



Finding A Healthy Church That's Into Jesus And Fishing

By Kurt von Schleicher

The Lord has a place for you in His family! Christ has *real* friends for you that you can relate to. He said, ***“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”*** (Matt. 18:20). Yes, Jesus expects us Christians to get together often and He likes to join-in with us at church.¹ Therefore, you never have to feel lonely in Jesus. The Bible says, ***“God sets the solitary in families; He brings out those who are bound into prosperity; but the rebellious dwell in a dry land”*** (Ps. 68:6). Lots of churches want more members, but you really can't join God's Church or family. You have to be born into God's family and Church (through a 2nd birth). Jesus puts humble repentant people in. And why not let Him? If you're born once you'll die twice, if you're born twice, you'll die once (physically, unless the Church is raptured out of here).

God Has An Excellent Place For You

Please know there's a church family for you—a place for you at the marriage supper of the Lamb—but you must make reservations in advance through Christ. We're talking about wonderful relationships that can start on earth and be very constructive if the Christians involved will proactively sow to this pure kind of friendship. The Bible says, ***“A man who has friends must himself be friendly”*** (Pro 18:24 nkjv) ***“There are ‘friends’ who destroy each other, but a real friend sticks closer than a brother”*** (nlt).

The first-century church rocked their world for Jesus—they turned it upside-down with Christ's passion and Message of truth. And that early church still serves today as our model fishing church. These people were committed to regularly gathering together in Jesus Name--***“They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers”*** (Acts 2:42). The Bible says, ***“If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”*** (1 Jn. 1:7).

Too many Christians choose to remain somewhat rebellious and independent from church fellowship. It's great to love the lost, but they choose unbelievers as their best friends and they do this to their own hurt, but the Apostle Paul said. ***“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?”*** (2 Cor. 6:14). God wants the church (righteous people—the Body of Christ—not a mere building), to stand out in a dark world that's quickly growing darker and walk uncompromisingly in God's light, before the unregenerate people that He cares about in these last days! Any Christian who wants to please God and make a positive impact for Christ as they commit to witnessing by life and deed, must become part of a healthy local expression of Christ's Body. And not to do so is to disobey the Word.

Christ often uses His Church to provide for people with blessings, opportunity and direction. How will you grow spiritually apart from a healthy Bible teaching church that's led by a discerning, born again, spiritually mature pastor? There is no growth for a Christian apart from the Word of God and His church is something you will never outgrow. People only grow spiritually weird—very strange with their idols—apart from Christ and His Church. Everyone will worship something or someone. But God put spiritually gifted people in His church to challenge you to lead a holy exemplary life with high standards. No saint can properly endure or spiritually prosper long if they ditch the Church! They will be isolated and lack the support that God wants them to receive. We are to prayerfully remain vertically-dependant and horizontally interdependent. You need the ministry of Jesus through His Church in a big way, and the Church also needs the ministry of the Holy Spirit that He wants to give through you! When you were born again, God gave you as a unique gift with unique abilities to help buildup His Church.

The church provides an ideal outlet for serving Christ. God has created you with spiritual gifts and talents that can benefit the rest of the Body. Scripture explains that the Holy Spirit displays God's power through each of us as a means of helping the entire Body (1 Cor. 12:7). No one is to be "left out" in the cold. If you fail to regularly fellowship in a Bible teaching church with other believers, you are neglecting the opportunity to use the gift(s) that God has given to you.

Following Christ's example, the early believers shared with each other and met practical needs. The Bible asks, if you see a fellow Christian in need and you say to him ***"Well, good-bye and God bless you, stay warm and eat hearty,"*** without helping him or giving something to him, what good have you done? (Jam. 2:16). The Church of Jesus ought to look out for its own before looking out for those in the world, but not become inverted and stop with its own. The world loves its own and won't typically lookout for Christians so we need to do this. Jesus said, ***"If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you"*** (Jn. 15:19).

Therefore, going forward from today, choose to be a blessing to others rather than a bummer in God's church! Choose to pray for your pastors. Pastors aren't to hurt you and you are not to hurt leaders. Pastors are there to equip and protect God's sheep and God's sheep are there to grow, equip others and to seek to protect God's sheep, as well. Just make sure that your pastor is God's sheep rather than a goat and protect him.

Scripture commands us to, ***"...consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together..."*** (Heb. 10:24-25).

Christians need to gather for corporate, united, biblical worship. We do this to give, not to get. But the benefits you receive from expressing your thanksgiving and praise with other believers, from publicly reading and studying the Scriptures, and from praying in one accord cannot be matched or replaced. God teaches us to worship Him in ***"spirit and in truth"*** (Jn. 4:23-24).

Here Are Six Reasons Why I Still Believe In Christ's Church:

1. ***The local church is the only institution dealing with the ultimate issues of life.*** Death. Judgment. Relationships. Raising children right, Marriage harmony. True salvation. Eternal purpose. Proper priorities. Meaning in life. Identity. Heaven and Hell.
2. ***The church provides proper perspective that gives dignity to all of mankind.*** We live in a day where millions of babies have been murdered and trashed—where humans have become a means rather than an end. And it won't be long before old people, mentally challenged, and weak people are killed. They'll call it mercy killing, but there's nothing merciful about it. This worldly perspective creates a desperate sense of inner worthlessness, but we all need to realize that all people are very valuable—they were made in the very image of God! The Church counteracts this *use-em-and-lose-em-message and mindset* with the truth of the Word of God.
3. ***The church provides a reliable moral and ethical compass in the midst of confusing moral relativism.*** Like a gross quagmire of murky, slimy algae-ridden, smelly swamp water, our mixed-up society has either rethought, resisted, or completely rejected absolute truth. Not the Church though! It still stands firmly on the timeless bedrock of Scripture. When a rapist, thief or abuser can say *"Hey like, my truth is true to me dude and just as valid as your truth. Your truth and way of life is ok for you but it's equal with my truth and my way of life"* and that kind of thinking is then accepted by our society as it is today, then something has become horrifically wrong here and we're in trouble!
4. ***The church is the only place to find genuine community, healing, compassion, restoration and selfless love.*** It is in the church where people really care, *"because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us"* (Rom 5:5). And God did not do this because of our good looks, nice buildings, excellent programs, noble deeds, social status, bulky bank accounts or our own merit. The Spirit of grace is still at work, weaving our lives together in God's kind of love within the Church! Some unloving groups might call themselves the church, but they need to line up with the Scriptures.
5. ***The Church, unlike any other institution in all of history, has provided motivation and assistance for the most lasting, unselfish, essential, courageous ministries on earth.*** Schools. Hospitals. Halfway houses. Evangelistic crusades, Orphanages. Leprosariums. Missions.
6. ***The Church is the only institution/organism in the whole universe over which Jesus Christ says He rules as Head.*** The Church is no cyclops kind of creature or some kind of two headed freak. This is the organization with one great Head that directs the Body daily. Christ is sovereign and is absolutely preeminently in charge of His Church. When Christ ascended upward through the first, second and into the third heaven, He didn't leave behind an established restaurant chain, a law firm, or a supermarket with a sushi bar in the corner. He left us with Church leaders that He personally empowered and baptized in the Holy Spirit to lead His flock and He told them, *"I will build my Church; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it"* (Matt. 16:18).

Doesn't all that just thrill you to the MAX? Man, just to realize that you can be so privileged and connected with Christ and His Body? It isn't perfect that's for sure (you and I are a part of it, aren't we?) and it hasn't always modeled its Message well before the watching world, though many of the blunders of history that have been blamed on the Church were committed by lost religious people merely claiming to be part of Christ's Church. But whatever is next in order of importance to the real Church, it is an extremely distant second, and I mean way down the line!

When ordinary people—the garden-variety type of folk like you and me—can gather around such a majestic Christ. For wholehearted vertical worship. For caring horizontal encouragement. For simple Bible instruction. For tactful outward expression (fishing). For practical support. For spiritual uplifting. For the carrying out of a God-given role that will never ever be matched or surpassed on this entire planet even though this is the stuff the world around us calls “peculiar.” And the Apostle Paul told us they would think it was peculiar... Why? ***“Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men”*** (1 Cor.1:25). So who even cares how it may appear to others if we are walking wisely in the Spirit of truth? The Church is something that God has chosen and is pleased to use for His glory, because of the blood of Jesus.

It's Time To Find Your Place With The Real Church

It has been wisely said, *"The church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints."* And because of Christ's involvement, I would even go father than that by saying it is more like the ambulance, the wheelchair, the crutches, the hospital, the bandages, the therapy, the nurses, the therapy—all of that!

Regularly go fellowship with strong spiritual Christians in a healthy flawed fishing church instead of to a sick flawed church! Again, no church isn't flawed, but your active participation with healthy Christians committed to church-fellowship cannot be overemphasized! As you attend church and find your place in it, you will then be in a position to give out to others that which God has given to you. Pray and rely on the Holy Spirit to show you the way.

Billy Graham offers this advice, ***“First ...I would select a church which preaches the Gospel faithfully. However, it is not enough to be sound theologically. I would choose a church which endeavors to practice what it preaches, translating its beliefs into everyday life...”***

Remember that the model for a God-honoring church is in the Bible. Study God's design and pray to be led to the place that He has prepared for you. Have you noticed any visitors in your church lately? Has your baptistery gone bone dry? Are your members even bothering to lift up a Bible or a hymnbook to passionately sing in worship to the Lord or is it all done halfheartedly?

Is Your Church Dying Or Gravely Ill?

Lots of fellowships in America are unfortunately getting sick and hardening spiritually. Pastor R.G. Lee said they'd either ***“Evangelize or fossilize.”*** And it is sad, because they don't even recognize their poor condition. They're ignoring the Word, so it's no wonder that the last thing these people want to do is go fishing for souls.

Is your church's membership declining each year even when new people are constantly moving into your community and the attrition rate can't be blamed on the brave pastor who is faithfully and uncompromisingly teaching the truth in love? Is the vast majority of people in your church white folk and it seems to be staying that way, even though droves and droves of new precious African American and Hispanic people are filling up the neighborhoods around your church? Man, something is very unhealthy about this!

Hey, if you want to discover the temperature of your church, I say stick a thermometer in the pastor's mouth. Are all the pastor's witnessing stories from decades ago or does he care enough to still verbally witness to people off the church campus? The health of the pastor and elders sets the tone – God uses a healthy on-fire pastor to help the local church gain a healthy state of being in the Spirit. Pastor, if you want your church to be a healthy fishing church, you must be a healthy leader that has learned to spend

time alone with Christ and subsequently learned to like fishing with Him! And being a healthy leader doesn't always guarantee that your church will be healthy or will soon be a mega-church, but being an unhealthy leader that's not personable will assure that your church will remain unhealthy and small.

The emphasis should be placed on church health according to how the Scriptures define that, and not on entertainment or church growth per se. If the Body aims for church health in the Word, they'll see church growth.

The Basic Characteristics Of A Healthy Church

What are the basics of a healthy well-balanced fishing church? This question has taken on added significance in recent decades first because of the influence of Christian radio, contemporary Christian music, the massive impact of televangelism and then with the internet, MP3s, pod casting etc. These things have changed our culture. In fact, it may well be argued that the "visual electronic church" has, in some ways, become the prototype for the local church.

In all too many cases, worship has been replaced with entertainment; fellowship has been transformed into individualism; and the biblical concept of "every believer fishing for souls" (Acts 8:1) has been replaced by the dubious witness of the money-hungry-televangelist teaching faith for avarice and acquisitiveness. Man, the very form and function of the local church has been dramatically altered.

In view of these cultural developments, it is critical that Christians have a handle on the basic ingredients of a healthy, well-balanced fishing church. Here's a simple acronym to help you remember this:

G-O-D

G = God

The first sign of a healthy, well-balanced soul-winning church is a born again Spirit controlled pastor who is committed to leading the community of believers under him, in biblical worship of God alone through **prayer, praise, and the proclamation of the Word...** for the purpose of edifying the saints and bringing in a catch of sinners.

Prayer – it's so inextricably woven together with worship that it would be totally unthinkable to have a church service without it. Preaching Christ, Worshipping God, prayer to Him and the ministry of the Word to people all need to be given preeminence in every church service ahead of all entertainment, recruiting, videos and everything! From the very inception of the early Christian church, prayer has been a primary means of worshipping God. Jesus Himself set the pattern when He taught His disciples to 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. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Matt. 6:9-13).

Praise – that's another key aspect of prayer. It's part of the believer's worship of God. *“By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name”* (Heb. 13:15). The Bible also says that you were made for *“the praise of his glory”* (Eph. 1:12+14). Paul urged the church at Ephesus to *“speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs”* (Eph.

5:19). In the Psalms, we see a stunning portrayal of a God who is worthy of our praise, worship and appropriately extravagant adoration. As the psalmist so aptly put it in Psalm 150:

Praise the LORD.

Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens.

Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.

Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with the tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.

Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.

Praise the Lord!

Proclamation – in addition to prayer and praise, the proclamation of the Word is a vital aspect of worshiping God. We see in First Timothy 4:13 how Paul exhorts us to devote ourselves *"to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching."* Through the proclamation of God's Word, believers are edified, educated, and equipped for evangelism. That's teaching souls! Through the proclamation of God's Word, unbelievers are challenged, educated, and evangelized. That fishing for souls!

It is through **prayer, praise, and proclamation** that we are *"being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"* (1 Pet. 2:5).

O = Oneness

The second sign of a healthy, well-balanced soul-winning church is its true spiritual oneness (and I'm not talking about the type of oneness heresy found in the UPC cult). Jesus Christ crushes all barriers of sex, race, and economic background that divide us and He makes us into one Body under the banner of true love. Communism claimed to turn people into comrades, but Jesus Christ turns believers into brothers and sisters in God's family. The oneness we share as members of Christ's Church is tangibly manifested through **community, confession, and free-will contribution**—yes, minus all the pressure and Madison Avenue hype and manipulation.

Community – is about fellowship with other growing Christians. Baptism symbolizes our entrance into a community of believers who are one in Christ. This is an outward sign of an inward reality—a seal that we have been buried to our old life and raised up into newness of life through Christ's supernatural resurrection power. Holy Communion (a.k.a. the Lord's Table) is the chief expression of the spiritual oneness that we share as a community of believers, for as we all partake of the same elements; we also partake of that which the elements do symbolize: Christ, the Bread of Life Who nourishes us and binds us together. Our fellowship on earth, celebrated through communion, is a mere foretaste of the heavenly fellowship that we will share when the symbol gives way to what it represents.

Confession – that's the bold confession of our oneness in Christ is based on a core set of beliefs which Mr. C. S. Lewis called Mere Christianity and which Dr. Walter Martin

referred to as "essential Christianity." These beliefs, which have been codified in the Christian Creeds of the Church, form the basis of our unity as the body of Christ. As Christians, our unity is to be formed around the Jesus Christ of the Bible and the Essentials and nothing more. The words of Rupertus Meldenus and later heard from Augustine bear repeating: "*In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; and in all things, charity.*"

Contribution – is the free-will sharing of our valuable **time, talent, and treasure** also tangibly demonstrates our spiritual oneness in Jesus. The pastor of the local church is called to "*prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up*" (Eph. 4:12). God has given the individual members of His church unique spiritual gifts to be used "*for the common good*" (1 Cor. 12:7) and He expects us to wisely and unselfishly employ these gifts.

God has called individuals from every tongue, tribe and nation to Christ His Son and to spiritual oneness in the family of God. Remember, no man is to be an island! Cain asked "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9). The answer should be yes—Cain was supposed to be. You and I are also to be our brother's keeper. God has called each member to the Body of Christ for an eternal purpose. God wants every member of the Church burning for Christ brightly! Many logs burning together do burn brightly, but when one log falls off to the side, its embers will quickly die out.

D = Disciples

In the *Great Commission*, Christ called us not only to win **converts** but to make **disciples** (Matt. 28:19). A disciple is a learner or follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are called to the task of making disciples through the testimony of our genuine **love**, the testimony of our pure **lips**, and the testimony of our holy **lives**.

Love – one of the secrets of the growth of the early church was the testimony of its pure love and clean conversation. The love of Christ not only compelled early Christians to be ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:14), but it constrained the world to take notice of them as well. Your witness too should be so attractive, that the last, the lost and the lonely should stop and take notice. The love of Christ was so contagious that it swept through the Roman Empire like wildfire. Jesus said, "*All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another*" (Jn. 13:35). We all need to be infectious with such love today!

Lips – the early Christian church not only transformed the Roman Empire through the testimony of its love but also through the testimony of its member's lips. Acts in the Bible tells us that on the day that Stephen was cruelly martyred, a persecution arose against the believers in Jerusalem, and all the Christians except the apostles were scattered abroad throughout Judea and Samaria. And those who were scattered went and preached the Word wherever they went. They were fishing for souls and many people got hooked as a result.

Therein lies another secret of church growth for the early church—every member evangelism. Yes, every believer was a blazing witness for Christ! No one said, "*Hey like, that witnessing stuff—it's not my gift or calling.*" While it is true that not everyone is called to be an **evangelist** or fulltime in "the ministry," everyone is definitely called to wisely **evangelize**. This is why believers everywhere must take the Great Commission very seriously—witnessing and equipping believers to better witness. For the rest of their individual lives, as God provides them opportunities, we believers are to be prepared to fish

and make disciples. I believe that a great commitment to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission will grow a great church. Jesus said, *"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples"* (Jn. 15:8).

Life – very closely related to the testimony of our lips would be the testimony of our lives. A story is told of a man who was working in a factory in the north of England. While standing on a ladder, he lost his balance and was skewered on a red-hot metal disk. His work mates were frantically scurrying about, looking for a doctor, when the man called out, *"Forget the doctor! I'm dying! Can anyone tell me how to get right with God?"* Of the more than 300 men in the factory, not one could help the man. Later one of the men confessed that he could have stepped forward, but the testimony of his life had long ago refuted the testimony of his lips. He was an admitted hypocrite who didn't walk his talk.

Which wing of an airplane is more important? It is more important to witness by our words or our lives? If we testify merely by our lives, attitudes, deeds and demeanor we are in danger of testifying only to ourselves. Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ. On the other hand, if our lives belie the testimony of our words—if we don't walk our Christian talk—we will be dragging the name of Jesus through the mud, so to speak. We must testify through **both our lives and our lips.** ²

It is absolutely crucial that Christian in the Church fully understand the biblical mandate of *fishing for souls* and the concept of the priesthood of all believers. Why? Because the Christian pastor's calling is not to do the work of the ministry single-handedly. Rather, he is called to help prepare Christians to better worship God, study the Bible, pray the prayer and compassionately witness. He is to *"prepare God's 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"* (Eph. 4:12-13).

We desire that this acronym **G-O-D** will remind you of the basic aspects of the Great Commission so that you will pray and discover your part with it. So that you will search and find healthy, well-balanced, soul-winning church: a church in which **God** is fully worshiped, in which we enjoy **oneness** of fellowship, and from which we can confidently exit the four walls of "the building" to go win souls and make **disciples** of all nations! Indeed, as Peter put it, you are *"a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light"* (1 Pet. 2:9).

What Are Some Very Important Tasks Of The Soul-winning Church?

1. To love and worship God in Spirit and in truth

Rev. 2:4

2. To glorify God daily

Eph. 1:5–6, 11–12, 14; 3:21; 2 Thess. 1:12

3. To display God's strong grace

Eph. 2:7; 3:6, 10; 1 Pet. 2:9

4. To tactfully evangelize lost people in the world

Matt. 28:19–20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47 ; John 20:21 ; Acts 1:8

5. To water-baptize real believers

Matt. 28:19

6. To instruct real believers for growth

Matt. 28:19 ; Phil. 4:8–9 ; 1 Tim. 4:6 ; 5:17 ; 2 Tim. 2:2, 24–25

7. To edify and encourage believers

1 Cor. 14:16; Eph. 4:11–12, 16; 1 Thess. 5:11; 2 Pet. 3:18; Jude 20

8. To discipline believers who insist on sinning

2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 2:15; 1 Cor. 5:5

9. To provide fellowship for real fishers of men (believers)

Acts 2:42 ; 1 Cor. 1:9 ; 2 Cor. 8:4 ; 13:14 ; Gal. 2:9 ; Phil. 1:5 ; 2:12 ; 1 John 1:3, 6–7

10. To genuinely care for its own in a time of need

2 Cor. 8–9; 1 Tim. 5:1–16; James 1:27

11. To provoke Israel to jealousy

Rom. 11:11–14

12. To prepare rulers for the millennial Kingdom

Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12

13. To act as a restraining and enlightening force in this present evil world

Matt. 5:13–16; 2 Thess. 2:6–7

14. To promote all that is good

Gal. 6:10

More Characteristics Of Healthy Churches And Pastors

A long-term pastorate with a Bible and prayer emphasis—there's something about a sick-flawed-church that is constantly looking for a new pastor... that seems to keep the church from becoming healthy! Let me ask you a question if I may. Does your church drive off, force out or fire decent pastors who preach, teach and live the Word? Do you have an elder board or advisory board that wants to rule without rival or any decent in the local church where you attend?—a board who feels they must be the pastors bosses and that He needs to always obey them as a fearful employee should? If so, pray for God to lead you to a healthy-flawed-church that believes in a long-term pastorate.

A clear purpose—is needed. A church that loves and encourages Christians to fish for souls outside the four walls of the building will grow warmer and warmer through warm-hearted fellowship! It will grow deeper and deeper through scriptural discipleship. It will grow stronger and stronger through full-throttle biblical worship. It will grow broader and broader through agape-motivated ministry and it will grow larger and larger through the healthy addiction of joyously fishing for souls! The purpose must embrace the whole world and must be lived-out according to what the Scriptures teach. If there is one immature saint in the earth, if there is one lost souls still living, then the purpose is not yet fulfilled.

A clear target—this is imperative. The target is people. Reach out to all those who live within reach of your church. Here's an idea—find out who is living in your community by actually going out to meet them where they work and reside. Do you even know why do they do not attend any church in your area? Hey, you'll never learn unless you go talk with them and carefully listen to them. Many churches are totally irrelevant to your neighbors because they talk about and do things that are totally irrelevant to life in America during this century. The principles of God's Word are very relevant if we teach God's Word in the way that God wants the Bible taught. Things have changed in our Land and some things have not. Methods change, the Message never does. Culture changes, Christ never does and He still cares for the lost! His mouth still works and He can tell you what methods to utilize and you stick to the basics of the Message. Remember to plant your feet in their shoes so to speak. Try to hold-off on using your Christian-eze lingo and remember what it's like to be lost?

Here Are Some Characteristics Of Great Churches (Small And Large):

Christ honoring biblical worship—make worship biblically educational and inspiring. Lots of the hymns inject great theological themes. Let the new love songs—the fresh lyrics be from the old Scriptures and very often directed right to Christ in lavish adoration! We need to take the old unchanging Gospel Message and relate it to people in different cultures today in a fresh way with words the people will understand. Many in America who are lost do not really understand church culture or unique our church lingo at all. So I would encourage you to communicate truth simply, candidly, sincerely and with common terms used where people live today.

Spiritual disciplines—at church will promote health and will provide practical soul-winning training and time tested/proven resources for people of all ages to apply and to develop with these disciplines. There are a whole lot of people in our churches today who have no clue about how to start with basic spiritual disciplines or even how to enjoy a quiet time alone with Jesus. We need to build leaders with spiritual knowledge about pursuing Christ at home first!

Growing a community of grace—at church is smart. Church must be a safe haven, an affirming warm-hearted place where the warmth of genuine Christian love is expressed with grace. It's to be a place where people recognize spiritual authority in servant leaders and the power of God's holy Word in action! You're not going have a mature church if you constantly give an equal voice and equal authority to new Christians who are fresh off drugs, coming in to every business meeting just to dominate the time and blab all that they are sure is wrong with your church and it's leaders. There must be grace and order, because God is a God of grace and order. In the church we are equally loved, equally cherished, equally valued, but we don't all have equal voice. There are different ranks in God's army if you will.

Loving relationships that are wholesome—are fostered at the fishing church. This is done intentionally. It's about building loving, caring relationships within families, with singles, with youth, and with all members ...even out in the community where the Christians work.

Humble servant leadership—is so important in the local church! Minister means servant. The healthy church identifies and develops individuals committed to Bible teaching whom God has called and given the gift of leadership to and then challenges them to become servant leaders, serving more people in a quality way simultaneously -- without making ministry an idol.

Outward focus—is a must! The natural tendency for any Christian and any local church is to hyper focus inwardly—us four and no more! It takes supernatural intervention for a person or a church to not only look upwards, but look outwards. Most Christians reach inward easily and becoming overly maintenance-minded to the exclusion of reaching out to outsiders. Our human tendency is to focus on self, our group and our stuff, just to keep it all “nice for us.” But we've got to change this and look upward and then outward beyond the property lines of our nice church campus. We need to pray a lot and think a lot and reach out a lot to the lost people around us or we are not like Jesus because that is what He did and that is what He came here for. We are not called to focus exclusively on the lost, but we should try to brag on Jesus Who is indeed brag-worthy, to exalt Jesus to the ends of the globe and to communicate with precious lost people for the purpose of friendship and bringing them to Christ and then into His church.

Proficient administration—can greatly improve how things are done. This builds some structure underneath a good thing and it can basically help your church streamline and become a more efficient fruitful church rather than merely have a structure in place that gets in the way of ministry and

evangelism. In the church, it shouldn't ever become so complicated that we shoot ourselves in the foot when trying to step out the door.

Inter-church networking—takes unity and cooperation. All church leaders need to locate within the church non-condemning accountability partners who can speak the truth in love, ones who might also be a good friend to talk with when times get rough. We pray these partners in, asking God for someone you can click-with, who will understand you and challenge you. I don't mean in a weird overly dependant way, but someone outside your family who loves Jesus and all He stands for most!

Generous stewardship—helps. The Gospel is free, but it takes money down here to pipe it to those in need. That's life under the sun. I once told some missionaries this: *Without a vision to give at a healthy church, the people perish, but without a people that give in a healthy church the vision perishes.*” I think that's true. Our God is a giving God—He gave His Son—therefore we must not selfishly live to be “on the take” corporately or individually if we want to reflect his glory and grace. A healthy church teaches its members that they are stewards of God's property—their God-given time, talent and treasure for His glory! The church is to challenge its members at times (not too much and not with pressure) towards sacrificial generosity for the cause of missions-fishing, and sharing with others locally in appropriate biblical ways. Again it is to do this without giving an overemphasis to financial giving. We are to give ourselves to God first. Giving money is not the only doctrine the Bible deals with, but many churches act like it is. There are a lot of things that we can give that will help others see Jesus and we can start with our free time and ears.

God's empowering presence – the healthy fishing church has a sense of the presence of God, because loving, joyous, hope-filled Christians are excited and have been praying the price. They are taught about the fear of God who sees and gets involved in our lives. Do visitors say that about your church? Hey man, God's there!

Remember every church leader needs to have a red hot passion for fishing for lost people, for discipleship and most of all for worshipping God wherever they go. We serve an *everyday Jesus*, not just a Sunday Jesus. The people MUST develop an intimate obedient relationship with this Jesus—He's so wonderful! He can do so much in a church! So many great things can happen if the church is committed to the Word and yielded to the Spirit! Churches just need to put aside useless, time wasting programs and obey Christ in reaching out. He said, **“Go into all the world and preach the Gospel!”** Sure we need to be willing to stand alone, to go, to sacrifice, to persevere through all the difficulties, to develop the right people skills and to maintain their exuberant joy on the upward journey!

I'm not saying any of this is going to be as simple as falling off a log. But if you have strong organizational skills, discipline to say not to busyness so you will draw aside to be with Christ so you will gain zeal, character, revival and enthusiasm, then you will have the what it takes. You will have great potential for being healthy and for promoting health in a church!

Yes, the church is a living organism. The church will thrive as it keeps seeking God to keep its members lovingly active in the truth and well fed with all the counsels of God. God's Word has gobs to say about the characteristics of a healthy, soul-winning church. You can even measure its vitality by comparing its qualities to the characteristics of the early church in the first century (see Acts 2:42, 44-47).

A healthy church will get together regularly! It will make obeying Christ, Bible study, prayer, love, worship and witnessing the priorities. It will systematically develop caring people who deeply concern

themselves with the well-being and maturation of each member. It will demonstrate Christ's love in their community meaningful ways. It will stress that:

1. Salvation is a free gift of God (no earning it at all) to all who will repent of their sins and trust Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and that this is the only way to come into a relationship with God or make it into heaven (Jn. 14:6, Eph. 2:8-9).

A healthy fishing church is a growing church, but the growth alone shouldn't be viewed as the proof of God's blessing. First century believers had JOY and enjoyed "*gladness and a singleness of heart.*" You should be at home at your church home. It should be a place you feel excited to go to on Sundays, and on other days of the week not just catch on TV, by pod cast or over the radio!

We don't walk by feelings but inner discomfort (conviction among other things like feeling grieved) when you are with Christians inside or outside the church could be a prompting from the Holy Spirit that something isn't right or scriptural. Jesus and the apostles warned us of false teachers, so prayerful growth in your understanding of what the Bible says will give you discernment regarding truth verses error. Please avoid any group that teaches beliefs, rituals or practices that deviate from what the Bible teaches. False teachers love to mix the truth with error.

Most Cults Are Identifiable Because They Refuse To:

1. Adhere solely to the sixty-six books of the Bible. Instead, they add their "special revelations" or they subtract canonical books from the Bible.
2. Believe that our relationship to God has been provided by grace alone through faith alone, by Christ alone. Instead they practice salvation by works.
3. Acknowledge Jesus Christ as the divine Son of a holy God nor do they want to give Him all the glory or full recognition for what he He rightfully merits.

Cults like the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), the Unification Church, the Unitarians, Spiritists, Physics and Scientologists are off the wall and dangerous groups. .

It's imperative that you find Christ and then a healthy soul-winning church with a growing, spiritual, born again Pastor who teaches the Word of God! You want one who lives in love according to the truth of the Word of God. Why? You want to be fruitful and live a life that is pleasing to Christ! After repenting and trusting Christ, you might be asking yourself: Where do you go from here? Which path will bring true spiritual success and growth?

It is radically important for you to become a vital part of a healthy church that loves to fish for souls! The Church (the entire body of believers worldwide), was established by Christ to provide you with biblically sound instruction, with clear application of this teaching and to allow you to passionately express real worship with other Christians upward to God. The church should help you use your God-given gifts and abilities as Christ intended for you to do, and help keep you accountable among balanced spiritual leadership.

The church wasn't designed to merely benefit the believer. The primary goal of the Church is to bring attention, praise, honor and glory to the Person who unifies the Church: Jesus Christ. And Christ has an eternal purpose in this for changing us and for outreach. He wants to makes us more like Him --

transforming us into His very image. Christ hasn't changed. He loves sinners. He has more people in mind that those currently in His church. And when the church operates as God intended, it serves as an effective witness of His love, truth and provision to a watching wayward world.



¹ *When you get the time, you'll want to study the churches in the Bible that loved to fish for souls:*

1. The church in Jerusalem

a. It began at Pentecost with at least 3120 members and was pastored by James, the half brother of Christ

Acts 2:47, 41; 15:13

b. Performed many wonders and signs

Acts 2:43; 5:12-16

c. Had believers who had all things in common

Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35

d. Had believers who were in one

Acts 2:46

e. Spent a good deal of time in prayer

Acts 2:42; 3:1; 4:24; 12:5-17

f. Witnessed at every opportunity

Acts 3:12; 5:42; 4:33

g. Radiated Jesus

Acts 4:13; 6:15

h. Was kept pure by God

Acts 5:1-11; 8:18-24

i. Grew constantly

Acts 2:47; 5:14; 4:4; 12:24

j. Endured persecution

Acts 4:1-3; 4:14-21; 5:17-41; 7:54-60; 8:1-3; 12:1-4

k. Appointed deacons

Acts 6:1-7

l. Practiced baptism and the Lord's Supper

Acts 2:41, 46

m. Sent forth missionaries

Acts 8:5, 14; 11:22; 13:1-3; 15:22, 27

n. Was the site of the important meeting on circumcision

Acts 15

o. Had Spirit-led believers

Acts 2:1-18; 4:31; 13:2-4; 15:28

p. Preached the word

Acts 2:16-36; 3:13-26; 7:1-53; 6:4; 5:42

q. Contended for the faith

Acts 15:1-21

r. Apparently later compromised with Judaizers

Acts 21:18-25

2. The church in Antioch of Syria

a. Founded during the persecution which followed the martyrdom of Stephen

Acts 11:19

b. Experienced a great in gathering of souls

Acts 11:21

c. Received Barnabas, sent by the Jerusalem church to check it out

Acts 11:22

d. First pastored by Barnabas

Acts 11:23

e. Had many new members added at this time

Acts 11:24

f. Had Paul as associate pastor

Acts 11:25

g. Where Paul and Barnabas worked for a year

Acts 11:26

-
- h. Where believers were first called Christian
Acts 11:26
 - i. Took up a large love offering for the needy believers in Jerusalem
Acts 11:30
 - j. The home church of the first two Christian missionaries, Paul and Barnabas
Acts 13:1–3; 14:26
 - k. Later became their headquarters, both after their first missionary trip and following the Jerusalem Council
Acts 14:26; 15:35
 - l. Home church of Silas
Acts 15:34
 - m. Where Paul set Peter straight on matters of legalism
Gal. 2:11

3. The church in Antioch of Pisidia

- a. God used Paul to start it during his first missionary journey
Acts 13:14
- b. Where Paul preached his first recorded sermon
Acts 13:16
- c. Formed from the converts coming out this meeting
Acts 13:43
- d. Where Paul turned from the Jews
Acts 13:46
- e. Where Paul related his heavenly calling as a light to the Gentiles
Acts 13:47

4. The church in Lystra

- a. Organized during Paul's first missionary journey
Acts 14:6
- b. The scene of Paul's healing of the impotent man, which led to Paul's almost being worshipped
Acts 14:10–11
- c. The scene of Paul's stoning
Acts 14:19; 2 Tim. 3:11
- d. Where Paul picked up Timothy during his second missionary journey
Acts 16:1–3

5. The church in Derbe

Acts 14:20–22

6. The church in Iconium

- a. Where Paul led many to Christ during his first journey
Acts 14:2
- b. Where he also worked great signs and wonders
Acts 14:3
- c. Where Paul was driven from by the unbelieving Jews
Acts 14:5

7. The church in Philippi

- a. Organized by Paul in the home of a woman convert named Lydia
Acts 16:15, 40
- b. The scene of Paul's healing of a demon-possessed girl
Acts 16:18
- c. Where the jailor became a convert
Acts 16:33
- d. Paul wrote a letter to this church.
Phil. 1:1
- e. Timothy ministered to this church.
Phil. 2:19
- f. Sent Epaphroditus to minister to Paul while the apostle was in prison
Phil. 2:25
- g. Was in danger of legalism
Phil. 3:1–3
- h. Paul wrote and asked the "true yokefellow" to help two quarrelling church women named Euodias and Syntyche.
Phil. 4:1–3
- i. Helped to supply the material needs of Paul
Phil. 4:15, 18

8. The church in Thessalonica

- a. Founded during Paul's second missionary journey
Acts 17:1
- b. Witnessed a great harvest of souls
Acts 17:4
- c. Paul was accused here of turning the world upside down

Acts 17:6

d. In spite of their zeal, the believers were not good Bible students

Acts 17:11

e. Paul wrote two letters to this church

1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1

f. The believers there had a reputation for witnessing

1 Thess. 1:8

g. They were persecuted by the unbelieving Jews for their faith

1 Thess. 2:14

h. Timothy ministered to this church.

1 Thess. 3:1–2

i. There were some lazy members in this church

2 Thess. 3:10

j. There were some busybodies.

2 Thess. 3:11

k. There were some disobedient members.

2 Thess. 3:14–15

9. The church in Berea

It was commended for its knowledge of and love for the Word of God

Acts 17:11

10. The church in Athens

It is not certain whether a local assembly came into being after Paul's sermon on Mars Hill, but if so, a convert named Dionysius probably led it.

Acts 17:34

11. The church in Corinth

a. Founded during Paul's second journey

Acts 18:1

b. Paul was aided by Aquila and Priscilla.

Acts 18:2

c. Crispus, the chief ruler of the Jewish synagogue, was one of the first converts.

Acts 18:8

d. His successor, Sosthenes, later was also evidently saved.

Acts 18:17; see 1 Cor. 1:1

e. Paul stayed here 18 months.

Acts 18:11

f. To this church Paul wrote several letters, two of which are included in the New Testament.

1 Cor. 5:9; 2 Cor. 10:9–10

g. This church experienced almost total confusion in regard to:

(1) baptism

1 Cor. 1:12

(2) earthly wisdom

1 Cor. 1:26

(3) carnality and strife

1 Cor. 3:1–3

(4) judging others unfairly

1 Cor. 4:7

(5) immorality

1 Cor. 5:1

(6) taking other believers to court

1 Cor. 6:1–4

(7) marriage

1 Cor. 7:1

(8) Christian liberty

1 Cor. 8–9

(9) the Lord's Supper

1 Cor. 11:17–34

(10) spiritual gifts

1 Cor. 12–14

(11) the doctrine of the resurrection

1 Cor. 15

(12) tithing

1 Cor. 16

h. Later pastored by Apollos

1 Cor. 3:6

12. The church in Ephesus

a. Founded during Paul's second journey

Acts 18:19

b. May have been pastored by Apollos, Timothy, and the apostle John

c. Where Paul wrought many miracles and saw much fruit

Acts 19:11–41

d. Where Paul went soul-winning door-to-door

Acts 20:17–21

e. The only Christian church ever to receive letters from two New Testament writers: Paul wrote a letter to them (Eph. 1:1), and John the apostle would later direct a portion of his book Revelation to them (Rev. 2:1–7). According to John's letter, this church:

(1) worked hard and possessed patience

(2) had high church standards

(3) suffered for Christ

(4) hated the deeds of the licentious Nicolaitans

(5) had left their first love

(6) needed to remember, repent, and return to Christ

13. **The church in Troas.**

Here Paul raised up Eutychus, a believer who had gone asleep during Paul's sermon and had fallen down from the third loft of the building.

Acts 20:7–12

14. **The church in Rome**

a. Origin and founder of this church unknown

b. Where Priscilla and Aquila labored, the church meeting in their home

Rom. 16:3–5

c. Had a ringing testimony throughout all the land

Rom. 1:8

d. Paul mentions having many personal friends in this church. The names of 26 individuals may be counted in Romans 16.

15. **The churches in Galatia**

a. Organized by Paul during his first journey

b. Had all fallen victim to the legalistic Judaizers, who would continually plague Paul's gospel of grace

Gal. 1:6–9

c. The Letter to the Galatians was written to these churches.

Gal. 3:1

16. **The church in Colosse**

a. Founded during Paul's stay in Ephesus, probably by Epaphras

Col. 2:1; 1:7, 12–13

b. Philemon and Onesimus were members.

Col. 4:9; Philem. 1–2

c. Paul commanded the Colossian epistle to be read to the Laodicean church, and ordered the one he wrote them to be read to the Colossian church.

Col. 4:16

17. **The church in Babylon**

1 Pet. 5:13

a. Wherever this church was located, it was filled with suffering believers.

1 Pet. 1:6

b. Some of this suffering was due to sin.

1 Pet. 4:15–17

18. **The church in Smyrna**

Rev. 2:8–11

a. The believers had suffered much for Christ.

b. They had been slandered by those from the synagogue of Satan.

c. Satan had imprisoned some of them.

19. **The church in Pergamos**

Rev. 2:12–17

a. The believers were located in the very center of satanic worship.

b. They had remained loyal to Christ in spite of martyrdom.

c. They were, however, tolerating some in the church who were guilty of sexual sins.

d. They were also tolerating those who held the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.

20. **The church in Thyatira**

Rev. 2:18–29

a. The believers had performed many good deeds.

b. But they permitted a false prophetess named Jezebel to teach that sexual sin was not a serious matter.

21. **The church in Sardis**

Rev. 3:1–6

a. This church had a reputation, but was dead.

b. They were to strengthen what little good remained.

22. **The church in Philadelphia**

Rev. 3:7–13

- a. Even though this church was not strong, its members had obeyed God's Word.
- b. This they had done during persecution.

23. The church in Laodicea

Rev. 3:14–22

- a. This was the least faithful church mentioned in the New Testament.
- b. The people were neither hot nor cold.
- c. They bragged about their wealth, claiming they had need of nothing, but in reality they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.
- d. God admonished them to totally repent and allow him to re-enter fellowship with them.

² I have Mr. Hank Hanagaph to thank for the great ideas above in the GOD acronym that he communicates about so well on the radio and at the *Christian Research Institute*.