



What Is a Healthy Church?

Mark Dever

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What is an ideal church, and how can you tell?

How does it look different from other churches? More importantly, how does it act differently, especially in society? Many of us aren't sure how to answer those questions, even though we probably have some preconceived idea. But with this book, you don't have to wonder any more.

Author Mark Dever seeks to help believers recognize the key characteristics of a healthy church: expositional preaching, biblical theology, and a right understanding of the gospel. Dever then calls us to develop those characteristics in our own churches. By following the example of New Testament authors and addressing church members from pastors to pew sitters, Dever challenges all believers to do their part in maintaining the local church. What Is a Healthy Church? offers timeless truths and practical principles to help each of us fulfill our God-given roles in the body of Christ.

What Is a Healthy Church? Details

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From Reader Review What Is a Healthy Church? for online ebook

Mwansa Ndemi says

A heart wrenching read that brought me face to face with my own inadequacies and failure to be plugged into the word concerning my efforts within the church. Each member has duty to perform toward his fellow members as well as the outside world in living a bible centered life that mirrors the life of Christ. More often than not we consider leaving a church if things don't seem to be going well for us in one way or another. In this book Mark Dever takes us through the marks of a healthy church as well as valid reasons to leave the church you are in for another. Three things that stood out for me.

Far too often I wallow in self pity and think selfish thoughts concerning why things are not happening the way I want them to or at the pace I want them to in the life of the church. This would lead me to flirt with the idea of leaving and finding another church but God wants more from each believer concerning one another because we are a family, a body of believers and that carries weight. Especially because we are Christ's body and it is this truth that I must meditate on often regarding all things church.

Silence helps no one. At times I may know of a brother who is struggling or outright living in sin and I would keep silent because I wouldn't want to be seen as the guy who "reported" him to the elders but looking to the elders and other strong Christians in the church about such an issue is loving the brother the right way. It is getting him the help he deserves. This view is counter cultural and can only be propagated with a biblical worldview and the biblical worldview can only grow if I am plugged into the scriptures.

Church membership is about a lot more than attendance but it is a tool God uses to grow and sanctify individuals in the church. It is a way that we are afforded to show love to one another regardless of age, sex, position or background and so I must take this seriously. How seriously do I take praying for the sick and those in need of any kind? How serious do I take going the extra mile to reach out to a church member in distress? How serious am I about meeting with both older and younger members in the church and deliberately pouring my life into them as they do the same to me so that we may grow and help each other on our journey towards the throne of grace.

At the end of the day it all goes back to being firmly grounded in the truth of the scriptures and trusting God even in the face of the slow progress that may come with sanctification

Troy says

A great little book on what a healthy church looks like. What I appreciated about it was that it was not a dissertation on how to become a healthy church, though you should take the markers of health and strive to make them a reality in your church, instead it was a picture of the things that would be evident in a community that was healthy. This book was short and easy to read, a great resource for anyone in the church.

Brenda says

Good thoughts about what a healthy, Biblical church looks like, divided into "essential" marks and

"important" marks.

Sarah says

This is an excellent little book on the "why and how" of a healthy church. I read it to be reminded and encouraged of the importance of the local church, and was.

Heather says

This book is highly recommended, don't worry, it's a quick read.

What is essential in a local church? What is important? What really doesn't matter?

I'm seeing the local church in a whole new way! I don't mean to say Mark is writing things I've never heard before, he's just putting them all together for me. I've been humbled by this book and can't say enough about it.

Imogen Beatrice says

Blunt, clear and surprisingly humble, this short book is worth a read. Dever claims that it's not just for church leaders, but for anyone who calls themselves a Christian. And as someone who is not in church leadership but would call myself a Christian, it's understandable, well set out and easily digestible. As it is written with an American readership in mind, and I attend an evangelical Anglican church in the UK, there are a few things I found hard to relate to - talking about the importance of there being elders seems a bit unnecessary, and when Dever bemoans how many churches have a lot of registered members but few show up, I think that would only be relevant to churches in the CofE which are not evangelical. Overall, worth a read but bear in mind that it feels a bit removed to a UK reader.

Rodrigo D'Cristo says

Excelente leitura, o pastor Mark discorre sobre o que é uma igreja saudável e quais as marcas essenciais e importantes de uma igreja saudável. São abordados vários pontos que nos levam a reflexão do nosso papel no Corpo de Cristo.

B says

I enjoyed this book despite having listened to the 9 marks series. I found it to be just the right size to use as a sort of handbook or to give to someone considering a church situation or looking for a church. The content is solidly planted in the Bible & concisely & clearly presented.

Ben Robin says

This is a spectacular little introduction to the 9Marks corpus, and thus, the biblical design and definition of a healthy church.

Marguerite Harrell says

I am reading this book for the second time. I am trying to encourage other to join church since they aren't going to church but staying at home. It is sad to see my Christian friends being burned out from going to church. How can we encourage one another to start going to church again? Looking forward to finish this book later this week. I know this is a great book and I do wish that every people that is currently not going to church to read this book and those who are currently looking for the right church home or church hopping around.

Jeff Short says

This book is based on Dever's larger work, "Nine Marks of a Healthy Church," and is a briefer and more practical treatment of what a healthy church should look like. He does briefly touch on each of the nine marks, but he divides them into essential marks and important marks. I appreciate how he emphasizes that the Bible is the rule of faith and practice. He asks for a hearing and that if the reader disagrees with his conclusions, it will be because, through studying the Bible, the reader believes the texts mean something different.

Having said that, I do disagree with some conclusions here and there because I believe the texts have a different meaning. However, the book overall is helpful for thinking through a number of issues related to the church and the practical application of doctrine.

Eric Durso says

Solid.

Barbara says

Mark Dever opens *What Is a Healthy Church?* by pointing out that much of what we look for in a church is determined by our own particular culture: the type of music, pastor, preaching, etc., that we're used to. He encourages readers to consider Biblical marks of a healthy church. Why does he address a book like this to Christians in general rather than church leaders? Because, he points out, most of the NT epistles, which contain much instruction about church as well as personal life, were written to congregations, not just pastors.

Then he explains briefly what a Christian is, what the church is and isn't, what the church is for, and why Christians need a church. Ultimately the church "is called to display the character and glory of God to all the universe, testifying in word and action to his great wisdom and work of salvation" (p. 48).

The church finds its life as it listens to the Word of God. It finds its purpose as it lives out and displays the Word of God. The church's job is to listen and then to echo...The primary challenge churches face today is not figuring out how to be "relevant" or "strategic" or "sensitive" or even "deliberate." It's figuring out how to be faithful—how to listen, to trust and obey (pp. 55-56).

He then discusses one by one what he considers nine marks of a healthy church, dividing them into three essential marks (expositional preaching, Biblical theology, Biblical understanding of the Good News) and six important ones (Biblical understanding of conversion, evangelism, membership, church discipline, discipleship and growth, and church leadership).

You and I cannot demonstrate love or joy or peace or patience or kindness sitting all by ourselves on an island. No, we demonstrate it when the people we have committed to loving give us good reasons not to love them, but we do anyway (p. 29).

If a healthy church is a congregation that increasingly displays the character of God as his character has been revealed in his Word, the most obvious place to begin building a healthy church is to call Christians to listen to God's Word. God's Word is the source of all life and health. It's what feeds, develops, and preserves a church's understanding of the gospel itself (p. 63).

Martin Luther found that carefully attending to God's Word began a Reformation. We, too, must commit to seeing that our churches are always being reformed by the Word of God (p. 67).

Sometimes, it's tempting to present some of the very real benefits of the gospel as the gospel itself. And these benefits tend to be things that non-Christians naturally want, like joy, peace, happiness, fulfillment, self-esteem, or love. Yet presenting them as the gospel is presenting a partial truth. And, as J. I. Packer says, "A half truth masquerading as the whole truth becomes a complete untruth."

Fundamentally, we don't need just joy or peace or purpose. We need God, himself. Since we are condemned sinners, then, we need his forgiveness above all else. We need spiritual life. When we present the gospel less radically, we simply ask for false conversions and increasingly meaningless church membership lists, both of which make the evangelization of the world around us more difficult (p. 77).

My thoughts:

I don't think I have ever read anything by Dever before and was only vaguely aware of his organization,

9Marks. This book seems to be a compact version of what he has written more extensively elsewhere. We received it in a gift bag from a church we visited. Generally I agree with what's here with a couple of exceptions, one relatively minor.

1) In the chapter on preaching he makes the statement "Has not every step of growth in grace occurred when we heard from God in ways we hadn't heard from him before?" (p. 66). For me, significant growth in grace has occurred sometimes from being reminded of something I already knew from God's Word that I needed to return to or refocus on.

2) I think he's too dismissive of differences in preference of music styles in churches. He seems to consider it almost a non-issue.

Remembering that the church is a people should help us recognize what's important and what's not important. I know I need the help. For example, I have a temptation to let something like the style of music dictate how I feel about a church. After all, the style of music a church uses is one of the first things we will notice about any church, and we tend to respond to music at a very emotional level. Music makes us feel a certain way. Yet what does it say about my love for Christ and for Christ's people if I decide to leave a church because of the style of its music? Or if, when pastoring a church, I marginalize a majority of my congregation because I think the style of music needs to be updated? At the very least, we could say that I've forgotten that the church, fundamentally, is a people and not a place (p. 35).

If it were just a matter of preferences, that would be true. What I think he might not understand is that some people consider certain types of music not just not preferable, but wrong. We've heard teaching for years about what's wrong with certain types of music. On the other hand, the Bible doesn't say anything about particular music styles, and I think some of that specific teaching went far beyond what the Bible has to say about music. But I don't think that means "anything goes." So we're trying to sort out what's coming from conscience or conditioning, but I don't think we can ignore conscience or conditioning, either. Music makes up a significant part of a church service, so, while it's not "the" main issue, or even part of the "nine marks," it is still an issue.

Aside from those, I thought this was a good overview of what a healthy church should be. I also appreciated his encouragement to both pastor and people to be patient if a church isn't "there" yet and his reminder that growth takes time. Once when we were getting ready to move to another state, our dear pastor at the time advised us to look not just at where a church is, but where it's heading, and I think that dovetails nicely with the instruction in this book. No church will be perfect, but we should look for one with a good foundation and growth in these ways.

Joseph Abudar says

Solid, quick and easy-to-read!

Adam says

"You and I cannot demonstrate love or joy or peace or patience or kindness sitting all by ourselves on an island. No, we demonstrate it when the people we have committed to loving give us good reasons not to love them, but we do anyway."

In this small book, Mark Dever surveys the role of the Church (and the church) in the lives of the Christian. He shows how life in the "body of Christ" is a vital component of Christianity.

I think the thing I liked most about the book is that it is very practical. It doesn't lack for theoretical theology, but Dever is also careful to emphasize that this stuff has real value and real application. On that note, I give the last word to him:

"If your goal is to love all Christians, let me suggest working toward it by first committing to a concrete group of real Christians with all their foibles and follies. Commit to them through thick and thin for eighty years. Then come back and we'll talk about your progress in loving all Christians everywhere."
