

**GROWING
ONE
ANOTHER:
DISCIPLESHIP
IN THE CHURCH**



Growing One Another: Discipleship in the Church

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INTRODUCTION

What does the local church mean to you?

Maybe you love your church. You love the people. You love the preaching, the singing. You can't wait to show up on Sunday, and you cherish fellowship with other church members throughout the week.

Maybe the church is just a place you show up to a couple times a month. You sneak in late, duck out early.

We at 9Marks are convinced that the local church is God's plan for displaying his glory to the nations. And we want to help you catch and live out that vision, together with your whole church.

The 9Marks Healthy Church Study Guides are a series of six- or seven-week studies on each of the "nine marks of a healthy church" plus one introductory study. These nine marks are the core convictions of our ministry. To provide a quick introduction to them, we've included a chapter from Mark Dever's book *What Is a Healthy Church?* with each study. We don't claim that these nine marks are the most important things about the church or the only important things about the church. But we do believe that they are biblical and therefore are helpful for churches.

So, in these studies, we're going to work through the biblical foundations and practical applications of each one. The ten studies are:

- *Built upon the Rock: The Church* (the introductory study)
- *Hearing God's Word: Expository Preaching*
- *The Whole Truth about God: Biblical Theology*
- *God's Good News: The Gospel*
- *Real Change: Conversion*
- *Reaching the Lost: Evangelism*
- *Committing to One Another: Church Membership*

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- *Guarding One Another: Church Discipline*
- *Growing One Another: Discipleship in the Church*
- *Leading One Another: Church Leadership*

Each session of these studies takes a close look at one or more passages of Scripture and considers how it applies to the life of the whole church. So, we hope that these studies are equally appropriate for Sunday school, small groups, and other contexts where a group of anywhere from two to two-hundred people can come together and discuss God's Word.

These studies are mainly driven by observation, interpretation, and application questions, so get ready to speak up! We also hope that these studies provide opportunities for people to reflect together on their experiences in the church, whatever those experiences may be.

When Jesus called Peter and Andrew to leave their fishing gear and follow him, he called them to a whole new life. And when Jesus calls each of us to be his disciple, he calls us to a whole new life.

Following Jesus means listening to him, watching him, and following in his footsteps. It means hating what Jesus hates and loving what Jesus loves.

It also means helping others to do the same. After his resurrection Jesus commanded his disciples to go and make more disciples, teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded.

And, as we will see throughout this study, God intends the local church to be the main context for disciple making. God established the church to affirm disciples, oversee disciples, and raise up more disciples.

All of this is possible because of what Jesus has already done for us. He has paid the penalty for our sins. He has reconciled us to God. Through our union with his death and resurrection, we have a new life, a new self. Before, we were rebels. Now, we're glad subjects of the King of kings, and we love to do what he commands.

This study, then, focuses on growing in Christ and helping others do the same—in local churches. We'll consider:

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- The need for discipleship
- The definition of discipleship
- The motivations of discipleship
- The means of discipleship
- The enemy of discipleship
- The end of discipleship

Are you striving to grow in Christ and to help others do the same? Our prayer is that this study will help you to do that more and more faithfully.

AN IMPORTANT MARK OF A HEALTHY CHURCH: BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP AND GROWTH

BY MARK DEVER

(Originally published as chapter 12 of What Is a Healthy Church?)

An important mark of a healthy church is a pervasive concern for church growth as growth is prescribed in the Bible. That means growing members, not just numbers.

Some today think that a person can be a “baby Christian” for a whole lifetime. Growth is treated as an optional extra for zealous disciples. But growth is a sign of life. If a tree is alive, it grows. If an animal is alive, it grows. Being alive means growing, and growing means increasing and advancing, at least until death intercedes.

Paul hoped the Corinthians would grow in their faith (2 Cor. 10:15), and that the Ephesians would “grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ” (Eph. 4:15 NIV; cf. Col. 1:10; 2 Thess. 1:3). Peter exhorted his readers, “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation” (1 Peter 2:2 NIV).

It is tempting for pastors and even some members to reduce their churches to manageable statistics of attendance, baptisms, giving, and membership. This kind of growth is tangible. Yet such statistics fall far short of the true growth that the New Testament authors describe and that God desires.

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GROWTH IN HOLINESS

How do we know when Christians are growing in grace? We don't ultimately know from the fact that they're excited, use lots of religious language, or have a growing knowledge of Scripture. Just because they exhibit an increased love for the church or display confidence in their own faith isn't determinative either. We can't even be sure Christians are growing because they appear to have an outward zeal for God. All these may be evidences of true Christian growth. At the same time, one of the most important and commonly overlooked signs of growth that must be observed is increasing holiness rooted in Christian self-denial (see James 2:20–24; 2 Pet. 1:5–11). The church should be marked by a vital concern for this kind of increasing godliness in the lives of its members.

Neglecting holiness, like neglecting church discipline, results in hard-to-grow disciples. In churches where unholy behavior goes unchecked, disciples become confused and unclear about the life that is honoring to Christ. It's like a garden where the weeds are never pulled or good things are never planted.

WHAT GROWTH DOES AND DOESN'T LOOK LIKE

The church has an obligation to be God's means of growing people in grace. Mature, holiness-seeking influences in a covenant community of believers can be tools in God's hand for growing his people. As God's people are built up and grow together in holiness and self-giving love, they should improve their ability to administer discipline and to encourage discipleship.

When you peer into the life of a church, the growth of its members can show up in all sorts of ways. Here are a few possibilities:

- Growing numbers being called to missions—"I've enjoyed sharing the gospel with my neighbors from South America. I wonder if God is calling me to. . . ."
- Older members getting a fresh sense of their responsibility in evangelism and in discipling younger members—"Why don't you come over for dinner?"

- Younger members attending the funerals of older members out of love—“As a single man in my twenties, it was so good to be taken in by Mr. and Mrs. . . .”
- Increased praying in the church and more prayers centered on evangelism and ministry opportunities—“I’m starting an evangelistic Bible study at work and I’m a little nervous. Would the church pray that. . . .”
- More members sharing the gospel with outsiders.
- Less reliance among members on the church’s programs and more spontaneous ministry activities arising from members—“Pastor, what would you think if Sally and I organized a Christmas tea for the ladies in the church as an evangelistic opportunity?”
- Informal gatherings among church members characterized by spiritual conversation, including an apparent willingness to confess sin while simultaneously pointing to the cross—“Hey brother, I’m really struggling with. . . .”
- Increased and sacrificial giving—“Honey, how can we cut fifty dollars from our monthly budget in order to support. . . .”
- Increased fruits of the Spirit.
- Members making career sacrifices so that they can serve the church—“Did you hear that Chris turned down a promotion three times so that he could continue devoting himself to being an elder?”
- Husbands leading their wives sacrificially—“Honey, what are several things I can do to make you feel more loved and understood?”
- Wives submitting to their husbands—“Sweetheart, what are some things I can do today that will make your life easier?”
- Parents discipling their children in the faith—“Tonight let’s pray for Christian workers in the country of. . . .”
- A corporate willingness to discipline unrepentant and public sin.
- A corporate love for an unrepentant sinner shown in the pursuit of him or her before discipline is enacted—“Please! If you get this message, I would love to hear from you.”

These are just a few examples of the kind of church growth for which Christians should pray and work. Will healthy churches grow in size? They often do, because they present an attractive witness to the gospel. But we should not assume they must. Sometimes God has other purposes, such as calling his people to patience. Our focus must remain on faithfulness and true spiritual growth.

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And what's the cause of such growth? Expository Bible preaching. Sound biblical theology. Gospel-centeredness. And a biblical understanding of conversion, evangelism, membership, discipline, and leadership!

But if churches are places where only the pastor's thoughts are taught, where God is questioned more than he is worshiped, where the gospel is diluted and evangelism perverted, where church membership is made meaningless, and a worldly cult of personality is allowed to grow up around the pastor, then one can hardly expect to find a community that is either cohesive or edifying. Such a church will not glorify God.

GOD GLORIFIED BY GROWTH

When we encounter a church composed of members growing in Christlikeness, who gets the glory? God does, because, as Paul said, "God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (1 Cor. 3:6b-7 NIV; cf. Col. 2:19).

Likewise, Peter concludes his second letter to a group of early Christians, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen" (2 Pet. 3:18 NIV). We might think that our growth will bring glory to ourselves. But Peter knew better: "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (1 Pet. 2:12 NIV). Peter obviously remembered Jesus's words: "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and [praise you?]" No! "... And] praise your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16 NIV). Working to promote Christian discipleship and growth is another mark of a healthy church.



WEEK 1

THE NEED FOR DISCIPLESHIP

GETTING STARTED

1. What was the last experience you had that showed you that you still have a lot to learn, whether at home, at work, in church, or in any other area of life?

This whole study is going to focus on discipleship. To be a disciple is to be a student, someone who learns from and imitates his teacher. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are all called to continually learn from him and follow him in every area of life.

Practically speaking, this means that we need to realize that discipleship is a lifelong process. In this life, none of us is a finished product. We all need to continually progress as disciples.

MAIN IDEA

None of us is perfect. We all need to grow as disciples of Christ.

DIGGING IN

In Philippians 3:8–11, Paul exclaims that everything that once caused him to be proud he now considers to have been a waste of time because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. He then explains why he has gladly lost all of that and more: it's allowed him to know Christ, to share in his sufferings, and to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

But in case anyone might think that Paul was saying that he had become perfectly mature, Paul continues:

¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me

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his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

¹⁷ Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. (Phil. 3:12–21)

1. *What does Paul say that he is not, and that he has not yet done (vv. 12–13)?*
2. *If this is how the apostle Paul viewed himself, what does that say about what our own attitudes toward ourselves should be?*
3. *What reason does Paul give for why he presses on to obtain a deeper knowledge of Christ (v. 12)?*
4. *What does this teach us about the basis and motivations for our growth as Christians?*
5. *What is the one thing that Paul does do (vv. 13–14)?*
6. *What kind of imagery does Paul use in verses 13 and 14? What does it remind you of? What does this teach us about the kind of effort we should spend on growing as Christians?*
7. *Whom does Paul instruct us to imitate in verse 17? (Hint: There are two answers.)*

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8. *What does this teach us about how we are to grow as Christians?*

9. *What is the threat Paul mentions to our faithfully following his and others' godly example (vv. 18–19)? Why does this threat make it especially important for us to follow godly examples?*

10. *List everything Paul says is true of us as Christians in verses 20 to 21. How does each of these things encourage us to persevere in our discipleship?*

11. *How do you respond when a fellow believer corrects or rebukes you? What does this reveal about how you see yourself?*

12. *In this study we've seen that all of us need to continually grow as disciples of Jesus Christ, and that we are to do so by seeking out and imitating godly examples. Can you list one or two people who are worth being imitated? What Christlike qualities do you perceive in those individuals that are worth imitating?*

13. *Paul presents himself as an example to be imitated. A person could do this out of pride, but explain how one could also do this out of humility.*

14. *Is your life one which younger Christians should imitate? If not, do you work to become that kind of person?*

15. *What is one practical way you can seek to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ this week?*

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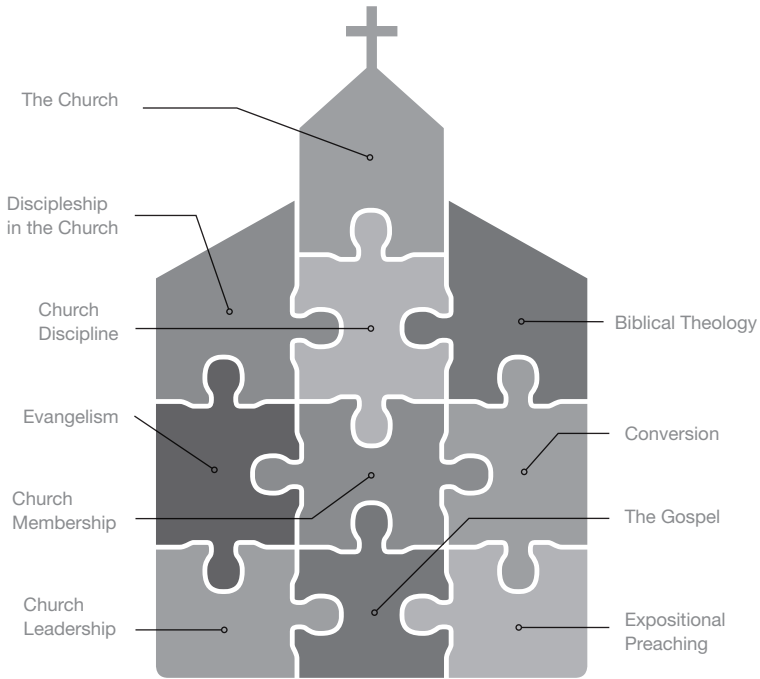
Building Healthy Churches

9Marks exists to equip church leaders with a biblical vision and practical resources for displaying God's glory to the nations through healthy churches.

To that end, we want to see churches characterized by these nine marks of health:

- 1** **Expositional Preaching**
- 2** **Biblical Theology**
- 3** **A Biblical Understanding of the Gospel**
- 4** **A Biblical Understanding of Conversion**
- 5** **A Biblical Understanding of Evangelism**
- 6** **Biblical Church Membership**
- 7** **Biblical Church Discipline**
- 8** **Biblical Discipleship**
- 9** **Biblical Church Leadership**

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Be sure to check out the rest of the
**9MARKS HEALTHY CHURCH
STUDY GUIDE SERIES**

This series covers the nine distinctives of a healthy church as originally laid out in *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* by Mark Dever. Each book explores the biblical foundations of key aspects of the church, helping Christians to live out those realities as members of a local body. A perfect resource for use in Sunday school, church-wide studies, or small group contexts.





DISCIPLESHIP IN THE CHURCH.

Discipleship was one of the central themes of Jesus's teaching, yet it is not a major emphasis today for many churches. This study guide explores the Bible's teaching on discipleship, and covers such topics as the need for discipleship, the demands of discipleship, and the enemy of discipleship. With discussion questions at the end of each chapter, participants will work through guided reflection as they learn about the centrality of discipleship in the Christian life.

"I am unaware of any other tool that so thoroughly and practically helps Christians understand God's plan for the local church. I can't wait to use these studies in my own congregation."

JERAMIE RINNE, Senior Pastor, South Shore Baptist Church, Hingham, Massachusetts

"Rich exposition, compelling questions, and clear syntheses combine to give a guided tour of ecclesiology—the theology of the church. I know of no better curriculum for generating understanding of and involvement in the church than this."

RICK HOLLAND, Senior Pastor, Mission Road Bible Church, Prairie Village, Kansas

"I have used these guides for the last year at my own church and appreciate how easy they are to adapt to my own setting. Highly recommended!"

MICHAEL LAWRENCE, Senior Pastor, Hinson Baptist Church, Portland, Oregon

9MARKS HEALTHY CHURCH STUDY GUIDES are a series of ten 6–7 week studies covering the nine distinctives of a healthy church originally laid out in *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* by Mark Dever. This series explores the biblical foundations of key aspects of the church, helping Christians to live out those realities as members of a local body. Conveniently packaged and accessibly written, the format of this series is guided, inductive discussion of Scripture passages and is ideal for use in Sunday school, church-wide studies, and individual or small group contexts.

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE

