



DEFINING CHURCH

1 Corinthians 3:1-23

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—let me invite you to find 1 Corinthians 3, where we'll consider our last key term when we're thinking together about missions—the church. What is the church?

I think about a flyer I got in the mail one day from a missions organization. In it I read, “For \$20 a month, you can plant a church in such-and-such a country.” They went on to talk about the rate of church growth in that area. But as I read further, I found out that this organization was basically defining the church as “wherever two or three Christians are gathered together.” It was a definition that grieved my heart, because it's not the way the Bible defines the church. It was also a total abuse of that particular Scripture that speaks of “*wherever two or three are gathered*” (Matthew 18:20).

But I realized that if we're not careful, given our desire to report numbers and raise money for missions, we can totally prostitute the nations for the sake of those numbers. It's a dangerous tendency we've got to avoid. When we think about the church, we need to make sure we have a biblical picture in our hearts. When we speak of planting churches around the world—especially when we're going into unreached people groups and this is the first time they're hearing the gospel—we have to make sure we get the gospel right. We have to make sure they have a true understanding of what the church is.

I'm going to read 1 Corinthians 3 and then I want to show you three pictures of the church that are mentioned briefly in this chapter. Look for the three pictures that we're given here, because based on these analogies, we're going to discuss 12 characteristics of a healthy church that we find all over the Bible. Finally, this will lead us to three critical implications. If you're counting, that will be 18 points, but we'll go quickly and not dive deeply into all 12 of the characteristics of a healthy church. My goal is simply to explain what I believe a church is from a biblical perspective. First Corinthians 3—this is the Word of God:

¹ But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, ³ for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? ⁴ For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human?

⁵ What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

⁸ He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. ¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³ each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

¹⁸ Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," ²⁰ and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." ²¹ So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

The church is God's field

The first picture of the church is set up in verse five. As Paul is addressing different divisions in the church, he starts using agrarian imagery—planting and watering. Then in verse nine he says, "*For we are God's fellow workers. You...*" and he's speaking to the church here, "*...are God's field.*" When the gospel is planted and watered, God gives growth, bringing people to life like plants in a field. It's imagery that Jesus also used in Mark 4:26-27: "*The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.*" So man works to spread the seed, but how it grows is a mystery. The Creator God is causing it to grow. As with the Kingdom, so with the church. The church is God's field and He's giving life to all these plants.

The church is God's building

Then in the same verse, 1 Corinthians 3:9, we're given the second picture: "*You are...God's building.*" Paul continues with this image through verse 15. I love how he describes himself as the church planter, "*a skilled master builder,*" laying a foundation for the church in Christ. This is the work that missionaries do around the world. They're church planting as master builders. It's extremely serious work, according to Paul in verse 13: "*Each one's work will become manifest...*" in the Day of Judgment, as our work will be tested.

Sometimes people take the verses that follow this as a description of the carnal or flesh-driven Christian, something Paul addresses earlier in chapter three. But here he's talking about church planters, people who are building the church. He's saying, "You'd better build the church well—on a firm foundation—because eternity will show whether or not what you've built is going to stand the test of fire." Verses 14-15: *"If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire."*

This is a clear reminder that planting and building the church is no casual task, something we can do any way we want. This is a serious task and we must be sure we're accomplishing it according to God's Word. So while our salvation is secure—and in that sense we don't need to fear the Day of Judgment—the reality is God is going to judge how we build the church in our day. And that reality should cause all of us to tremble. The church is God's building.

The church is God's temple

The third picture is found in verses 16-18: *"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple."* The church is the dwelling place of God. Later in 1 Corinthians 6 Paul tells us that our individual bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. But here he's speaking of Christ's body—the church—in which His Spirit dwells. So Paul is saying, "Church at Corinth, you are God's temple. God's Spirit dwells in you as a church."

This is so important. Paul has been talking about how the church had become divided over their allegiance to different leaders and he's telling them, "You need to realize what you're messing with. The church is God's field, God's building, God's temple. It's the place where His Holy Spirit dwells. So you must work to build up and honor the church. Don't treat it casually."

I think about this chapter and about the world of missions. When it comes to church planting around the world, God is saying clearly in His Word to the people He's calling to plant and water all over the world, "Work hard to build the church wisely, according to My Word." God intends for His holy character to be put on display in what's called the church in the world.

That then leads to the question: how do we make sure we're building and planting the church wisely according to His Word, in a way that will stand the test, the fire, in eternity? That's a question every member of a church and every leader in a church and every church planter needs to answer. It's why the term "church" is so important. We must have a clear biblical understanding of what a church is according to God's Word.

Twelve characteristics of a healthy church

We'll now cover the 12 characteristics of a healthy church. They're all over 1 Corinthians and they're throughout the New Testament. They're also based on the Old Testament foundations. I'll go through them quickly, but I'll camp out on a few as we go. Let's think together about what marks a church—this body of believers gathered together? Is it just two or three people gathered together? Or is there something more going on here? Here are 12 characteristics we find in Scripture, with each one starting with the word biblical, because we're describing the church based on God's Word and how He defines it.

1. Biblical evangelism. This is where Paul starts in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2:1-5, proclaiming Jesus Christ and Him crucified. It's where the church started in Acts 2, as Peter proclaimed in verse 36, *"God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."* If you go all the way back to Matthew 16, which is the first time the word "church" is mentioned in the Bible, Jesus is asking His disciples, *"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"* The disciples respond with the different things the crowds were saying. Then Jesus asked, *"But who do you say that I am?"* Peter said, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* Jesus looks back at Peter and says, *"You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church."*

This is the first time we see the word church—*ekklesia*. Jesus says, *"I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* We don't have time now to consider the controversy that has arisen about that passage throughout Christian history regarding what Jesus was actually saying to Peter. Was He making Peter the authority over the church—the first pope as some believe—leading to the idea of papal succession? Or was what made Peter significant in that moment actually his confession of faith in Christ? In this view, the church is built not on a person, but on a confession.

It was this confession that Peter reiterated in Acts 2:36, *"God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."* Throughout the New Testament, whenever that confession is made and people come to faith in Christ, we see the church expanding. This is the foundational confession of the church of Jesus Christ—that He is the Son of the living God Who came to save us from our sins. So biblical evangelism is the first foundation for the church. If the evangel—the gospel—is not being proclaimed, then you don't have a church. So the church is a people who have come to faith in Christ based on the power of the gospel and they're proclaiming the gospel.

2. Biblical discipleship. As we've been discussing, this is the second mark of a healthy church. We don't just evangelize and then move on. The church isn't made up of people who have only come to Christ, but they're people who have been baptized and who are being taught to obey everything Christ has commanded us. As we see in Scripture, this teaching happens in the context of a local church. Biblical

discipleship is not disconnected from a local church, but is actually part of its fabric. God has designed the church to be a community that is helping people grow into the image of Christ. Sometimes people disconnect missions and disciple making from the local church, but a lack of involvement in a community of faith misses the whole point of what Scripture teaches. We're intended to grow in Christ as part of a local church.

3. Biblical membership. When I use the term "membership," I'm not referring to having your name on a roll that means nothing. Rather, a healthy church has an identifiable membership in the biblical sense. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 we read, *"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body."* The body doesn't consist of one member, but many. Ten times in that chapter Paul refers to Christians as members of the body who each play different parts.

At that point some people might think, "Well, of course we're all members of the universal body of Christ, because we're all believers in Him." But is that what Scripture is teaching? Think about how the Bible emphasizes the importance of local church membership. The New Testament word *ekklesia* literally means a gathering. Almost every time it's used, it refers to a gathering of Christians in a particular place. Yes, there are times in Scripture where "church" incorporates all believers throughout all time, but those are a small minority of references. Out of the 114 times the word *ekklesia* is used, at least 90 of them refer to specific, local gatherings of believers.

For example, Acts 11:22 speaks of the church in Jerusalem. First Corinthians 1:2 addresses the church of God in Corinth. Galatians 1:2 mentions the churches in Galatia, which means there were different gatherings in that region. In 1 Thessalonians 1 says the church of the Thessalonians. If you look at Romans 16:5, Colossians 4:15, Philemon 2, you see references to churches that meet in homes. The Bible puts a clear priority on these local gatherings as visible expressions of the universal body of Christ. In each of these individual local churches, the Bible never refers to them as part of the church, or components of the church.

Yes, the universal body of believers is sometimes referred to as the church, but far more often the Bible speaks of local gatherings of believers who identify with one another as the church in a particular place. When Paul wrote to the church of God at Corinth, he was writing to a specific, identifiable group of people. When he spoke of the church that met in a particular house, he was referring to a specific, identifiable group of believers.

So a healthy church identifies itself as a church. With a few exceptions, most of the New Testament letters are written to such a group in a specific place. So we must ask ourselves: what church am I a part of? Not just the big-picture church of all believers in all times. If I was getting a New

Testament letter written to me by Paul, what church would I be included in by way of identifiable membership?

4. Biblical leadership. One of the main themes Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 3, and a matter that is a priority in all of his church plantings, is the appointment of church leaders. He uses three terms interchangeably—elders, overseers and pastors—and clearly lays out their qualifications in Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3. We know that everyone is not intended to be a leader. For one thing, not everyone in the church is male, which is a biblical requirement for an elder in the church.

As a side note, this is not easily accepted in some cultures and in some parts of the world. But we have to be clear that cultural patterns and practices do not take priority over biblical parameters when it comes to the church. The Bible never affirms women as pastors. Rather, it explicitly and exclusively speaks of men as pastors, so in church planting we need to affirm this practice as well. This doesn't minimize the unique and significant role of women in the church according to God's design. But when it comes to pastoral leadership, God has called men to lead in the home in a unique way (Ephesians 5) and to lead in the church in a unique way (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1). Male pastoral leadership is not some Western invention, but God's. Just as He has designed marriage to be a complementary relationship between a husband as head and a wife as helper, and that truth transcends culture, so God has designed elder/pastor leadership in the church to be reserved for men—and that truth also transcends culture.

At the same time we know every man in the church is not supposed to be a pastor, or even a leader. The Bible doesn't teach that every man in the church is gifted by God with the same leadership capacity. That's the whole point in membership, according to 1 Corinthians 12. Members have differing gifts and functions. That's why Paul lists so many specific qualifications, including competency qualifications. For instance, he says in 1 Timothy 3 that a leader must have certain character qualities, plus he must be "able to teach"—specifically to teach the Word of God—which leads to the next characteristic of a healthy church.

5. Biblical teaching and preaching. This is how Jesus leads His church. There's a sense in which I would put this characteristic of a healthy church at the top when it comes to essentials, because everything flows from this. It's a commitment to teaching and preaching God's Word that leads and guides every other facet of the church. Jesus is Lord over His church. He's given His Word to form and transform His people into the community He desires them to become. We become the followers He wants us to be through the faithful teaching and preaching of the Word.

Therefore pastors, elders and overseers have one primary responsibility as they're living to model the character of Christ: they lead the church by faithfully teaching the people what God has said in His Word. When we plant churches, we need to be very intentional about raising up and training pastors who are able to accomplish this as well. So while I hope all of us read the Bible on a regular basis, that's not

sufficient. We need the teaching of the Word in the church. There's something unique that happens when we gather corporately to hear the Word taught.

6. Biblical ordinances. Biblical ordinances specifically include baptism and the Lord's Supper—both of which are highlighted in 1 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 1 Paul talks about how believers are baptized in the name of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 11 he talks about the Lord's Supper. It's clear all over Scripture, from the very beginning of the church, that they believed and were baptized as a public confession of their faith in Christ. Baptizing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is fundamental part of the Great Commission, as God raises up new believers around the world. And then we should also regularly celebrate the Lord's Supper as we look back to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, examining our hearts in light of that sacrifice for us. In a very real sense, we are nourished by His grace and mercy toward us.

7. Biblical worship. A healthy church regularly gathers to worship and exalt God. We're to sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with one another and to one another. We're to share testimonies of God's grace to spur one another on toward Christ in worship. We see that in Hebrews 10 and 1 Corinthians 11. We find instructions for worship in 1 Corinthians 14. A healthy church regularly gathers together for worship.

8. Biblical prayer. We see this all over Scripture. The early church devoted themselves to prayer. Every major move of the Spirit of God and the advancement of the gospel of God in the book of Acts comes about as a response to the church praying. So there's a picture of corporate prayer that marks the church.

9. Biblical fellowship. Think back to Acts 2:42, where the church devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching of the Word, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. That word there for fellowship is *koinonia*, which really sums up what we see all over the New Testament when it comes to the "one anothers" in Scripture. Love one another. Serve one another. Care for one another. Teach one another. Serve one another. Admonish and exhort one another. Build up one another. Bear with one another. God's design is for His children, who are gathered together into churches, to do these one anothers in each other's lives. We talked about this when we talked about missionaries. No Christian is intended to live their life in isolation. We need brothers and sisters around us who are spurring us on toward Christ in fellowship and keeping us from wandering away from Christ.

10. Biblical accountability and discipline. Accountability in the Christian life is normative and normal, and it must be present as a foundation. While we sometimes don't talk about it, accountability should be accompanied by church discipline. During my time with the Lord a couple days ago, I read in 1 Corinthians 5 where Paul was emphasizing the need for discipline in the church. Some people might

wonder why we would include biblical accountability and discipline as a characteristic of a healthy church. Is it really that essential?

If you look back, the only other times Jesus specifically mentioned the church—*ekklesia*—was in Matthew 16 and the confession of Christ as the foundation of the church. Then two chapters later, in Matthew 18:15-20, He gives instructions concerning church discipline: *“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.”* That’s the word *ekklesia* again. *“And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”*

Jesus has actually designed His church to be the means by which God brings erring and wandering children back to Himself. He loves His people so much that when one of His children is continuing in unrepentant sin, He will send the entire church in love after them, drawing them back to Christ. That’s the picture we see in Matthew 18.

Which, by the way, is where we see those verses I mentioned earlier which were being abused. Verse 19: *“Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.”* This is clearly not a blank check for finding someone else who agrees with you on just about anything, then poof, God responds to whatever you want. Jesus has just finished talking about confronting a brother in sin and He’s saying, “Know this. When you gather together with a couple other people and that brother to do this work of church discipline, you have the full support of the Father in what you are doing.”

Then in the next verse, verse 20, we read, *“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”* That is not a definition of a church. It’s specifically talking about church discipline when two or three people gather to talk with a brother who’s in sin. But how many times is that verse abused in worship gatherings? The worship leader might quote it and say, “Well, we’ve got two or three people here, so we can know Jesus is here.” Don’t say that. “What about when I was alone in my prayer closet this morning? Does that mean Jesus was waiting for someone else to show up before He came into the picture? How many people does it take for Jesus to show up at a prayer meeting? How about one?”

Jesus is not saying, “Once you’ve got two or three together, count Me in.” No, He’s not giving us a definition of when His presence is there. He’s with us whenever we’re seeking Him and everywhere we go, for that matter. And it’s not a definition of the church. He’s saying, “When you’re carrying out this church discipline, be assured that you will experience My presence in a powerful and poignant way in the middle of this process.” Accountability and discipline are necessary characteristics of a healthy church.

11. Biblical giving. We see people giving from the very beginning in Acts 2 and 4. Then in 1 Corinthians 16 there's a picture of giving our resources on a regular basis for the building up of the church, here and around the world, particularly in the midst of poverty.

12. Biblical mission. A church is intentionally organized and designed by God to share the gospel, to make disciples in the community around it, and then to send out missionaries for the spread of the gospel far beyond that community. Local churches have been given a mission to make disciples of the nations for the glory of God. To be a biblical church, we need to be about mission.

So these are the 12 characteristics of a healthy biblical church: evangelism, discipleship, membership, leadership, teaching and preaching, ordinances, worship, prayer, fellowship, accountability and discipline, giving and mission. As a side note, notice what's not on that list. Location is not on that list. Where the church meets is not part of its essence. It can meet in a building, a home, a factory, rented space, inside or outside under a tree, as long as that gathering is intentionally organized to carry out the functions of a healthy church. We need to be careful not to despise churches that meet in buildings, nor do we despise churches that meet in homes. Where they meet is not essential. It's what they do that's essential.

Another non-essential is whether or not the pastor is paid. We see different pictures of ministry support in leadership in the church in the New Testament. We don't despise churches where pastors are paid; we don't despise churches where pastors are not paid. This is not essential. It's not the essence of a church. The 12 characteristics I listed are the essence of the church and we need to make sure to focus on the essentials and not on non-essentials.

Now let me give you three implications that I want to encourage you with, based on this quick summary of the church according to God's design in His Word.

First implication, we as followers of Christ must participate in a healthy church. We've just seen in the Word the necessity of the church for every one of our lives—for our growth in Christ, for us to thrive in Christ—so we need to prioritize being a member of a healthy church. This church must be a place where the gospel is being proclaimed, where discipleship is happening and where the Word is being taught by biblically qualified leaders. There must be accountability and discipline and fellowship and prayer—where all these things we've been talking about are realities.

Obviously, no one church in this world is perfectly healthy in all these ways, but we want to be part of a church that is as healthy as possible. We should also be working in the church we're part of to help it grow into greater health on all these different levels. I would encourage to think about the church you're part of, asking yourself, "Is this church healthy in these ways? How can I be part of helping and serving so we might grow in health?"

This is important for every follower of Christ, but I want to particularly apply this to missionaries who serve in unique settings and places around the world, where there's a tendency to be disconnected from the local church. Maybe you've been sent out by a church in North America and you say, "Well, that's the church I'm a member of." But in reality, while that church has an important part to play in sending you out and supporting you from a distance, all these functions of a church can't happen with people who are thousands of miles away from you. You need the church where you live and work.

So if you're a missionary serving the world through the IMB or anywhere else, you need to participate in a healthy church on the field where you are. I know that's uniquely challenging in many settings. You may be in a place where it's just you and somebody else, or you and another couple or family, because you're the only believers in that area. Well, if that's the case, then be the church—as healthy as you possibly can be—in that place. You need the church. Do this for the good of your soul. God has designed you to grow with Him in the context of a church.

That setting needs a church there. They need a picture of Christian community, of the gospel on display in the unique way God has designed it to be on display in the church. I know it's challenging for brothers and sisters around the world. I don't presume to know or personally understand all those specific challenges. This could be a house church. It could be a church with national believers. It could be an international church. There are all kinds of different ways this could play out. But I want to encourage you to be a part of a church.

If you're in a house church, don't settle for just letting that be a Bible study. A house church needs to be a healthy church in all the ways we just saw in the Word. Your soul needs the body of Christ. You cannot survive, much less thrive spiritually—in your life and even more so in your work as a missionary—without the uniquely God-designed community of brothers and sisters serving as the church around you, carrying out the functions of the church for you, and you doing the same thing in their lives. In this process, you will show in this outpost of the Kingdom the beauty of the King in a place where there may be no church. We need to participate as members of healthy churches. That's the first implication.

The second implication is this: when we think about the spread of the gospel in the world, we must plant healthy churches. We need to participate in healthy churches and we need to plant healthy churches that look like what God has designed as the church. We do not have the option of coming up with our own design for the church. He has defined it and we want to be faithful to plant churches according to His plan, based on the 12 characteristics of a healthy church. This is where we must focus on the essentials and not the non-essentials. God is continuing to teach me this truth.

As a quick aside, I remember when I was pastoring the Church at Brook Hills—a mega-church—I saw a lot of things in that church model that I did not like. At one point I was ready to turn the whole

thing upside down. I stayed up all night one night and wrote a 20-page manifesto, describing all the things that needed to change in the Church at Brook Hills. The next morning I sent it off by email to a few key leaders.

About half of the leaders, after reading my manifesto, were like, “Man, that’s awesome.” The other half were like, “Man, that’s not awesome.” That began some really, really good conversation in the days that followed among the leaders. And it was so helpful—the Lord taught me so much. You see, much of what I was focusing on was doing things differently—but a lot of those things were non-essentials. Some of the brothers who thought my ideas weren’t so awesome were really helpful to me by bringing me back to consider what was really essential in our church and what would most help us to grow spiritually. That’s a good conversation to have in the churches we’re a part of. How do we focus on the essentials and not so much on the non-essentials?

Then as we plant churches in places around the world, maybe in places where there has never been a local body of Christ, that we intentionally focus only on the essentials. That way we’ll be planting healthy churches that will stand the test they’ll face; that will not only survive but thrive.

The third implication is this: we need to partner with healthy churches. Particularly with missions around the world, but also in any context, I see a tendency for church planting to totally bypass the churches that already exist there. I would encourage us not to do this. Especially when we’re doing church planting in a new place, let our first step be to discover the state of the churches that are already there. How healthy are they? How open are they to growing in health? We should look for opportunities to come alongside them, serving with them—or even to plant a new church through the already existing churches.

It’s so important in the Christian life—particularly in missions—to participate in healthy churches together. After all, how can we plant something we don’t prioritize in our own lives? We’re going to be held accountable before God for what we’re calling “churches” in the work we’re doing around the world. Let’s be faithful to His Word. Let’s partner with churches to the extent possible, working alongside the other believers in places around the world, in this work of church planting. It is an awesome thought that we are, in Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 3, “workers, skilled craftsmen, building a foundation.” In a real sense, that’s what he’s saying. To be sure, Jesus says in Matthew 16, “*I will build My church*,” but He builds it through the people He’s working in and through in a particular place.

So let’s build faithfully. We’re talking about the body of Christ. Let’s treasure His body. We’re talking about the bride of Christ. Let’s treasure His bride. Let’s not treat the church casually in any way. Let’s make sure, when we talk about planting the church and being part of the church in the world, that we’re being faithful to what God has revealed in His Word.

Let’s pray.

Lord God, we thank You for the church. We thank You for the privilege of being part of Your body, of being part of Your family. We join together with brothers and sisters in the privilege of being Your temple, the place where Your Spirit dwells. O God, thank You for this privilege You've given us. Help us all, we pray, to be faithful members of a local church and to grow in Christ there, to help others grow in Christ, to glorify Your name as faithful members of a local church, wherever we are in the world.

Then we pray, O God, that You would give us grace in our local churches and in the work You've called us to do in different ways around the world, to be faithful to see Your church expand into new places with new people groups, to see the church planted more and more and more. And God, help us to be faithful in that work, in planting Your church according to Your design for the display of Your glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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