

What Healthy Churches Do

*10 Common Qualities of
Healthy Churches*

Volume 1

David O. Dykes

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What Healthy Pastors Do *6 Common Qualities of Healthy Pastors*

GOD IS NOT AS INTERESTED in growing the size of a church as He is in growing the people *inside*. That includes the pastor. A spiritually unhealthy pastor often has an unhealthy effect on the church. Today's pastors are being challenged to model and create a spiritually healthy environment in their churches so that growth can take place. When we shift our focus from an obsession with *church growth* to a passion for *church health*, we will see God grow His churches like never before.

This curriculum outlines 6 basic characteristics of a healthy pastor. The formula is simple when we see how God likes to grow His Church. **A HEALTHY PASTOR = A HEALTHY CHURCH.**

www.WhatHealthyPastorsDo.org

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From the Author

In over 30 years of leading churches of all sizes, and from my study of Scripture, I've discovered some universal principles that apply to all churches everywhere. Although the Church that Jesus established is growing all over the world in every culture, I have identified *10 Common Qualities of Healthy Churches* that can apply in any setting. These are just some of the fundamental principles all healthy churches practice in order to ensure growth.

If a church displays all of these characteristics in increasing measure, the natural by-product is growth. That includes numerical growth. However, more importantly, the church will grow spiritually. Focus first on church *health*—and church *growth* will naturally happen in due time.

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How Do I Use This Curriculum?

There are 12 total lessons in this two-volume curriculum series. Each volume has an Introductory lesson plus five additional lessons. Each volume focuses on five characteristics of healthy churches modeled by the early Church in Acts 2. There is no particular sequence to the list, although it follows the order of the characteristics as they are listed in Acts 2. After you complete the Introductory lesson, you can continue your study at any chapter you wish.

You will notice there is a particular pattern in each of the lessons. Understanding this repeated pattern will help you as you process the material and apply it to your church setting.

Each lesson looks like this:

- Introduction to lesson
 - Truth: Summary of principle
 - Scriptural Context: Summary of main scripture from Acts 2
- Exploring the Principle: examination of key teaching points
 - 5-8 key points followed by questions and fill-in-the-blank answers
 - Additional scriptures
- Applying the Truth:
 - Application-based exercises to apply what you learn to your church setting
 - Summary and conclusion
- Answer Key for fill-in-the-blanks

You can use this material in a variety of settings, including a Master Teacher format. A Master Teacher can lead a large group (25 people or more) through each lesson. It is also suitable for small group use where a group works through the individual lessons together. Additionally, it is also appropriate for individual use by a single pastor or church leader. May God bless you as you begin to learn and apply these principles for identifying the characteristics of a healthy church.

Introduction: Why Healthy Churches Matter

Key Truth: Churches that focus on spiritual health experience church growth as a natural result of their efforts..

Scriptural Context:

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. Acts 20:28

As church leaders, our desire is to see the expansion of the Kingdom of God so that His name can be made famous throughout the entire earth. We do this great work through the New Testament model Christ initiated and left for us—the local Church, Christ’s Body.

Jesus didn’t leave us a stale organization—He left us a living, breathing organism comprised of all kinds of people in His Kingdom. His plan for transforming the world is through the expression of the local Church in every tribe, culture and nation. We have an exciting opportunity to be part of this movement and to create effective means of growth within our churches.

Outcomes:

As a result of this lesson, you will:

- Understand the relationship between church growth and church health
- Learn how God accomplishes church growth
- Apply the principles to your church setting

Exploring the Principle:

All Healthy Organisms _____

Any healthy organism is continually growing. A baby, for example, does not remain a baby long. He or she matures and grows into a toddler, then a child, then a young adult who matures into a grown man or woman. If this continuous growth process is interrupted in any way, it is a sign of sickness and an indication that something is wrong.

Did you know the body renews itself every day throughout our lives? In any given day, our bodies renew 300 billion cells! For example, the lining of the intestine renews itself every five days or so. The liver renews itself every two years, and human lungs experience a total turnover of cells every four years. So it is in the Church. It is constantly growing.

1. The Church is a living _____.

God is not growing and maturing the outward stone, bricks and mortar of a church's meeting place—that is not really the Church. That is simply a building or meeting place. Rather, God is constantly growing the people inside. They make up the true church. Believers who are part of healthy churches contribute to their overall growth because they are growing spiritually and maturing in Christ.

2. A healthy church will _____.

As church leaders, it's normal to want our churches to grow. It's normal to want to be part of something that is vibrant and healthy with the capacity to change lives for eternity. No one wants to be part of something that lacks momentum.

Is your church growing as much as it can right now? Why or why not?

Principles of a Healthy Church

1. Only _____ can grow a church.

- Jesus said to Peter, "...on this rock I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH." (Matthew 16:18). The Church is His Body and His Bride. Jesus will grow His Church—or healthy growth will not take place.
- When we ask, "How can I make my church grow?" we are essentially subconsciously stating ownership and responsibility for something that is not our own in the first place.

Why is it tempting to think church leaders are primarily responsible for church growth?

2. Leaders should focus on _____, not growth.

- Our primary focus should be on *church health* instead of *church growth*. It's a fundamental shift that must take place in how we approach church.
- If we focus on growth first, we will see people as "numbers," and we will be preoccupied with how the numbers grow or decline. However, if we make the spiritual health of others our priority, the Lord will make sure that church growth comes as a natural result of our efforts.

What does a healthy church look like?

3. When leaders create a healthy _____, God will grow _____ Church.

Programs and activities are necessary—but they must have a well-defined purpose.

- A church may have many activities without necessarily experiencing growth. Their people may be busy, but they may not be growing spiritually.
- Rather than focusing on growing a church through busyness, healthy pastors and church leaders work to create an environment geared toward growth.

Why is being involved in church programs not the same as spiritual growth?

Healthy Church Growth Follows a

This 2-volume curriculum offers a plan based on a passage of Scripture that identifies 10 qualities every healthy church has in common. If a church possesses these qualities in increasing measure, it will be a very healthy church. And a healthy church naturally grows.

The key passage is in Acts 2 where this brand new organization of believers (soon to be called the Church), is just beginning to form.

ACTS 2:42-47: They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he 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.

From this passage, we see 10 different qualities that the early Church modeled. As a result, they grew tremendously and spawned a movement that eventually impacted the entire world.

10 Common Qualities of Healthy Churches

Volume 1:

1. Healthy Churches Offer Consistent Bible _____
2. Healthy Churches Offer Loving _____
3. Healthy Churches Make _____ the Priority
4. Healthy Churches Trust God to Do _____
5. Healthy Churches Maintain _____

Volume 2:

1. Healthy Churches Develop a Culture of _____
2. Healthy Churches Offer Excellent _____
3. Healthy Churches Create _____
4. Healthy Churches Impact Their _____ in Positive Ways
5. Healthy Churches Welcome _____ People into Their Church Family

Applying the Truth:

Complete the following assignments and reflect on your response:

1. What did you learn from this lesson that you can put into practice immediately?

2. Look over the list of 10 qualities above. Which ones are areas of strength for your church and which ones represent areas you need to grow?

Strengths	Challenges

3. Spend some time thinking about how your church can become healthier. Journal about what a healthier, more spiritually mature church membership would look like. Envision what your church *could* be for God's glory.

Summary:

In order for a plant to thrive, it must have food, water and sunlight. An animal or human must have water, food and rest. In the same way, there are certain conditions that lead to church health and, consequently, church growth.

Answer Key Introduction: Why Healthy Churches Matter

All Healthy Organisms GROW

1. The Church is a living organism.
2. A healthy church will grow.

Principles of a Healthy Church

1. Only God can grow a church.
2. Leaders should focus on health, not growth.
3. When leaders create a healthy environment, God will grow His Church.

Healthy Church Growth Follows a PATTERN

Volume 1:

1. Healthy Churches Offer Consistent Bible truth
2. Healthy Churches Offer Loving fellowship
3. Healthy Churches Make prayer the Priority
4. Healthy Churches Trust God to Do supernatural things
5. Healthy Churches Maintain unity

Volume 2:

1. Healthy Churches Develop a Culture of Generosity
2. Healthy Churches Offer Excellent Large Group Worship
3. Healthy Churches Create Small Group Relationsh
4. Healthy Churches Impact Their Community in Positive Ways
5. Healthy Churches Welcome New People into Their Fellowship

Notes:

LESSON ONE

Healthy Churches Offer Consistent Bible Truth

Introduction to lesson

Key Truth: The Bible, God’s holy Word, must be the central focus of the ministry of the Church and guide all the other aspects of ministry.

Scriptural Context:

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching... Acts 2:42

The early Church did not have access to the New Testament as we do today—it was not yet written! Still, the Bible clearly says they “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” in Acts 2:42. What was this teaching? It was an oral telling and retelling by the apostles about all that Jesus had done and said throughout His ministry. They were eyewitnesses to the miracles and shared with others all they had heard Jesus teach. One of the apostles, Peter, wanted to make sure skeptics did not come along to discredit what they were teaching as merely gossip or misinformation. They were credible witnesses to everything firsthand.

We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 2 Peter 1:16

The four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) originated from these eyewitness accounts. They are the God-inspired written accounts of these same stories and Jesus' teachings. God inspired men to write the other books in the New Testament, which are actually letters that were circulated among the churches to communicate God's Truth. We use the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, as our sole authority and only true foundation of our preaching and teaching because we believe it is God's holy Word—written by men but inspired by God.

Outcomes: As a result of this lesson, you will:

- Understand the priority of God's Word in preaching and teaching
- Learn effective principles for teaching God's Word in small and large group settings
- Apply the principles to your church setting

Exploring the Principle:

God's Word is Unique

The Bible is no ordinary book. It contains 66 books written by 40 different people over 1600 years—yet it has one theme. It is the story of God's redemption of humanity from their sinful condition.

1. We find the answers to life's biggest _____ in God's Word.

People throughout the world in every culture long for answers to their most heartfelt concerns like: *Why am I here? What is my purpose in life? Where did I come from? Where am I going?* Through consistent Bible teaching and preaching, we can reveal the answers to them and provide the opportunity for God to change their lives for eternity.

Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.' John 6:68

2. We find the sole source of _____ for our lives in God’s Word.

In today’s society, truth is considered relative. The world says, “What is true for you may not be true for me.” Non-believers doubt whether any one true, infallible authority exists.

However, the Bible presents itself as the basis of all authority because it explains God’s love and His laws. We never have to wonder what God expects of us because it is written plainly in the Bible. The Bible is not a human idea; it is God-inspired. Peter explained it this way:

For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:21

3. We find Jesus in every _____ of God’s Word.

The whole Bible is built around one central theme: Christ Himself. The Old Testament is the story of a nation from whom one Man would come to redeem the entire world. The New Testament describes how that one Man—Jesus Christ—did that through His death on the cross and resurrection.

The whole Bible is the story of Jesus, as He pointed out to the Pharisees:

You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. John 5:39-40

How do you know God’s Word is true? What evidence would you give a non-believer?

God's Word Must Be Taught

Before Jesus ascended back into heaven, He gave the disciples an important command. We often call this "The Great Commission."

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

1. People Need the _____.

Jesus left us with the responsibility of teaching others what He commands. Without teaching God's Word, people will not know everything He wants them to know about God's love and God's laws.

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' Romans 10:14-15

2. People Need God's Word to be _____.

God wants people to read His Word for themselves. However, God also equips certain people to teach others the Truth of His Word so they can grow in their understanding. Preachers and teachers share God's Word to help people grow spiritually.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. 2 Timothy 3:16

Scripture says there will come a time when "men will not put up with sound doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:3). What evidence do you see of this today?

Why is it important for the Church to maintain Bible-teaching as their top priority?

How to Effectively Share God's Word

1. _____ as you prepare.

The best preparation a teacher or preacher can do is spend some time praying about what God wants to share with others through the lesson or sermon. Pray for God to help you speak the right words. Pray for the hearts of others to be open to what you have to say. Pray for the Holy Spirit to use your words.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. Ephesians 6:18-20

2. Study God's Word for _____ growth.

Preparing for a lesson is no substitute for daily personal study of God's Word. Study time for a lesson is not the same as devotional time where you are simply reading God's Word and praying for your own spiritual growth.

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. Psalm 119:105

3. Develop a plan to share God's Word _____.

Read how a fellow pastor decided to preach verse-by-verse: "When I first started preaching many decades ago, I struggled to know what to preach on every Sunday. I would often pray Monday through Friday, hoping God would reveal

a topic He wanted me to preach on, leaving little time to prepare for the sermon once I finally chose a topic. Then a wise pastor counseled me to choose a book of the Bible and preach through it verse-by-verse. This is called ‘expository’ preaching, and it helped me tremendously. I never again struggled to find a topic. I let God’s Word dictate the topic for my next sermon, and I have now preached through most of the books in the New Testament this way.”

Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart. Psalm 119:34

Three Questions to Apply to Every Bible Passage:

1. What does the passage _____? (Explanation)

2. What does the passage _____? (Illustration)

3. What _____ does the passage make in my life?
(Application)

Why do you think teaching the Word of God verse-by-verse is effective?

Applying the Truth:

Complete the following assignments and reflect on your response:

1. *What did you learn from this lesson that you can put into practice immediately?*

2. *God's Word says, "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart," Hebrews 4:12. Spend some time praying and asking the Lord to show you evidence of this truth at work in your church.*

3. *How would you rate the priority your church currently places on consistently teaching and preaching the Bible? Explain your choice.*
 - a. *Very high priority*
 - b. *Average priority*
 - c. *Low or no priority*

If Bible teaching is not a very high priority, what can you do as a church leader to address this problem?

Summary:

God's Word is like food. Christians need a steady diet of it in order to be healthy. Teaching the Bible is more important than morality, philosophy or even theology. The Bible must remain the main curriculum of a church in order to be healthy.

Answer Key Lesson 1: Healthy Churches Offer Consistent Bible Truth

God's Word is Unique

1. We find the answers to life's biggest questions in God's Word.
2. We find the sole source of authority for our lives in God's Word.
3. We find Jesus in every part of God's Word.

God's Word Must Be Taught

1. People need the truth.
2. People need God's Word to be explained.

How to Effectively Share God's Word

1. Pray as you prepare.
2. Study God's Word for personal growth.
3. Develop a plan to share God's Word verse-by-verse.

Three Questions to Apply to Every Bible Passage:

1. What does the passage say? (Explanation)
2. What does the passage mean? (Illustration)
3. What difference does the passage make to my life? (Application)

Notes:

LESSON TWO

Healthy Churches Offer Loving Fellowship

Introduction to lesson

Key Truth: A healthy church inspires, creates and nurtures a sense of true community among its members where they share life together on a number of levels.

Scriptural Context:

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching **and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread ...** Acts 2:42 (bold emphasis)*

The early Church was a tight-knit group of individuals who bonded over their commitment to what Jesus Christ had taught them. In hindsight, it was incredibly brave of those early disciples to continue meeting—considering their Leader had just been crucified for His teachings and beliefs. They needed each other more than ever to draw strength and encouragement from one another. No wonder they prayed together, worshiped together, ate meals together and shared nearly every aspect of life together! Spending time together was essential to carrying this new movement forward—they could not do it by themselves.

What has changed about our need for community in 2000 years? Not much. Today's Christians still need to be part

of a community of believers—just like their early Church counterparts.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

There are many types of community people share. For example, a family is a type of community. People who attend school together also share community because of their similar experiences. People who live in the same neighborhood, city or part of the country also share many things in common. However, Christian community is unlike any other form of community we may share with other people. And you're about to find out why it is so essential to forming a healthy church.

Outcomes: As a result of this lesson, you will:

- Understand how to prioritize your family
- Learn effective keys for healthy families
- Apply the principles to your personal setting

Exploring the Principle: Christian Fellowship Creates a Sense of

How important is Christian fellowship? Some people who call themselves Christians consider being part of a community of believers optional. They may attend church seldom or never at all. Have you ever heard someone say something like, “Why do I have to be part of a church? God and I get along just fine by ourselves.” We get a very different picture when we study what the Bible teaches about community. So, why is community essential to our faith?

1. God Himself _____ in community.

God Himself exists within the equal and triune nature of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is one God, expressed in these separate but unified personalities. The first reference

God makes to Himself describes this sense of shared community.

*Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...'
Genesis 1:26*

He says “our image”—but who is “our”? It is a picture of the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God exists within the context of a three-member relationship. Therefore, we are designed for sharing our lives with others.

2. God _____ community.

After God created the world, His first task was to create a human to enjoy it with Him. When He created Eve for Adam, He established another pattern for enjoying a relationship and fellowship with someone else.

The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.' Genesis 2:18

God made Eve so that Adam could enjoy fellowship and friendship with her, with God at the very center of their relationship. God created community between people so that He could be their focus and their reason for joining together.

3. The _____ established community.

Eventually, the Hebrews (Israelites) became a community several million strong who followed God’s laws and worshiped Him. They were a community of faith—set apart by God for a special purpose, which God explained to Abraham when He called him:

I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. Genesis 12:2-3

This shows us one of the original purposes for the gathering

of God's followers: to be a blessing to other people *outside* of the community of faith. We'll explore that idea later on in this lesson as we see how a community of faith can transform an entire city, country and continent for Christ.

4. **Jesus _____ community.**

Jesus chose to be part of a family. He could have been a self-sustaining, supernatural human being who just “appeared” one day in Nazareth as a fully-grown man. However, he chose to be born into a family with Mary and Joseph. He chose community.

When Jesus began His ministry, He did not do so alone. He called 12 men beside Him to share life together. Once more, he emphasized community and provided a model for us to follow. Like God was with Adam and Eve, Jesus was the central focus of these new relationships. The disciples looked to Him for guidance and teaching—while caring for one another.

When Jesus concluded His earthly ministry and ascended into heaven, he instructed His followers to continue building community in what is called the Great Commission:

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

This last instruction marked the beginning of what we know now as the Church.

What would you say to someone who believes Christian community is not important to God?

The Focus of _____

We have a _____ to other Christians

Acts is the story of the Church being born and growing into a worldwide movement that would soon reach every corner of the earth. In a sense, the story of Acts is still being written today as the modern Church continues to grow throughout the world. How did a few dozen believers grow to include over two billion Christians in the world today? What is the secret to its success? One answer is the priority the Church places on Christian community—how we treat one another out of respect for Christ. Let's look at some of the basic principles of Christian community.

1. **Christian community = God's _____.**

When a person becomes a Christian by expressing faith in Christ, they become part of God's family. Therefore, "Christian" community is reserved for only those who have accepted Christ as Lord and Savior. Everyone can have the opportunity to enter God's family this way and join the community of faith.

2. **Christian communities are _____, but _____.**

God's family is very diverse. Just look at your church! People of every shape, size and color are part of it. People may speak different languages. They may have different needs. Each one brings a special quality to your church, and it wouldn't be the same without each person's unique personality. However, the one thing everyone shares in common is a commitment to worship Jesus Christ and serve Him by serving others.

3. **Everyone in Christian community has a _____ to each other.**

The Bible teaches us to love each other, especially those within the community of faith we call the Church. Paul explained it this way:

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

The Bible describes some of our responsibilities to other Christians:

1. Carry each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2)
2. Pray for each other (James 5:16)
3. Forgive each other (Colossians 3:13)
4. Be kind to each other (Ephesians 4:32)
5. Encourage each other (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
6. Be accountable to each other (James 5:19-20)
7. Love each other (1 John 4:7)
8. Serve each other (Galatians 5:13)

What do you think makes Christian community so unique?

How well does your church currently fulfill its responsibilities to each other? What could be improved?

Applying the Truth:

Complete the following assignments and reflect on your response:

1. *What did you learn from this lesson that you can put into practice immediately?*

2. *Look at the following list of biblical responsibilities and evaluate some areas where your church needs to grow in meeting each other's needs. Score each responsibility according to the scale below to describe how well your church does in this area.*

1 = Very well—we do our best all the time

2 = Somewhat well—we could do better

3 = Not very well—we need to start growing in this area

Score

- Carry each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2)
- Pray for each other (James 5:16)
- Forgive each other (Colossians 3:13)
- Be kind to each other (Ephesians 4:32)
- Encourage each other (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
- Be accountable to each other (James 5:19-20)
- Love each other (1 John 4:7)
- Serve each other (Galatians 5:13)

3. *Write a prayer regarding the areas where your church needs the Holy Spirit's help to grow in community. Pray for specific leaders to arise in these areas.*

Summary:

The Church is a unique organization when it comes to building community. Other organizations are built around other causes—only the Church provides true community, fellowship, love and encouragement. When we love each other as Christ loves us, the world takes note. And people are drawn to find out why we are so different.

Answer Key Lesson 2: Healthy Churches Offer Loving Fellowship

Christian fellowship creates a sense of community.

1. God Himself exists in community.
2. God created community.
3. The Israelites established community.
4. Jesus modeled community.

The Focus of Fellowship

We have a responsibility to other Christians.

1. Christian community = God's family.
2. Christian communities are different, but similar.
3. Everyone in Christian community has a responsibility to each other.

Notes:

LESSON THREE

Healthy Churches Make Prayer the Priority

Introduction to lesson

Key Truth: A healthy church is a praying church.

Scriptural Context:

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread **and to prayer**... Acts 2:42 (bold emphasis)*

Of all the activities a church engages in, prayer is the most powerful. Sadly, it is also the most overlooked and underutilized. Do you long to see more of God's supernatural activity in your midst? Is your church struggling to find vision for the next steps it should take? Is there a challenge your church is facing that threatens your future? An honest evaluation of your church's commitment to prayer and a recommitment to prioritize prayer in your congregation will reconnect you with the greatest resource your church has at its disposal.

Outcomes: As a result of this lesson, you will:

- Understand the priority of prayer
- Learn effective principles for increasing your church's commitment to prayer
- Apply the principles to your church setting

Exploring the Principle: When Should Churches _____ for Prayer?

The early Church not only made prayer a priority—it was THE priority. In fact, prayer is the very first thing they did after Jesus ascended back into heaven. Acts 1:14 describes them as being “constantly in prayer” as they waited for the Holy Spirit Jesus had promised in Acts 1:8.

They continued praying about every challenge and opportunity they faced. When their enemies opposed them—they prayed. When they had a problem—they prayed. When they needed direction on their next step—they prayed. In Acts, we see at least three situations where the early Church made a commitment to pray together:

1. When they face _____ (Acts 4:23-31).

The rulers, elders and teachers of the law (I call them the “religious mafia”) were not happy with the growing audience listening to Peter and John teach about Jesus. They were jealous, suspicious and even angry about what was happening.

They warned Peter and John not to speak about Jesus anymore to anyone. Of course, Peter and John refused to do so, despite these threats. When they told the Church what had happened, their first response was to cry out to God in corporate prayer.

When your church faces opposition (and it *will* face it at one time or another), follow this same pattern. Begin praying for boldness. And ask God to show His miraculous power.

How have you seen prayer work when your church has faced opposition in the past?

2. When they experience _____ (Acts 12:1-19).

King Herod began arresting some of the key leaders in the early Church. He killed James, and Peter was next on his list. However, the believers responded immediately:

- They _____ together.
- They prayed until God _____.

When was a time you saw your church come together in prayer during a crisis?

3. When they need to follow God's _____ (Acts 13:1-3).

God instructed the early Church leaders in Antioch to set apart two men for leadership. Notice that the Church prayed AFTER they received this instruction and BEFORE they acted. Sometimes your church will gain a clear sense of what God wants you to do next. But you must continue to pray all the way through the decision. Just as you prayed before receiving God's guidance, you must continue to pray as you respond to what God says. We learn two things from their example:

- A healthy church will start every decision in prayer.
- A healthy church will make every decision with prayer.

How does your church typically factor prayer into its decisions?

What Kinds of Prayers Should We Pray?

1. _____

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Philippians 4:6

Why should we make our requests known to God?

- Prayer puts our problem in perspective (God can handle it).
- Prayer puts us in right relationship to God (We are dependent on Him).

Why does it please God to hear our requests?

2. _____

I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever. Psalm 145:1-2

- Praising God should be our automatic response in any circumstance.

How does praise change your perspective when something goes wrong?

3. _____

...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... Colossians 1:9

Ideas to pray for others:

for protection, for blessing, to listen to God's will, for strength against temptation, for wisdom, to have pure thoughts, for peace, for willingness to obey God, to be courageous, to be faithful, to have contentment, to experience joy

4. _____

Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. Psalm 95:2

- In small or large groups, ask people to share blessings for which they are thankful.
- Start a gratitude journal where you list three things every day for which you are thankful and let others contribute to it.
- Lead by example—make a practice of being more grateful for the little and big things in your life.

Why is gratitude so important?

5. _____

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior... 1 Timothy 2:1-3

Set aside time every worship service to pray for government leaders and those in authority to seek God's will. You do not have to agree with a person to pray for him or her.

Applying the Truth:

Complete the following assignments and reflect on your response:

1. *What did you learn from this lesson that you can put into practice immediately?*

2. *What can you do to increase the level of prayer in your church? Consider the following options and take notes on how these activities might work at your church. Add your own ideas, too.*

Ideas for Prayer	How This Could Work in My Church
<p>*Host a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week prayer ministry</p> <p>*Compile a list of “prayer warriors” who will contact others when a specific prayer need arises.</p> <p>*Provide prayer cards for people to write down their requests and submit them.</p> <p>*Lead your church in one 24-hour period of corporate prayer</p> <p>*Host a prayer-and-fasting day</p> <p>*Teach a special lesson on prayer</p> <p>Other ideas:</p>	

What is the number one obstacle to increasing the amount of prayer in your church? What can you do to overcome that obstacle?

Summary:

Prayer is the primary resource of a healthy church. When prayer becomes a priority in a church, God demonstrates His supernatural power in and among them. God calls His people to pray for each other and to pray about every circumstance and decision.

Answer Key Lesson 3: Healthy Churches Make Prayer the Priority

When Should Churches Gather for Prayer?

1. When they face opposition (Acts 4:23-31).
2. When they experience crisis (Acts 12:1-19)
 - They gathered together.
 - They prayed until God answered.
3. When they need to follow God's leading (Acts 13:1-3)

What Kinds of Prayer Should We Pray?

1. Requests
2. Praise
3. Intercession
4. Thanksgiving
5. Prayers for those in authority

Notes:

LESSON FOUR

Healthy Churches Trust God to Do Supernatural Things

Introduction to lesson

Key Truth: God's supernatural power is released when your church attempts the impossible.

Scriptural Context:

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous **signs were done by the apostles...** Acts 2:42-43 (bold emphasis)*

God is the only self-sustaining force in the universe. He commands all power and authority and determines the course of everything in history—all that has been, all that is and all that will be. If we want to experience power in and through our church, we must seek God as the single, reliable source. All the activities of a church (prayer, training, worship) are ultimately unfruitful if we're doing them in our own strength. A church that boldly relies on the Holy Spirit's power will see God at work in their midst.

Outcomes: As a result of this lesson, you will:

- Understand the importance of faith

- Learn effective principles for understanding and accessing God’s supernatural power
- Apply the principles to your church setting

Exploring the Principle: God has all the Power

God reveals Himself in Scripture as all-powerful. It is one of the more common attributes of God expressed throughout the Old Testament, especially the Psalms. “You are the God who performs miracles; you display your **power** among the peoples,” Psalm 77:14.

When we consider the scope of God’s power, we realize three truths that distinguish His power from any natural human power we may possess.

1. **He is** _____.

We can only make decisions based on the knowledge we have at the time. When God acts, He does so perfectly based on His perfect knowledge of the future, present circumstances, motives and attitudes surrounding the situation.

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:13

2. **He is** _____.

We are limited in what we are able to achieve using our natural talents and gifts. God’s power is unlimited and unending.

He rules forever by his power... Psalm 66:7

3. **He is** _____.

God is everywhere at once throughout the Universe.

Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your

presence? God is everywhere at once...the whole of God is present in every place throughout the universe? Psalm 139:7

4. He is _____.

History proves that power in the hands of mortal men and women can be unpredictable at best and destructive at its worst. However, we can be certain God always uses His power for the good of those who love and serve Him.

Who compares with you among gods, O God? Who compares with you in power, in holy majesty, in awesome praises, wonder-working God? Exodus 15:11

How do the results compare when accessing God's power vs. your own?

Accessing God's Power

In the New Testament, we see Jesus exercising the power of God, performing miracles and teaching with authority. People were amazed at what He was doing (Mark 1:27). They had never seen anyone else teach and act like He did! But then Jesus did something unusual—He started transferring this power to His disciples.

God _____ His Power with Us

When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. Luke 9:1-2

1. He gave them _____.

When Jesus sent out the disciples, it was based on His authority—not their own. They were ambassadors of Jesus.

2. **He gave them** _____.

They were able to perform miracles in His name and through His power.

Why do you think Jesus shared God's power with His disciples?

These examples in Jesus' ministry were temporary flashes of power. Jesus told the disciples that He was going to give them something better: a permanent source of power through the Holy Spirit.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8

This new power source was the Holy Spirit, whose story is told in Acts. In fact, the subtitle of the story of Acts should be "The Acts of the Holy Spirit" instead of the "Acts of the Apostles."

God Expects Us to Use His Power

The Greek word used in Acts 1:8 for the "power" Jesus predicted the believers would receive is *dunamis*. It is often translated as the root for our English word, dynamite. However, dynamite is only a flash of power and then the dust settles and it's over. I prefer the word "dynamo," which describes a never-ending, self-generating source of power.

How is the Holy Spirit a never-ending source of power?

1. God’s power is released by _____.

When was the last time you and/or your church attempted something that was impossible to do in your own strength? If it has been a while, you have not been relying fully on God’s power. Why not? Usually, it’s a matter of trust.

When we exercise our faith, we prove that we trust God to do what only He can do. If we do not trust Him, then we try to control the outcome ourselves. Our power is limited and our vision for ministry is small. However, great faith greatly pleases God.

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Hebrews 11:6

When was the last time your church attempted the impossible for God? Explain.

2. We see God’s power when we attempt the _____.

Scripture says we must act in faith before we see any results. This is the “reward” mentioned in Hebrews 11:6 for faith. There are examples throughout the Bible.

- The Israelites had to enter the Red Sea in order to see it part.
- The priests at the Jordan River did not see the river stop flowing until they set foot in the river.
- The blind man had to ask Jesus to touch Him.
- The paralyzed man’s friends had to bring Him to Jesus.

What “impossible” situation or need is your church facing right now?

3. Whatever we _____ in our _____ power equals _____ in God’s accounting.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5

Faith is the only way we access God’s power. What are you often tempted to do in your own power?

Is God Still Performing Miracles Today?

1. Do not _____ God’s power.

There are those who say God is no longer performing miracles today. However, many have seen Him perform miracles many times in the form of healings, transformed lives, financial needs, etc.

Likewise, we have seen Him choose not to do so when we so desperately wanted to see a miracle. God is able to do whatever He wants—and that we must never doubt.

... *But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt... James 1:6*

2. _____ on the power of God's Spirit.

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Ephesians 5:18

2. **Remember that a miracle can take many _____.** Sometimes churches stagnate in their appreciation for God's supernatural power because they are ignoring all the ways God works. His supernatural power is not limited to the arena of physical healing.

God's supernatural power can take the form of:

- Transformed lives through salvation
- Financial provision
- A relationship
- Inner peace
- Removing the desire to sin
- Disarming the power of a sinful habit

Where do you see God's supernatural power at work in your church today?

Applying the Truth:

Complete the following assignments and reflect on your response:

1. *What did you learn from this lesson that you can put into practice immediately?*

2. *Remember the “impossible situation or need” your church is facing right now. What can you do to exercise greater dependency on God’s power to address it?*

3. *How would you evaluate God’s supernatural power at work in your church? Where would you like to see more of His power displayed? Spend some time praying about your conclusions.*

Summary

Miracles and wonders drew many believers to the early Church. When people began seeing God at work, they wanted to be a part of it. Exercising trust in God by believing Him for the “impossible” can bring your church to a healthy level of faith on a more consistent basis. And it will attract more people who want to be involved where God’s power is evident.

Answer Key Lesson 4: Healthy Churches Trust God to Do Supernatural Things

God has all the Power

1. He is all-knowing.
2. He is all-powerful.
3. He is all-present.
4. He is good.

Accessing God's Power

God shares His Power with Us

1. He gave them authority.
2. He gave them power.

God Expects Us to Use His Power

1. God's power is released by faith.
2. We see God's power when we attempt the impossible.
3. Whatever we attempt in our own power equals nothing in God's accounting.

Is God Still Performing Miracles Today?

1. Do not doubt God's power.
2. Depend on the power of God's Spirit.
3. Remember that a miracle can take many forms.

Notes:

LESSON FIVE

Healthy Churches Maintain Unity

Introduction to lesson

Key Truth: God creates unity among individual Christians; healthy churches maintain it.

Scriptural Context:

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. **All the believers were together and had everything in common...** Acts 2:42-44 (bold emphasis)*

Christian unity is a powerful force in the world to accomplish God's purposes. Individually, Christians may not be of great significance. However, when they are unified through the Holy Spirit in the Body of Christ, they become a channel for God's supernatural work. Dr. Vance Havner once compared Christians to snowflakes. Each snowflake is wonderfully unique by itself, but one doesn't amount to much on its own. However, put enough snowflakes together in a snowstorm and their combined power is enough to stop traffic and shut down a whole city! Together, we can change the world for Christ.

Outcomes: As a result of this lesson, you will:

- Understand what unity is and what it is not
- Learn effective principles for how God creates unity and

- how healthy churches maintain it
- Apply the principles to your church setting

Exploring the Principle:

1. How the Bible _____ Unity.

In the New Testament, there is a special emphasis on unity among believers. Consider what the Bible teaches about unity:

- Jesus _____ for it.
May they be brought to complete unity... (John 17:23)
- God _____ it.
May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus... (Romans 15:5)
- Love _____ it together.
And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Colossians 3:14)

2. Unity _____ to God

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. Ephesians 4:4-6

3. Unity is not the Same as _____

The Bible praises unity as a key value among believers. “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!” Psalm 133:1. However, don’t confuse unity (everyone acting together) with uniformity (everyone acting the same). Here are some key differences:

- **Uniformity expects** _____.
When we expect everyone in our church to act the same, dress the same, worship the same way and pray the same way, we are expecting uniformity, not unity. The truth of

God's Word is able to unify very diverse people.

In the Bible, there is NOT:

- One way to worship God
 - One way to preach the Gospel
 - One way to reach lost people
 - One way to pray
 - One version of the Bible to read
- **Unity exists in _____.**
The worldwide Church (capital "C") is wonderfully diverse because of a variety of cultures, backgrounds, experiences, etc. Each local church (small "c") should reflect this same diversity.

How can you welcome more diversity in your church (cultures, races, backgrounds) while promoting unity in your beliefs?

4. **Unity is not the Same as Man-made _____**
Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 2 Corinthians 6:14

For the sake of union, some have tried to bring together different groups throughout history. However, those who hold very different core beliefs (Jews, Muslims, Christians, etc.) may experience temporary man-made union without experiencing unity.

5. **Only _____ can Create Unity**
- _____ **together is not the same as unity.** Some people think a church that meets together weekly qualifies as unity. Not so. You can tie two cats'

tails together—but they are not necessarily in unity!

- **Unity is an _____ of the Spirit.** We can meet together as Christians, but we cannot create unity—that’s not our job. The Bible says only God can create “unity of the Spirit” among Christians.

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:3

Why is unity something only God can create?

Two Choices About the Unity of Your Church

1. We can _____ **unity.**

Since unity is an act of the Spirit, we can cause Him grief by the way we act toward other Christians in our church. A lot of churches suffer because of unreasonable disagreements and arguments among believers. The Bible says to watch what we say if we’re interested in promoting unity.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Ephesians 4:29-30

OR

2. We can _____ **unity.**

We are to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit...”

(Ephesians 4:3). Paul shares a practical example later in Ephesians 4 when he says to build each other up. Healthy churches do all they can to maintain an encouraging, positive environment among believers.

Where has your church been successful in maintaining unity?

How to Maintain Unity in the Church

1. Be _____ to one another (Ephesians 4:32).

One of the problems in unhealthy churches today is that sometimes Christians aren't very nice—even to each other! We treat other Christians with shocking antagonism. A little girl prayed this profound prayer one night, “Dear God, please make the bad people good, and please make the good people nice.”

Kindness attracts unbelievers. Division among Christians is a poor witness to the world.

2. Seek to please _____ instead of ourselves (Romans 15:2).

We must set aside our own preferences, desires and wishes for the sake of others. In a church, selfishness is the enemy of unity. When we insist on our own way, problems arise. When we are willing to sacrifice for others, we create an environment where unity can thrive.

Members of a healthy church focus on:

- Sacrifice instead of Selfishness
- Your Needs instead of My Needs
- The Good of Many instead of My Happiness

How well does your church practice sacrifice over selfishness?
Name specific examples.

3. **Carry each other's _____ (Romans 15:1).**

The Bible says to “bear with” other believers—especially those who are weak or immature in their faith. We may disagree with each other for a variety of reasons—remember, people are different! However, we must never dishonor one another.

- Not everyone in a church is going to agree—but we can agree to disagree.
- Not everyone in a church is going to like each other—but we can love each other for Christ's sake.

4. **_____ for unity (John 17:23).**

This was the subject of one of the final prayers Jesus prayed for believers before He was crucified. Healthy churches follow His example by praying for unity because they know supernatural unity among Christians is something only God can create. He provides it as a gift.

Why is unity among believers such an effective witness to the world about what God is like?

5. **_____ God together (Romans 15:6).**

Nothing unifies a group of Christians like praising God together. Why? Because when the focus is exclusively on

Jesus, we forget about ourselves. We can all agree on the majesty and glory of Jesus—and His worthiness to be praised.

Glorify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name together. Psalm 34:3

So that with one heart and mouth, you may glorify the God and father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 15:6

Praise is a powerful prescription for disunity.

How do you maintain unity in your church?

How do you deal with disunity?

Applying the Truth:

Complete the following assignments and reflect on your response:

1. *What did you learn from this lesson that you can put into practice immediately?*
2. *How can your church maintain greater unity while celebrating your diversity?*
3. *What do you think God could accomplish through you if your church becomes even more unified? Be specific.*

Summary:

Unity is not the same as uniformity or unison. It is created by God and maintained by the local church. Selfishness is the primary enemy of unity, and believers must remain diligent in making others' needs a priority over their own. When a church is unified through the Holy Spirit, there is no limit to what it can accomplish for the kingdom of God.

Answer Key Lesson 5: Healthy Churches Maintain Unity

1. How the Bible Describes Unity
 - Jesus prayed for it.
 - God gives it.
 - Love keeps it together.
2. Unity Matters to God.
3. Unity is not the Same as Uniformity
 - Unity expects sameness.
 - Unity exists in diversity.
4. Unity is not the Same as Man-made union
5. Only God can Create Unity
 - Meeting together is not the same as unity.
 - Unity is an act of the Spirit

Two Choices About the Unity of Your Church

1. We can disrupt unity.
OR
2. We can maintain unity.

How to Maintain Unity in the Church

1. Be kind to one another (Ephesians 4:32).
2. Seek to please others instead of ourselves (Romans 15:2).
3. Carry each other's burdens (Romans 15:1).
4. Pray for unity (John 17:23).
5. Praise God together (Romans 15:6).

Notes:
