mind.

The sacrifice offered by the Body of Christ should be living, holy, and acceptable. In a healthy church, each member of the Body of Christ voluntarily gives up themselves to the Lord. This is the same idea Jesus spoke of in Luke 9:23, *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”* In a healthy church, each member of the Body of Christ is holy – set apart for service to God. In a healthy church, each member of the Body of Christ is acceptable to God through faith in Christ as they are conformed not to this world (Romans 12:2) but are conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29).

Ask yourself:

1. Do I view my entire life as an act of worship unto the Lord?
2. To what image is my life conforming – the world or Christ Jesus?
3. Does my life encourage the faith of others in my church?
4. As an individual member of the Body of Christ, are there any areas of my life that prevent my church from offering an acceptable offering of corporate worship?

Lord, I offer my life to You – all of it. I pray that You would use me as a member of Your Body to encourage others, to be an example of a child of God with a transformed mind and a life in total surrender to you. Lord, conform me to the image of Your Son. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Robert Forrest

MEMBERS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH MATURE AND GROW IN THEIR FAITH

“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of His holy people in the kingdom of light.” (Colossians 1:9-12).

A healthy congregation, being a manifestation of the body of Christ, matures in faith. This is a natural body life function. Paul prayed for the faith maturation of the church in Colossae. His prayer was specific and identified several marks of a maturing congregation.

Wisdom - A maturing congregation experiences Spirit given understanding into God's ways.

Worthiness – A maturing congregation lives life with a grace-based commitment to holiness.

Works – A maturing congregation is marked by fruitful good works.

Wonder – A maturing congregation lives with joyful thanks and a childlike sense of wonder.

Ask yourself:

1. Am I manifesting these marks of faith maturation in my own life?
2. Am I praying for these biblical marks of faith maturation to manifest in our local congregation?

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” (James 1:22).

Lord, give our church wisdom so that we can live lives worthy of the cross. Fill us with the Holy Spirit so that we may be effective in the good works that You have prepared for us. Kindle gratitude and joy so that we can endure with great strength. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

Matt Snowden

IN A HEALTHY CHURCH, THE WILL OF GOD IS THE CENTRAL DESIRE OF BELIEVERS

John 6:38-40 - *"For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me. And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those He has given me but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."*

1 John 2:16-17 - *"For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever."*

Jesus is our example and teaches us that our highest purpose is to do the will of God the Father, for the salvation and resurrection for all who come to Jesus. God's will is the one source of divine authority and prosperity in this life and eternity. All believers of the local church should depart from the current of this world, which is contrary to the Father's will.

The most advanced philosophy and human intelligence can never replace God's will. It is the immovable foundation that remains for all generations. Those who do God's will abide in Him forever and should pursue his overall purpose in every area of life; that they may be a productive member in the body of Christ. Romans 12:2 says that God's will is good, pleasing and perfect, therefore everything outside of His will is not supported by Him. The believer should pray as Jesus prayed, saying: "Father, if it is your will, take this cup away from me; nevertheless, not my will, but Yours, be done."

Ephesians 1:11-12 - *"In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory."*

Ask Yourself:

1. Am I submitting my thoughts and ideas to the authority of the Word of God and His will?
2. Am I denying my own self to do the Lord's will for the well-being of my church family?
3. Am I pursuing in prayer, and in my daily interactions, to share Jesus' love and eternal hope in Him?

Heavenly Father, I ask You to help me to follow Jesus' example. That I always choose Your will over mine own, and that I be a productive member in this congregation. I believe that Your will is the eternal foundation. I ask that our congregation do Your will in winning souls for eternal salvation and resurrection in Jesus.

Mario Sandoval

YOU ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST: SET APART TO DO HIS WORK

As complex as the human body is, we normally do not think about it in separate pieces of systems unless some particular part is failing or causing us pain. We just think about our body as “me”. That my hands belong to me isn’t usually debated. I (nor any of my body parts) never question the assumption that this body is to be obedient to my head. It is only when a part of my body doesn’t respond to my head that I know something is deeply wrong. My body is my primary way of interacting with the world. The same is true of the Body of Christ, the church. It is assumed that it will do the bidding of the head, Jesus Christ. It is also assumed that the church is His primary means of bringing healing and redemption to this world.

Peter 2:9 says, *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.”*

Ephesians 2:10 states, *“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

This all sounds great in theory until I look around at the churches I know. They are all like the Corinthian church in that they are filled with “normal” people who struggle with raising their children, paying their bills, and navigating through a world of increasingly complex challenges. The church members I know struggle with at least a few of the following: flaws, addictions, personality conflicts, difficult marriages, stress, and too many demands on their time. Collectively, we aren’t really that impressive on the surface. But week by week, God uses us to bring redemption and hope into this broken world. I see teenagers turn their lives around, and women regain hope, and the sick become whole. I see lost and selfish people turn into faithful and loving adults. That work of redemption is real! And God is using us to accomplish it.

In the next moment, would you simply flex your fingers and make a fist? Find a small piece of paper and crumple it. Now straighten it back out. Isn’t that incredible? Invisibly your head communicates through nerves, bones, muscles and skin and you are changing the world. Jesus is the Head of the Church. 1 Corinthians 12:27 says, *“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”* That “you” in this verse is plural. In Texan, it should be translated, “y’all”. Collectively, together, we are the Body of Christ through whom He is redeeming His creation. We get to be a part of that!

Ask Yourself:

1. How have you seen God use you and your church to accomplish His work recently?
2. What kinds of things keep you as a church from making more impact in your community?

Lord, we are Yours. From head to toe, we belong to You. Collectively we respond to You in glad obedience. Do Your full work on us to make us a worthy body for Your glory, and then, would You keep doing Your work through us? For Your name’s sake we pray, Amen.

Tim Randolph

THE BODY OF CHRIST

Sermon Ideas

Church Strengthening Process



How to use this section: Sermon Ideas

Several scriptures that speak to each of the functions of the twelve human body systems are given with a short suggestion of how these texts might speak to the proper functioning of the church body. This is intended to give several possible approaches to develop either a sermon or a Bible study on that system within the Body of Christ. Together with the stories that are found in the next section, this should give some imagination to a different way to teach about the church as a body. Depending upon the length of time a church chooses to spend on this strengthening process, a sermon or Bible study could be developed from each of the twelve systems. This could be presented in six small group Bible studies and six messages. You might consider using this process as a platform to include additional people in the preparation and delivery of Bible study material.

SERMON IDEAS

"We must first become a healthy church before we can become a big church."

1. Muscular system –

Consider the condition of organizational movement and working together.

Ephesians 4:12-16 - *"to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."*

1 Corinthians 12:12-19 - *"Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be?"*

Commentary: Unity and harmony are very important in the local congregation. This unity is not sameness. This unity is the oneness of many diversities. The diversities of each moving part are unique in their contribution to the overall objective. Mutual respect and commitment to the overall and higher objective is essential to being an effective member of the body of the local church congregation.

2. Excretory system –

Consider how strong the church is in removing unnecessary elements.

*Hebrews 8:13 - *"By calling this covenant "new," He has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear."*

*Isaiah 42:9 - *"See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being, I announce them to you."*

*Matthew 9:16-17 - *"No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."*

Commentary: The leadership of the local congregation must learn to discern when something that was good and productive has fulfilled its purpose and come to its end and is no longer necessary. The leadership must be flexible, open to making changes and embracing new things. The changes are not about trying to stay up with modern fads. The principle of God's kingdom is that he does not put new wine into old wine skins. He only places new wine into new wine skins. God provides the new wine and we, the Body of Christ, provide the new wine skin. The removal of those things that are no longer helping the church accomplish its mission can be done with grace and gratitude. Instead of letting a program or a ministry slowly languish and then finally disappear, it can be called a success, celebrated, and concluded. Propping up lifeless, out of date ministries can actually drain precious energy and resources from the productive new ministries that need to bloom.

3. Respiratory system – Consider spiritual vitality, worship, and prayer.

** Acts 2:41-47 – “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”*

** Jude 20-21 – “But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.”*

Commentary: It is important to stay diligent in practicing the Christian disciplines for the maintaining of a healthy congregation. These practices involve what we do, and what we don't do, to have a healthy congregation. Prayers and songs and joyful worship are the fresh breath that continually renews our bodies every day.

4. Digestive system -

Consider how nourished the church is in receiving essential nutrients.

** Hebrews 5:12-14 – "In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."*

** Matthew 12:33 – "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit."*

** Galatians 5:16-26 – "So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other."*

Commentary: The Bible teaches us that we can diagnose people's spiritual wellbeing and health level, by observing the outward character they express; whether that be the fruit of the Holy Spirit or the works of the flesh. Being committed to Godly exercises and a healthy routine will lead to a healthy spiritual life. If the leadership, foremost, and the families are healthy, then the congregation as a whole will be healthy. Christ-like maturity is key for continual spiritual growth.

5. Endocrine system -

Consider how well the internal information systems are working.

** Acts 2:42-47 – "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."*

Commentary: A high percentage of active and faithful members involved in fellowship and the work of the ministry is a sign of unity and oneness in the local church body. In our chosen passage of Scripture, we see this congregation of thousands of believers living in one accord. All have a lifestyle of continual fellowship among themselves and active outreach ministry to the community.

6. Reproductive system -

Consider missions, outreach, and bringing new life to unbelievers.

* Mark 16:15-16 – *“He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”*

* Galatians 2:9-10 – *“James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.”*

* James 1:26-27 – *“Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”*

* James 2:14-20 – *“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?”*

Commentary: Evangelism and mission outreach is part of the great commission that our Lord and Savior commanded us to do. He said: "go into all the world". We should never allow our vision and compassion for the lost, the hurting, and the less fortunate to become fuzzy. We should continually enlarge our hearts and reach out to the hurting, beginning with those that are most near to us. A church with a good reproductive system is continually producing new ministries, new believers, new leaders, and new groups of Bible study.

7. Integumentary system -

Consider how the church finds its identity and protects its internal systems.

* 1 Peter 2:9-10 – *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*

* Ephesians 2:19-22 – *“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”*

** Matthew 22:35-40 – "One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

** John 15:1-11 – "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."*

Commentary: Every ministry should always protect and never stray from the fundamental core of ministry. This foundational core of ministry includes the purpose for existence, the initial motive, the right attitude, and the ultimate objective desired in ministry, all these being according to the heart of God and divine scripture. When one part of the body comes under threat of attack, the other parts of the body should rally around in defense of the body as a whole.

8. Skeletal system - Consider the business-like framework of the church.

** 1 Peter 2:13-17 – "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor."*

** Matthew 20:25-28 – "Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

** 1 Peter 5:1-6 – "To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away."*

In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.'

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time."

** 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 – "If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord's people? Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you ask for a ruling from those whose way of life is scorned in the church? I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother takes another to court—and this in front of unbelievers! The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters."*

Commentary: The business aspect in the local church is unavoidable, but the way the church does business should always be done in reverent fear of the Lord and with the irreproachable testimony of Christ Jesus our Lord. Good administration, with integrity and transparency, is good ministry. It protects those involved from false accusations and provides a platform for the church to move into the future without hindrance.

9. Circulatory system -

Consider how the lifeblood of the church circulates among its members.

** John 15:1-5 – "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*

** Colossians 3:12-17 – "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."*

Commentary: The believers are as the branches. They are not tagged to the vine, but they are birthed and grow from the vine. This is what Jesus meant when He said: "you cannot enter into the kingdom unless you be born again. Those who do not acknowledge the authority of biblical Scripture and are not devoted to upholding the testimony of Christ, are to be considered carnal and in some cases as non-believers.

Lymphatic system -

Consider how immune the church is to organizational disease and sickness.

** Matthew 7:15-20 – "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them."*

** Matthew 18:15-17 – "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector."*

** 1 Timothy 3:1-7 – "Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap."*

** Corinthians 11:13-15 – "For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve."*

** John 10:1-5 – "Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."*

** Colossians 2:8-10 – "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority."*

Commentary: Disease is not harmful until it gets inside of you. The church must protect itself from unhealthy diseases forming on the inside. Spiritual discernment is essential and also diagnosing the levels of maturity of the believers, to avoid from laying upon their shoulders a task beyond their ability to bear. There should be zero tolerance against those who do not acknowledge the authority of biblical scripture, and in some cases, they are to be considered as non-believers. The enemy always seeks to enter in through an unauthorized access. The church must establish government, structure and rules of engagement, because these serve to filter out the enemy.

10. Nervous system -

Consider thorough information sharing within the church body.

** 1 Corinthians 14:7-11 – "Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the pipe or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air. Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker is a foreigner to me."*

** Genesis 11:1-9 – "Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth." But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language, they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." So, the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth."*

Commentary: Communication and healthy relationships are an essential part for unity and teamwork. Because the church is the Body of Christ, a spiritual organism made up of many diverse members, excellent communication is necessary. In these scriptures we can see how the lack of communication can create a gap and eventually destroy unity.

11. Sensory System - Interprets Outside Environment

* Ezekiel 33:7-9 and 21-22 – *“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to the wicked, ‘You wicked person, you will surely die,’ and you do not speak out to dissuade them from their ways, that wicked person will die for their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood. But if you do warn the wicked person to turn from their ways and they do not do so, they will die for their sin, though you yourself will be saved”.....“In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month on the fifth day, a man who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, “The city has fallen!” Now the evening before the man arrived, the hand of the LORD was on me, and he opened my mouth before the man came to me in the morning. So my mouth was opened and I was no longer silent.”*

* Acts 11:27-29 and Acts 21:9-11 – *“During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius). The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea.”.....He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, “The Holy Spirit says, ‘In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.”*

Commentary: The people of God cannot be isolated from the things that are happening outside in the community and in the world. In a direct way, the church is impacted by the community and world events. If violence and riots overtake a city, the church suffers loss of property and life and hope just like the other residents and organizations that reside there. If the city or nation flourishes, then the church enjoys the fruits of prosperity. On the other hand, the church is also called to impact the community and the surrounding world with its message and ministry of repentance and faith and hope and abundant life. Truth and love are not only held in a sacred tension of mutual dependency within the church body, but they are also expected to be projected outward into the suburbs, projects, inner city, and into the rural farmland. The sensory system of the church is comprised of those individuals to see what is happening outside of the church and speak truth in love to (1) help the church prepare adequately for the coming changes and (2) to impact the lost world with the love of God. Ezekiel and Agabus both represent the multi-directional ministry of the prophetic voice active in the body of Christ.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

Stories of Churches

Church Strengthening Process



How to use this section: Stories of Churches

True stories of 24 churches have been collected to help illustrate how the Body of Christ functions similar to the human body systems. The names of these congregations have been changed, but in most cases, leaders in the congregation shared and affirmed the way their story is told in these pages. These illustrate several truths: There are no perfect churches, only churches with strengths and weaknesses. What happens in one body system affects the entire body.

Use these stories to:

- Stimulate your imagination about what is happening in your own church body.
- Illustrate Biblical truths in sermons and Bible studies.
- Print in newsletters, guide booklets, worship brochures and newsletters to create the conversation about how the systems in your church body function.
- Write your own and share them with the church.

24 True Stories of Churches that Illustrate the Twelve Systems of the Human Body

The following are examples of the human body systems as they function (or don't function) in a local church. These stories are from real churches, but the identities have been altered to protect the innocent (or guilty – as the case may be).

Muscular System: Movement and work are possible because the muscles are strong and active.

Example of a healthy muscular system: Westside Baptist is a large, thriving suburban church. Through years of strong stable leadership, the church has a legacy of local and international mission involvement. Year round they have volunteer teams of all ages (teens to seniors) rebuilding churches in Chile, restoring run-down churches in poorer parts of town, serving the school district staff, taking care of international missionaries while on stateside assignment, and on and on. These kinds of hands-on ministries are not necessarily centrally coordinated, nor does anyone really know how much the church is accomplishing, but it seems like every group and every part of the church is out in the streets changing the world one life at a time.

Example of an impaired muscular system: The Berean Baptist Church meets in a run-down, hand-me-down church building and can't quite keep up with the weekly maintenance challenges of an older building. Even though they are twelve years old and have lots of weekly meetings, the grass just keeps gaining on the sidewalks. The community is unaware of the church's presence because the only signs of life are the large signs in the parking lot warning that loitering and littering are not allowed. In spite of a \$500.00 grant and offers to help from neighboring churches, the Berean Congregation just couldn't quite get organized enough to pull off a block party last fall.

Excretory System: This system effectively eliminates unnecessary elements in the life of the church.

Example of a healthy excretory system: The Capital Area Community Church is perched on top of a hill overlooking the city. The clear glass panels of the auditorium sparkle in the sunlight as the congregation sings praises to the Lord. No room in the facility is used to pile up old junk. Every room is updated and attractive. The programs are also intentionally limited. The founding pastor announced from the very beginning that they would do only the five things that they could do extremely well: worship, youth ministry, children's ministry, home groups, and marriage/family ministry with counseling and enrichment. As new people join the church, their gifts are tapped, but "lone rangers" starting independent little ministries just do not fit the vision of the church. There is no outdated literature lying around, and the offices are clean and efficient. No dust settles here!

Example of a faulty excretory system: When the new pastor came to Colcord Baptist, he found hundreds of rusty unusable chairs, outdated baby beds, old magazines, and broken lawnmowers stacked in the many unused spaces. Even the programming looked just like it did in the 1970's, complete with the tattered number board. The congregation is characterized by whole Sunday School classes that consist of the teacher and her husband, one-person ministries that are ineffective, and dusty teaching materials that “we might need one day”. Some committees listed on the old bulletin board haven’t met in three years.

Respiratory System: The spiritual vitality of a church and the leaders is expressed by the abundant fruit of the Spirit and by worship and prayer.

Example of a healthy respiratory system: Del Center Baptist Church is a surprisingly lively congregation right in the middle of the county with a declining population. Pastor Bill has served that congregation for almost forty years, and yet there is nothing stale about the church. The prayer services are extended and sincere. They believe God can change anyone. They regularly see alcoholics and drug addicts and youth from torn-up families find restoration, love, and wholeness through their worship and spiritual nurture at Del Center. The preaching is fresh, and the congregation exudes generosity and a spirit of love towards the hardest of the hard country folk they encounter down some of the dirt lanes in the northern part of the county. When they have a “church feeding,” they roll out the giant barbeque pits and smoke briskets for two hundred people from everywhere they can drag them.

Example of an unhealthy respiratory system: On Easter Sunday mornings, the pastor of Rocky Baptist Church greets the well-dressed-sometimes-church-attenders with a sarcastic, “Glad to see you back since last Easter.” The sermons are mostly admonitions to love God more by tithing and coming to Sunday night services. There are about five men who rotate the duties of public praying, and they are likely to thank God for the food they are about to receive just before taking up the offering. Just like the spotless building and the clean cars outside, the worship seems sterile and lifeless - pretty and well-organized, but in an awkward sort of way.

Digestive System: This system brings regular spiritual nourishment and energy to the body.

Example of a healthy digestive system: Hilltop Community Church is a sprawling mega-church that has community groups all over the region that regularly reach people for Christ before they ever come to a worship service. The community groups have high standards for leadership and are actively managed by a visionary staff. Each life group engages people with inductive Bible studies that show attendees how to apply the Bible to life. The multiple worship services are well thought out with deep Biblical truths connected to real life stories. The pastors who speak offer a great variety of topics from missions, Christian life, evangelism, Christian care, ethics, family health, body care, and basic theology. Their facilities are always hosting new conferences for each kind of people in the community as well as seminary-styled courses for deeper discipleship, leadership training, church planting, and missions. They have high expectations of anyone who is appointed to teach the Scriptures. It is a Spiritual buffet, and the members thrive with joy and purpose in their lives.

Example of an unhealthy digestive system: The offerings for spiritual nurture at the former Fresh Water Church were very limited. Because the pastor was the only one who taught or preached, his voice and his perspective alone nurtured the few supportive members who badly wanted to help the church grow. Unfortunately, the messages as well as the Sunday School lessons were almost always about one theme: the importance of being really committed to this church by working, tithing, attending, and bringing in new families. From the announcements to the invitation, it felt like a barrage of “you need to give more; you need to do more; you need to grow more”. In fact, for the first-time visitors, it felt a bit like being served some sand in a glass when they were thirsty. Although well-intentioned, the members almost died of spiritual starvation before they finally decided that there was no other choice other than to close the church.

Endocrine System: This body system commands and controls the body, coordinating appropriate body movement and activity for the well-being of the entire body. Unlike the central nervous system that transmits information to all of the body parts, the endocrine system actually puts things in motion and carries out complex body reactions in a timely fashion to care for the members and the body as a whole.

Example of a healthy endocrine system: This Vietnamese congregation quietly and (it seems) effortlessly comes to a consensus about what they believe God desires of them, and they move together to get it done. Three times in six years when they heard of another sister congregation struggling because of an unfortunate catastrophe, they prayed, discussed, and then stepped up to help in very significant ways. When they needed to build their own facility, each member generously gave according to their ability. Within a few years they had saved enough to build without any debt. During the services, there are very few announcements. It never takes a harangue or a plea or chastisement to move the congregation to do the right thing. Just a mention is enough. Even in the care of their own members, they quickly and quietly mobilize to meet the needs of every family, whether it be shelter, food, encouragement, comfort, or correction. Watching this church is like watching a well-conducted orchestra-- except the conductor is barely visible. In their mission endeavors, they are training pastors and planting churches on several continents.

Example of an unhealthy endocrine system: On Sunday morning, no schism is visible, but throughout the week, few signs of unity can be observed. The youth minister regularly rallies his faithful followers (family and friends) to support his causes either through direct gifts, volunteering, or speaking at business meetings. In fact, most of the ministries are this way. The environment feels like each leader is only for him (or her) self. Without open hostility, there are questions about who is in charge and why that particular person gets to make those decisions. Debt is accrued, properties damaged, and fairly major decisions are made without the corresponding committees even knowing about it. The church secretary often feels caught in the crossfire because everyone assumes that she knows or decides things about which she has no knowledge. At times the church almost feels paralyzed because no one is sure who should make the decisions.

Reproductive System: This system creates new life in the church whether it be new believers coming to faith or new classes and new ministries being born or new churches and missions planted.

Example of a healthy reproductive system: On Thursday evenings, pastors meet with all of the leaders of their cell groups from around the city. Their time of sharing, prayer, and instruction is lively with reports of new believers coming to faith and stories of answered prayers. This bilingual Hispanic Church typically sees neighbors and friends actively participate in a cell group for months before they ever step foot into a worship service. The cell group leaders are comfortable in creating a fun and spirit-filled environment where everyone is welcome. They also fully expect some of their more mature cell group members to grow and learn and start their own home group within a year or two of active work in the church. The discipleship and immediate follow-up for the new believers happens right in the same cell group where they came to study the Bible for the first time. Every month they celebrate baptizing a group of new believers. This ministry has now been blessed to extend to Temple, Texas, Monclova, Mexico, and southern California with new pastors and church leaders stepping out in faith in response to God's call on their lives.

Example of an unhealthy reproductive system: This Hispanic congregation consists of the family members and friends of the long-time pastor who loves each and every one of the members dearly. They meet for worship, prayer, fellowship, and Bible study very regularly each week. They have great ideas for ministries to the community, but for some reason, they never materialize. The baptism probably doesn't work, but they aren't sure because it has been years since they tried to fill it. There hasn't been a new Sunday school class started in at least ten years.

Integumentary System: This system (the skin) gives identity to the body, protects it, and keeps all the systems "together" in one body.

Example of a healthy integumentary system: Stonybrook is quickly becoming a regional church as it reaches new people from around the whole county. They are out of space in their three Sunday morning worship services and have an active portfolio of ministries to children, youth, singles, families, and senior adults. A few years ago, a group of disgruntled families from a sister church in the area joined Stonybrook. They expressed delight in the vibrant services and the hard-working staff, but soon it became apparent that they had an agenda. Stonybrook was just too moderate for their theological tastes, and they soon began a quiet campaign to change the Bible translation the church used in worship, to influence the pastor to take a more conservative stand on some present social issues, and to support some other mission causes that were dear to their hearts (but not part of Stonybrook's vision). Several of the lay leaders in the church took these families aside and quietly and kindly let them know that Stonybrook wasn't "that kind of church," and if they really wanted to be a part of "that kind of church," they might consider joining a different congregation in the neighborhood. The families left. A schism never developed, and there was never a discussion about those events in any public forum. The leaders and active members know exactly what kind of church this is and are happy with that. The values, vision, and direction of the church are widely known, shared, and loved. They are graciously committed to keeping the body within its own skin.

Example of an unhealthy integumentary system: Even though the pastor and wife have served this congregation faithfully for several decades, when a guest visits a few weeks in a row, something about the congregation seems very strange. It appears as if the pastor and worship leader are on two completely different paths. The preaching and teaching are strictly about the traditional way a Baptist church ought to be, and the music and worship are all about becoming a contemporary community church. The Sunday school classes feel like a fiefdom where there is quiet talk about changes that need to happen, but no one includes the other classes in their agendas. Though the facade looks unified, there are deep and substantial divisions about what the identity and future of the church ought to be.

Skeletal System: This system gives the church body its internal structure and a framework that is solid and permits free and pain-free movement and activity. It adequately supports the life of the body.

Example of a healthy skeletal system: Hope Baptist has enjoyed stable leadership for many years. In spite of the lack of turnover among the ministry leaders, the church has remained committed to a pattern of updating policies a couple of times per year and reviewing their bylaws and articles of incorporation about every four years. The resulting structure of ministry teams and deacons and staff remains surprisingly dynamic and alive. New members are assisted as they self-assess their spiritual gifts and are invited to serve in a place of ministry for one year. If they prove to be active and effective, they may be invited to serve an additional year. After that, they are encouraged to join a different ministry in the church and learn a new role. The quarterly business meetings are usually very brief with maybe one or two points that the entire congregation needs to deliberate. In over forty years of ministry, they have had to navigate several tough decisions, but they have managed to do so with a spirit of maturity and love that has overcome the tensions. The deacons clearly know their role, and in spite of a few (failed) attempts to move more toward a controlling board, they maintain a posture of service and helpfulness to the whole church. All of the updated governing documents for the church are available on the church website.

Example of an unhealthy skeletal system: Though the church is five years old, they still do not have a constitution or bylaws that they actually observe. There are no policies nor guidelines for the volunteers in the office to know how to handle the various situations that come through the office doors. For a lack of oversight, the tax-exempt status of their property was almost lost, bills remain unpaid until a third notice, and even the leadership team doesn't really know what it is authorized to do.

Circulatory System: This system transports nutrients and oxygen to all of the parts of the body. Every church member feels known, loved, and supported in their life and in their ministry.

Example of a healthy circulatory system: Clear Spring Community Church discovered they had some problems with their circulatory system when multiple congregants continued asking, "How do you get to know anybody around here?" They realized that because of their simple structure and streamlined programming, there were few opportunities for new members to get connected and to feel known, loved, and supported.

Now after seven years of focused attention, new members enjoy a deep level of connection, and they easily find that new spiritual family that "get" them and walk with them in life's journey. One of the big factors in this turnaround was the intentional formation of "Life Together Groups." These groups ideally have between eight and twelve members who meet regularly and practice at least the five basic practices for a "Life Together Group." The practices of these groups mirror the culture and values of the congregation as a whole so that church life is one integrated experience. Recently one member was diagnosed with cancer. The pastor made an appointment to stop by the evening before surgery for prayer with the member and her family. At the time of the appointment, the pastor discovered twenty other members gathered in the home. They read Scripture, prayed, and then laid hands on the member.

The unusual part of this story is that this kind of event is NOT unusual for members of Clear Spring. Currently more than 2/3 of their membership regularly participate in meaningful community groups where they feel loved and known and supported.

Example of an unhealthy circulatory system: A committed believer had attended Freedom in Christ Church for about a year when his daughter was tragically killed in an accident. A family member called the church office to let them know. The receptionist then told one of the church elders, who then forgot to pass the information along to anyone else. On the following Sunday, when the family showed up for worship, no one knew that anything had happened. After much heartache, the family never came back. In fact, this is not an isolated incident. The church regularly sees a flow of new people coming and older members leaving after a failure of care or connection leaves them feeling as if the church doesn't care. The Life Groups of the church seem to be able to mostly keep up with one another within the group but care outside and beyond the Life Groups doesn't seem to happen in a predictable way. Ministries of the church also frequently have to turn to resources outside of the church to operate since the funding and resourcing of internal ministries are not open processes. The church is determined to keep structure to a minimum, so when members have surgery, no one is made aware of what care might be offered (or not), and people frequently fall through the gaps.

Lymphatic System: This system is the primary immune system for the body. This system detects and eliminates external and internal attacks and threats quickly before serious damage can occur.

Example of a healthy lymphatic system: First Baptist Church is a thriving Baptist congregation in the midst of a traditionally Catholic community. Throughout its history, it has endured its share of struggles and setbacks. A watershed moment, however, was when an industrial explosion levelled about one third of the town. Instantly the stress level within the community and within the church soared through the roof. Members and leaders all suffered devastating losses. Stress increased over the next months as thousands of volunteers came to help, millions of dollars for rebuilding had to be distributed, and displaced families scrambled to relocate and reestablish themselves. The ingredients for serious anger, divisiveness, infighting, jealousy, and bitterness were abundant. But the church (as a whole) kept breathing, laughing, serving, and loving. Today the church is stronger and more united than ever before.

Example of an unhealthy lymphatic system: The Third Street Baptist Church splashed across the headlines of regional papers when the pastor and the church secretary (also a High School teacher and coach) were arrested for raping a fifteen-year old girl. The deacons had long been trying to lead the church to dismiss the pastor for financial fraud and a lack of basic integrity. Of course, the congregation was traumatized by the negative publicity, but the worst was yet to come. The pastor led the church to dismiss the deacons, many of whom had been life-long members of the church, and the church allowed the pastor to take a lien against the church property to pay his legal fees. Those beleaguered members who showed up for business meetings stood behind the pastor until he was convicted and sent to prison. The church basically ceased to function at that point in time.

Nervous System: This system provides communication and decision making for the rest of the body. It processes signals from every part and then gives direction to the whole.

Example of a healthy central nervous system: Friendship Bible Church averages around four hundred people on any given Sunday morning. With a complex offering of programs, multiple staff, on-campus and off-campus, Fellowship Family groups, and two worship services, making sure that appropriate information regularly gets to the right people at the right time is an important part of their ministry. They use a combination of email send lists, social media (Facebook), SMS text messaging, the church website, weekly staff meetings, Power Point slides during services, announcements, and a network of greeters and welcome center volunteers to disseminate information for each different group. The key seems to be the connections pastor, who intuitively knows how to channel the vast quantities of information in and out every day. When asked how Sunday morning's connections cards were handled, she immediately named the four staff who received them, one after another. When asked how prayer requests were handled, she responded by citing a chain of staff and volunteers who clearly know what to do with each bit of information.

A year ago, Belinda, a single mom, had started a small business, which soon was burned by arsonists. When the associate pastor learned of her need for volunteers to help her relocate the inventory and reopen at a new locale, he sent emails to a few select Fellowship Family group leaders, who in turn sent an email to all of their members asking them to show up at a given location and time to help. In one day, the disaster was largely turned around into a beautiful opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ to Belinda and the neighborhood.

Example of an unhealthy Central Nervous System: Christ's Church is a fairly difficult church to penetrate unless you just walk through the doors on Sunday morning. In spite of averaging seven hundred people each week, communication seems to be a constant struggle. The website is chronically out of date, and the phone at the church office is not always attended.

The one system of communication that seems to work fairly well is a network of individual cell phones. When something needs to be communicated out of the church office, the secretary uses her personal cell phone and sends out text messages to the leaders that need to know of a meeting or a need. These leaders are then responsible to send out the same text message to their constituents. Many people are involved in the distinct channels of communication, and they do not always talk to each other. There is a quarterly meeting of leaders where problems and frustrations are aired. The church secretary shared that they can't seem to stay in touch with senior adults who don't use cell phones.

Sensory System: This system perceives and interprets what is happening in the world outside of the body and communicates needed adjustments or changes to the body itself.

On one hand, this system acts as the solid prophetic voice of the Ezekiel 33 watchman, who sees and understands what God is doing in the world and calls upon the people of God to respond appropriately. On the other hand, it is in touch with cultural and community trends and the pain of the lost world around. It expertly guides the body to minister effectively in Jesus' name. These "ears, eyes, noses, tongues, and fingers" constantly scan the environment of the church and help it respond with repentance and obedience in a culturally appropriate way so that the community experiences redemption.

Example of a healthy Sensory System: Though the community was devastated by the disaster, the First Baptist Church of Waveland was humming with activity. Even before the area was officially declared safe and secure, groups of first responders and other outside entities met in the parking lot of the church to plan the next steps. Through the ensuing months, FBC was, by default, the leader in appropriate response to the calamity that had befallen the community. The pastor calmly gave voice to the grief and hope in the midst of the confusion and anxiety. The church immediately and (it seemed) almost automatically responded to the spiritual, physical, and emotional needs of the citizens of the entire town. But this wasn't really a new thing. Throughout the previous fifteen years, the church has been boldly calling for clear interventions to stop the wave of teenage deaths by drunk driving, to improve the schools with positive engagement, and to extend hope to the helpless. The town was already accustomed to FBC consistently leading the community to do the right things.

Example of an unhealthy Sensory System: Batesville Baptist Church sits in a small community less than a quarter mile from the major interstate that cuts through the state. Though the construction of new roads, homes, and businesses constantly disrupts the traffic around the church, the congregation has not changed a single major thing in the last five years. Their calendar, budget, ministries, and programs are exactly the same. Even the worship and preaching seems oddly from a distant era. It is as if the members of the church aren't aware that new families are moving into their neighborhood every week. The only baptisms are of the children of those who have been long-time members.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

Assessments

Church Strengthening Process



How to use this section: Assessments

Assessments are designed to provide a quick diagnostic tool for your church. The member assessment can be administered in a town hall meeting, through the small group ministry of the church, through email using a tool like Survey Monkey or Google or Constant Contact. Assessments provide your church with two valuable outcomes:

1. They create a conversation that could lead to new insights and important changes.
2. They help identify what is working well and what needs some attention in the church body.

If the assessments point out a clear strength in your church, celebrate it! Thank God for those parts of the body that are functioning well and marvel at how He is using your church to accomplish His eternal purposes. When the assessments identify an area or two that need some attention, prayerfully ask the Lord for guidance as to how to strengthen your church body. You may want to enlist the help of a friendly outsider to help you think through the next steps, as a prescription or a plan of action. Keep it simple! If the church identifies one system that isn't functioning as it should, and then takes concrete steps to correct that, then your whole body will enjoy the benefits of renewed vitality.

Church Strengthening Process

Church Leader Assessment

1. Rank the twelve Church Body Systems in the order of their strength (health) for your church (1 = Weakest).

Body System	Rank
Muscular System: Working together & getting things done	
Excretory System: Eliminate distractions	
Respiratory System: Breathe the Spirit	
Digestive System: Spiritual nourishment that energizes	
Endocrine System: Communication and coordination	
Reproductive System: Produce new life and growth	
Integumentary System: Sense of unity and identity as a church	
Skeletal System: Organizational framework	
Circulatory System: Transports nutrients - members feel loved and known	
Lymphatic System: Church thwarts off attacks	
Nervous System: Communication - Information arrives at the right time and right place, to the right people	
Sensory System: Church appropriately changes with community/prophetic voice	

2. Why did you rank the system you selected as the healthiest?

3. Why did you rank the system as the weakest?

4. Which Church Body System, without a doubt, needs some attention right now?

Body System	Rank
Muscular System: Working together & getting things done	
Excretory System: Eliminate distractions	
Respiratory System: Breathe the Spirit	
Digestive System: Spiritual nourishment that energizes	
Endocrine System: Communication and coordination	
Reproductive System: Produce new life and growth	
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Sensory System: Church appropriately changes with community/prophetic voice	

Comments:

5. Which Church Body System is working very well?

Body System	Rank
Muscular System: Working together & getting things done	
Excretory System: Eliminate distractions	
Respiratory System: Breathe the Spirit	
Digestive System: Spiritual nourishment that energizes	
Endocrine System: Communication and coordination	
Reproductive System: Produce new life and growth	
Integumentary System: Sense of unity and identity as a church	
Skeletal System: Organizational framework	
Circulatory System: Transports nutrients - members feel loved and known	
Lymphatic System: Church thwarts off attacks	
Nervous System: Communication - Information arrives at the right time and right place, to the right people	
Sensory System: Church appropriately changes with community/prophetic voice	

Comments:

6. What prescription would you write for your church to bring it into full health and vitality?

Church Strengthening Process

Church Member Assessment

1. How long have you attended our church?

- ☐ Less than 6 months
- ☐ 6 months to less than 1 year
- ☐ 1 year to less than 3 years
- ☐ 3 years to less than 5 years
- ☐ 5 years or more

2. Which ministries do you regularly attend? Select all that apply

- ☐ Sunday morning worship
- ☐ Sunday School
- ☐ Prayer Service
- ☐ Discipleship classes
- ☐ Life Group

3. How do we rate on the following body systems?

Body System	Weak	Average	Strong
Muscular System: Working together & getting things done			
Excretory System: Eliminate distractions			
Respiratory System: Breathe the Spirit			
Digestive System: Spiritual nourishment that energizes			
Endocrine System: Communication and coordination			
Reproductive System: Produce new life and growth			
Integumentary System: Sense of unity and identity as a church			

Body System	Weak	Average	Strong
Skeletal System: Organizational framework			
Circulatory System: Transports nutrients - members feel loved and known			
Lymphatic System: Church thwarts off attacks			
Nervous System: Communication - Information arrives at the right time and right place, to the right people			
Sensory System: Church appropriately changes with community/prophetic voice			

4. What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

5. Which category describes your age?

- ☐ Younger than 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65 or older
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

THE BODY OF CHRIST

Spiritual Health Chart

Church Strengthening Process



How to use this section: Spiritual Health Chart

The Spiritual Health Chart can be an on-going spiritual growth map! This is primarily designed to help individual believers identify where they may be lacking in the Fruit of the Spirit. It comes with a variety of suggested exercises to strengthen each aspect of their Spiritual fruit. Ask participants to prayerfully read over the whole chart and then identify **one** area of fruit that they would like to work on personally. Ask them to highlight that one box. Then ask participants to choose, from the Spiritual Treatments column, **one discipline** that they will incorporate into their daily life beginning today. Ask them to keep working on that one discipline throughout the time your church is going through the Church Strengthening Process. At the conclusion, some great testimonies should be available about personal renewal in the Body of Christ.

Spiritual Health Chart

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Symptoms of Spiritual Illness	Signs of Spiritual Health	Spiritual Treatments
Self-Hatred (Evidenced by Pride/Fear)	Love (agape)	Service, mentoring, using spiritual gifts, mission trips, caring for less fortunate, prison ministry, volunteering, sharing your faith.
Depressed/Downtrodden	Joy	Celebration, gratitude, journaling, memorize the Beatitudes, corporate worship, music, blessing at meals.
Anxiety/Worry/ Discontentment	Peace	Sabbath, meditation, tithing, retreat, inner healing, prayer, intercessory prayer.
Frustration/Anger/ Intolerance	Patience/Longsuffering	Slowing, unplugging, control of the tongue, prayer walking.
Selfish/Hateful	Kindness	Acts of kindness, hospitality, intercessory prayer, compassion.
Immoral/Greedy	Goodness	Simplicity, stewardship, unplug, fast from things and technology, mentoring, spiritual friendship.
Unreliable	Faithfulness	Bible study, memorization, silence, solitude.
Pride	Gentleness/Meekness	Acts of kindness, learning from failure, exalting God only, trusting God not yourself, confession.
Undisciplined/Addictive	Self-Control	Fasting, Celebrate Recovery, confession, accountability partners, rule of life.
Bitterness/Resentment	Forgiveness	Prayer of inner healing, covenant group.
Sloth	Diligence	Accountability, rule of life, calendar, make promises and keep them.
Lust	Purity	Chastity, prayer partners, Celebrate Recovery, confession, fixed hours of prayer, memorize verses on purity, small group.
Discord	Unity	Practice "one anothers", small group, truth tellers, study John 17, create "one another" collage.
Foolishness	Wisdom	Accountability partner, small group, truth tellers, journaling, teachability, examen, praying Scripture, spiritual directors and spiritual friends.

"Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well." (3 John 2)

A spiritual practice is an intentional activity undertaken for the purpose of becoming like Christ.

