



## What Is a Healthy Church Member?

*Thabiti M. Anyabwile*

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Biblically and practically instructs church members in ways they can labor for the health of their church.

*What Is a Healthy Church Member?* takes its cue from Mark Dever's book *What Is a Healthy Church?*, which offered one definition of what a healthy church looks like biblically and historically. In this new work, pastor Thabiti Anyabwile attempts to answer the natural next question: "What does a healthy church member look like in the light of Scripture?"

God intends for us to play an active and vital part in the body of Christ, the local church. He wants us to experience the local church as a home more profoundly wonderful and meaningful than any other place on earth. He intends for his churches to be healthy places and for the members of those churches to be healthy as well. This book explains how membership in the local church can produce spiritual growth in its members and how each member can contribute to the growth and health of the whole.

## What Is a Healthy Church Member? Details

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

### David Schultz says

A helpful and brief overview of what marks a faithful member of the body.

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### Dustin says

A wonderful, short book that won't scare off those of whom it would be of the most use to. It was a joy to read and where I was strong, I was further encouraged; where I was weak, I was convicted. Every Christian ought to take a few days off from their reading schedule and go through this book.

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### Daniel Melvill says

In What is a Healthy Church Member? Thabiti Anyabwile asks the question, "What does a healthy church member look like in the light of Scripture?"(14) The author answers his question with ten chapters, each addressing a mark of a healthy believer. The first five marks, Expositional Listening, Biblical Theology, Gospel Saturated Life, Genuine Conversion, and Biblical Evangelism, are calls to pursue a more biblical theology, while the final five, Committed Membership, Seeking Discipline, Growing as a Disciple, Humbly Following, and Biblical Prayer, address personal growth.

The first part of this book was very encouraging. It put a lot of my thoughts into words, especially in the chapters on Biblical Theology (Mark 2) and Biblical Evangelism (Mark 5). In Chapter Two, Anyabwile quotes J. I. Packer: "Ignorance of God lies at the root of the church's weakness today. Christian minds have been conformed to the modern spirit: the spirit... that spawns great thoughts of man and leaves room for only small thoughts of God." (27) This quote reminded me of something R.C. Sproul said; "I think virtually all the errors that plague the church and her doctrine relate to one of two errors: either an underestimation of the greatness of God or and overestimation of the greatness of man." To correct this situation, Christians need to study the Bible more, for "to practice biblical theology is to know God himself." (28)

"To practice biblical theology is to know God's macro story of redemption." (28) In order to understand the Bible fully, we need to take a step back and look at the history of revelation. "In other words, healthy church members give themselves to understanding the unity and progression of the Bible as a whole – not just isolated or favorite passages. They approach the Bible knowing that they are reading one awesome story of God redeeming for himself a people for his own glory."(28) And indeed, the two principles are connected. For "in that story, they see that God is a creating God, a holy God, a faithful God, a loving God, and a sovereign God as he makes and keeps his promises to his people, beginning with Adam and Eve and progressing to the final consummation of all things." (28)

Reading this charge made me ask; do we as a church teach God's macro story of redemption? Are we emphasizing the character of God through the study of his Word? I think there is great room for improvement. Look at the way we teach kids. We tend to focus on favorite Bible stories, like Jesus and David and Goliath or on morals, like sharing, being kind, and giving to missionaries. Instead we should be

systematically showing the grand story of redemption. Once we have shown who God is and who man is, the framework is already laid and we can then build on it. The same is true in the way we teach doctrine to new believers. Instead of beginning with topics, like faith, prayer, and Jesus, we should lay the Biblical worldview using the story of Scripture. Then the additional doctrines have a solid framework on which to be built.

Having built that foundation, a Biblical understanding of evangelism is easier to reach. Anyabwile explains that “faithful evangelism must be content specific, presenting the truth about who God is, who men are, what sin is, who Jesus is, what Jesus has done, and what we must do about what Jesus has done, include the notion that Christ is the exclusive way of salvation... and call the hearer to repentance and faith in Christ.” (59) This is a very biblical picture of salvation and presentations like it are rare in the church today. Few Christians, it seems, take the time to properly understand what the gospel is and how to present it. Appeals to Christ are based on some need that will be met in God, with a mention of sin tacked on at the end.

Or Christians believe that “just sharing their testimony or living a good Christian life is as effective a witness as doing evangelism.” (44) But Anyabwile asks “Is such a life... a witness to the cross of Jesus Christ? Does “witnessing” through our personal testimonies and good deeds point effectively enough to the cross and the Savior? In too many cases such attempts leave only a vague impression of religiosity, not a brilliant display of the glories of God in the redemption of sinners through the sacrifice of his Son.” (44) When we present the gospel, it should be clear that we are vile sinners, who are one day going to face a holy God. When that realization sinks in, the fact that Jesus died to take away our sins comes as very good news. And that is the biblical presentation that we need in our churches.

The second half of the book is concerned with personal growth. A good word to summarize this half would be “committed.” A healthy church member, according to Anyabwile, is a committed member (Mark 6), a committed disciple (Marks 7 and 8), committed to the church’s leadership (Mark 9), and committed to prayer (Mark 10). The first half of the book encouraged me; this half left me challenged to grow in godliness.

“The growth we wish to see...is growth in godliness or holiness, growth in the stature of the fullness of Christ. A growing church member is someone who looks more and more like Jesus in attitude of heart, thought, speech, and action.”(89) How does one grow in these areas? Anyabwile gives us a list, from which I have chosen three that have impacted me the most.

The first way that we grow to be more like Christ is through corrective discipline. “Scripture...has two general purposes: formative discipline and corrective discipline.” (75) The formative discipline is the teaching of Scriptures covered in Part 1 of the book. It is the teaching that shapes our minds. Corrective discipline is the teaching that “confronts us and turns us away from error to righteousness.” (76) The second suggestion for growth is abiding in Christ by remaining in his Word. “Such words must so lodge in the disciple’s mind and heart that conformity to Christ, obedience to Christ, is the most natural... thing in the world.” (90) And the third area to grow in holiness is to meditate on and look forward to the coming of Jesus. “Most of the New Testament references to Jesus’ return are connected with some exhortation to holiness and purity.”(91)

Such suggestions were helpful, but even more encouraging was his reminder that “self-effort is not the source of true spiritual growth.”(87) Quoting Hebrews 6:1, 3, “Leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity... and this we will do if God permits” (emphasis mine). He goes on to say that “Holy Scripture tells us that our progress in discipleship and spiritual maturity depends on the grace and will of God, no on our self-effort and strength.” (87)

What is a Healthy Church Member? is a little book jam packed with advice and encouragement. Churches whose leadership and members live by the principles in this book are indeed blessed by God. I pray that our church would be one of those.

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### **Rachel Genovese says**

This is a great read for someone who has recently joined their local church or for a Christian who is considering joining a local church. Every chapter has biblical examples of what it means to not just a healthy church member, but a healthy and good Christian in general. It explains our responsibilities in our church and to our fellow Christians. I'll definitely need to re-read this book and take notes so it all sticks in my memory. It is definitely a book to re-read.

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### **Adam says**

Good, heartening stuff. In a day when we're constantly being given reasons why the Church cannot possibly be fully Biblical, an author like Thabiti Anyabwile does a great service in plowing through all of that and simply, clearly describing the duties and character traits of a healthy Church member.

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### **Leah says**

This one is a short, easy to read book. the author not only talks about what church members ought to be looking for in a church, but the mindset of church members and how as a body, we all work together to love, serve, and grow. it quickly dives into how certain qualities in our personal walk and corporate worship should be mixed together. good read!

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### **Taylor Diehl says**

I don't view scripture the same way that Anyabwile does, and so our theology ends up being a bit different. Since this difference was quite evident throughout the book, it was hard for me to ever believe that I was fully on board with what he was saying. I found his description of the gospel to be extremely frustrating and boring. I did not like it at all.

That being said, the ten marks described are all very good ones, and all things that I wish people in my church growing up would have emphasized. Once I was able to overlook the specific differences between my and Anyabwile's understanding of things, I was able to appreciate, and agree with, the broader points of this book, and still gleam some good reminders from it.

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### **Tyler Daniels says**

An extremely helpful and practically rich book on what it means to be a healthy member of a church. Filled with poetic grace, this small, yet powerful work will not only challenge how you interact with your local church but inspire a deeper biblical understanding for maturity in all of Christian life.

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### **Brian says**

A fine book, though not what I was looking for. Anyabwile's book lines up chapter by chapter with Dever's "9 Marks of a Healthy Church." It's a good book, but I think it is one step above a newcomer's/inquirers' audience. It would be more helpful for someone a bit further along in their understanding of church life. I found Harris' "Stop Dating the Church" to be a better resource for regular attenders who aren't yet ready to commit to church membership. Both books provide excellent biblical foundations.

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### **Blake says**

This book, while having some excellent, excellent points, the overall content of the book didn't grip me. I would not hesitate to give it to someone who wants to consider church membership but it wouldn't be at the top of my list for books to read about church, church structure, and most of all about church membership.

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### **Jimmy says**

Over the last few years I've read this book different times with others in different context ranging from our church's small groups and also one on one. The last time I finished this book was a few months ago. I'm somewhat surprised that I have not written a review of this book until now.

The author Thabiti Anyabwile has written on what is a healthy church member. For those familiar with Mark Devers' ministry and writing, readers will immediately notice that Thabiti's first nine of ten points is borrowed from Dever's book on the nine marks of the church. However what I like about this book in contrast to Dever's book is that the emphasis is not so much on the church but now the individual readers (after all its about healthy church members). I like the focus on the readers as members of a church since too often today we have those in the church who can be hypocritical in focusing on what's wrong with others in the church without seeing the need for themselves to be healthy and godly church members. It's a great tool for discipleship to focus on members being healthy church members.

I appreciate the author's tenth mark on a healthy church members. A healthy members as the author pointed out is one who is a "prayer warrior." Church members and prayers should go together. Personally God has been teaching more the importance of prayer so this is great to see in the book. I've enjoyed this book that I bought it for myself and others as gifts. It should be no surprise then for me to say that I recommend this book.

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### **Johnny says**

*What is a Healthy Church Member?* is the second book in the *IX Marks* series which began with *What is a Healthy Church?*. In many ways, it's the kind of book I avoid. It's a short work filled with short

prescriptions which are supposed to fit every believer and every church. I like complexity and ambiguity. Once in a while, though, we need to remind ourselves of fundamentals of what we do, just like major league baseball players need to reinforce throwing motions, fielding procedures, and bunting, as well as proper swings in batting practice. So, this book doesn't really break any new ground; it just happens to be useful in "drilling" me on helping my church have more effective members.

The first mark of the healthy church member is being an "expositional listener." This presupposes that the pastor preaches from the Bible and seeks to get the point of the message from the main point of the passage, but it's more than that. I like what Pastor Anyabwile said about this: "When we listen to the preaching of the Word, we should not listen primarily for 'practical how-to advice,' though Scripture teaches us much about everyday matters. Nor should we listen for messages that bolster our self-esteem or that rouse us to political and social causes. Rather...we should listen primarily for the voice and message of God as revealed in his Word." (pp. 19-20) He delineates several ways in which such listening benefits both the listener, her/his pastor, and the congregation and then, suggests ways in which the individual can become more involved in creative listening. Part of this (like announcing sermon passages in advance) requires the cooperation of the pastor, but part of this merely requires a concerted effort to talk about what one gleaned from the sermon with friends and fellow believers. Questions like "How did the Scripture challenge or speak to you, today?" or "What about God's character most surprised or encouraged you in today's message?" would certainly make the sermon/worship experience more interactive (p. 23).

The second mark is being a "biblical theologian." But don't you have to be trained for that? One would think so, but every individual is a theologian whether she/he knows it or not. Being a biblical theologian simply means to look at the Bible as a whole and systematically or thematically try to put together a big picture perspective on God's person and plan of redemption. I definitely agree with the advantages of having church members thinking and studying on such matters: 1) growing in reverence for God; 2) overcoming our wrong (or merely inadequate) ideas; 3) helps church resist doctrinal controversies; 4) ensures that the "teaching" aspect of the Great Commission is being implemented; and 5) prepares and inspires believers to share the gospel (pp. 29-31). Here is where I find a flaw with this volume in that all of his recommended readings on theology are one-dimensional and representative of one section of the theological spectrum. Growing believers need to be exposed to all sections of the spectrum in order to be certain they aren't putting God in a presupposed box. Putting God in the box of our tradition and understanding would defeat the purpose of being a biblical theologian.

Batting third in this nine-point batting order is being saturated with the gospel. My frustration here is that Pastor Anyabwile emphasizes God's "condemnation" over the horrendous consequences of humanity's "rejection" of God. Take any message about eternal damnation and it is a consequence of God's willingness to allow human beings to choose. Want a hell full of suffering? It's the inevitable consequence of human beings saying, "I want no part of God." Since God is love, having no part of God means that any everlasting dimension carved out to honor that wish for "no part of God" is full of selfishness, hostility, and violence. Want a hell with wailing and gnashing of teeth? Remove God's inherent goodness and care for humanity, remove the Light of God, and remove the healing/nurturing presence of God and what's going to be left? It isn't that God's condemnation is a vindictive infliction of punishment; it's that God is clearly and emphatically stating in that negation that the irresponsible choice against God means everlasting suffering and longing for unfulfilled desires. We can't know the good news of the gospel without recognizing that horrible suffering (that sometimes starts even in this life) when humans reject God, but we don't have to dwell on it as this author seems to do.

The good news is that surrendering our lives to the will of God as expressed by and made possible through Jesus will enable us to erase guilt, learn to change, and grow in God's grace until we have abundant life

NOW and forever. That doesn't mean all the problems will go away or that life will suddenly become easy and successful. It does, however, mean that no matter what we face, life will have significance and we will have hope and direction to build upon. The gospel isn't about avoiding hell; it's about gaining a relationship with God that's worth having, living, and expecting to go on. Sorry about the sermon. I was just affected by the wording in this chapter. What this chapter does offer that is most worth noting is the author's eight suggested strategies for establishing relationships in order to be able to share the gospel (p. 43).

The clean-up spot in this book belongs to the need of the believer to be "genuinely converted." The author reiterates his emphasis on damnation before moving to the tests of conversion, one of which is no longer living in habitual sin (p. 51). He cites the First Letter of John for this and follows it with a reference to 1 John 5:1 when he reminds his readers that loving each other is supposed to be a major sign of conversion (p. 52). Another sign of conversion is that one is growing as an individual and overcoming the negatives of society and one's own life (p. 53).

Fifth, a healthy church member needs to share the five major points of evangelism: 1) the holiness and righteousness of God who created all things; 2) the sinfulness of humanity and the consequences of rebelling against God Who wants all things to be good for us; 3) the need for radical change in order to discover God's meaningful plan for our lives; 4) the fact that Jesus Christ is the only One Who has lived exactly according to God's meaningful plan and died in order to make it possible to have relationship with God restored, and 5) the need to bear the fruit of applying God's love to others (p. 57). The most significant matter in this discussion was when he wrote: "It's frightening to think about how many people have not tasted the goodness of God and his salvation, not because Christians have not had opportunity to share, but because we have been so shallow in what we did share." (p. 58) From there, he offers some good suggestions for authentic sharing (pp. 59-60).

Sixth, church membership requires commitment. Even though it currently isn't fashionable to speak about church membership and, in fact, the Bible doesn't specifically mention membership, *What is a Healthy Church Member?* contends that the idea of membership is pervasive in Scripture (p. 65). Otherwise, why would you have leaders without an identifiable membership? Why would you have an admonition to put an unrepentant, immoral person out of the fellowship if there was no practical way of knowing who was actually part of the fellowship (p. 66)? Most importantly, how to you show love to each other, influence each other, and demonstrate accountability (as in Hebrews 10:24-25) without some form of "membership?" (p. 67)

With accountability in mind, the seventh position in the healthy church member batting order is the idea of developing discipline (both as an individual and in the church as a whole). Pastor Anyabwile builds his case based on the idea that the Bible "...has two general purposes: *formative discipline* and *corrective discipline*." (p. 75) The reality expressed here is the necessity of guiding people into becoming what they *should* become and counseling them with regard to what they *shouldn't*. The purpose of discipline is not to punish, but to fix and improve.

The eighth mark is Anyabwile's batting order is the normalcy of spiritual growth. He cites three reasons why believers might stop growing, drawing from Jesus' account of the Pharisee and the tax collector going to the temple to pray (Luke 18), noting that the Pharisee was caught in: a) a "performance trap" of being satisfied with all of the things he had done for God (keeping score like we sometimes do with attendance, tithing, witnessing efforts, mission trips, etc. – p. 86), b) an inaccurate standard in that the Pharisee compared himself with others rather than with God and God's standard (p. 86), and c) a false sense of self-sufficiency (not recognizing the need for God's gift of power and mercy—p. 87). Any of those three circumstances can stunt one's spiritual growth. On the other hand, Pastor Anyabwile urges a focus on the goal of bringing glory

to God and the power of depending upon Jesus as the source and energy of our growth. I particularly liked his emphasis on people in the church growing together as a kind of “maturity co-op.” (p. 91)

Batting ninth is the idea of humbly following leaders. I like an early paragraph in this chapter. “In the final analysis, church members are the people who generally make or break a local church. And making or breaking a church has a lot to do with the membership’s attitudes and actions toward its leaders.” (p. 95). Pastor Anyabwile’s counsel to healthy members on this is that they: a) show honor to their leaders as per 1 Timothy 5:17 (p. 96), b) have an open and affectionate relationship with their leaders as per 2 Corinthians 7:2-3 (p. 97), and c) be teachable as per God’s intention in 2 Timothy 2:24-26 (p. 98). He even suggests that it is the member’s duty to make the leader’s job a joy, not a burden (p. 99).

Now, even though the name of the book series is IX Marks, this book has a bonus point. I think of it as being the manager behind the batting order, though the author calls it “one to grow on.” (p. 105) The factor that pulls the entire batting order together is prayer, prayer that boils down to two primary emphases: “pray constantly and pray in the Spirit.” (p. 109) “Prayer in the Spirit is *controlled* by the Spirit>” (p. 110)

All of these points may sound like the same old messages that have been preached from pulpits for centuries, but they are presented concisely and, except for the reservations I’ve already presented, helpfully. The book is a light read and should be useful to any believers who want to grow in God’s grace.

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### **Drew Cox says**

My wife and I read this book together a little over a year ago and it greatly impacted how we think about our role as church members! A delight to read, really practical, quite convicting, and immensely encouraging! Read it, buy an extra copy, and go through it with others.

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### **Mike says**

Anyabwile gives a well reasoned, scripturally argued treatise on the duties and responsibilities involved in being a “healthy,” or good, member of a local church. The points were practical, but presented in such a way not to bully you into doing what you should. It isn’t so much a tool to guilt you into doing the right thing, but rather a helpful guide for those who truly are seeking to know how to contribute and participate better in a local church setting. I read this book in preparation for leading a Sunday School class, alongside two other men, where we will be giving advice and instruction to our fellow church members on how to relate to one another within the context of our local church, which is considered by most attending there as an extended family. The Body of Christ is called a family. This is apparent when addressing one another as brothers and sisters.

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### **Ryan Hawkins says**

Nothing too profound, but it pretty much accomplished that which it set out to do. The chapter titles themselves summarize the book well. A healthy church member is: an expositional listener, a biblical theologian, gospel saturated, genuinely converted, a biblical evangelist, a committed member, seeks

discipline, is a growing disciple, is a humble follower, and is a prayer warrior. Each of these chapters had helpful insights.

I'd recommend this book because many of these may be new ideas for some church members. If so, it is helpful. Or, many of these ideas may be rightfully convicting to many church members. Maybe they have never considered that they need to be a committed member biblically, or that they should seek discipline (but formative and corrective discipline), etc. I think Anyabwile's remarks are biblical, and therefore guiding and helpful. They may benefit many.

And many of them did benefit me, especially as a pastor. They helped me see what to look and pray for in congregants. Not so I may have more power or control or have it easier, but so that the members and church as a whole may be healthy, the gospel may more flourish, and God may be more glorified.

So the book wasn't life-changing or phenomenal, but I'm glad it was written.

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