

Nine Marks of a Healthy Church  
Trinity Baptist Church Discipleship Training  
June, 2006

This study is a summary of material compiled from Mark Dever's book, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004). Information was also obtained from the Nine Marks website (©9Marks. Website: [www.9Marks.org](http://www.9Marks.org). Email: [info@9marks.org](mailto:info@9marks.org). Toll Free: (888) 543-1030.)

From the website:

“9Marks is committed to helping local churches pursue, develop, and maintain nine of the most important marks of any healthy church. In identifying and promoting these nine, we are not intending to lay down an exhaustive or authoritative list. There are other significant marks of healthy churches, like prayer and fellowship. We want to pursue those ourselves as well, and we want you to pursue them with us. But these nine are the ones we think are most neglected in most local churches today, with the most damaging ramifications. So we think it is wise for us to concentrate on these nine and let other parts of the Body universal promote other important marks of a healthy local church. Here's a brief summary of what we mean by each of the nine marks.”

### 1. [Expositional Preaching](#)

The first mark of a healthy church is expositional preaching. It is not only the first mark; it is far and away the most important of them all, because if you get this one right, all of the others should follow.

This is preaching which expounds what Scripture says in a particular passage, carefully explaining its meaning and applying it to the congregation. It is a commitment to hearing God's Word and to recovering the centrality of it in our worship.

Expositional preaching is in contrast to topical preaching that takes a subject and talks about it, rather than taking a particular text of the Bible as the subject.

#### ***Definitions of types of Preaching:***

***Anecdotal*** - a sermon in which the preacher primarily tells engaging stories with a moral lesson.

***Biographical*** - a sermon in which the preacher traces the life of a biblical character and draws contemporary moral implications.

***Topical*** - a sermon that has a topic in mind prior to consulting the text, and then searches for one or more biblical texts that address the topic chosen beforehand.

***Textual (running commentary)*** - a sermon that refers often to a particular Biblical text, but does not take the main point of the text as its own.

***Expositional*** - a sermon which takes the point of the text as the point of the sermon

#### ***The Details***

**The content of expositional preaching is the true word of God.**

An exposition of Scripture simply seeks to uncover, explain, and apply the divinely intended meaning of the text.

**The context of expositional preaching is the pure church of God.**

The local church is God's primary receptacle for His preached Word.

This kind of preaching will prove itself relevant when the local community of believers backs it up with lifestyles marked by holiness, joy, and selfless service.

**The goal of expositional preaching is for the people of God to hear and heed the Word of God.**

In this sense, expositional preachers are modern day prophets, serving merely as conduits through which the Word of God may flow into the people of God in order to do the work of God in them

***The Dangers:***

Topical Preaching

The preacher is never surprised or thereby challenged by the text, but simply ends up studying and preaching on his own favorite topics. *For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27).*

Therefore, the congregation never grows past the knowledge or maturity level of the preacher.

*The unfolding of your word gives light; it gives understanding to the simple (Ps 119:130).*

Anecdotal Preaching

The congregation may go away entertained, but will they go away having been fed on the Word of God? *Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matt 4:4).*

Large numbers may be attracted and entranced, but do the anecdotes have the sanctifying, transforming power that people need for growth in their personal discipleship? *Sanctify them by your truth; your Word is truth (John 17:17).*

***The Difference***

Pastoral authority is directly related to Authorial intent. The preacher only has authority from God to speak as His ambassador as long as he remains faithful to convey the Divine Author's intentions.

This means that the further the preacher strays from preaching the intention of the text, the further his divine blessing and God-given authority are eroded in the pulpit.

Expositional preaching is the only kind of preaching that, by definition, ensures that the agenda of the sermon is determined by the agenda of the text.

Therefore, a long-term commitment to expositional preaching is the most helpful way for a preacher to discipline himself to remain faithful to God's Word over a lifetime of ministry.

Does a commitment to expositional preaching mean that I should never preach other kinds of sermons?

No. Topical and biographical sermons still have value. It is sometimes helpful to address a certain topic by culling and presenting Biblical information. And it is sometimes instructive to study the life of a Biblical character and draw practical implications for today.

The point is that, as a consistent diet, expositional preaching is most healthy for both the preacher and the congregation.

## 2. Biblical Theology

Paul charges Titus to "teach what is in accord with sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). Our concern should be not only with how we are taught, but with what we are taught. Biblical theology is a commitment to know the God of the Bible as He has revealed Himself in Scripture. One of the chief marks of a healthy church is a biblical understanding of God in His character and His way with us.

*The God of the Bible is a Creating God*

*The God of the Bible is a Holy God*

*The God of the Bible is a Faithful God*

*The God of the Bible is a Loving God*

*The God of the Bible is a Sovereign God*

### 3. **Biblical Understanding of the Gospel**

The gospel is the heart of Christianity. But the good news is not that God wants to meet people's felt needs or help them develop a healthier self-image. We have sinfully rebelled against our Creator and Judge. Yet He has graciously sent His Son to die the death we deserved for our sin, and He has credited Christ's acquittal to those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus' death and resurrection. *That* is the good news.

*The Gospel is not simply that we are okay* – rather, the gospel plainly presents man with a sin problem. We have a sinful nature. We have broken God's law and are justly condemned. An adequate understanding of our condition is essential to an adequate solution.

*The Gospel is not simply that God is love* – Love is not the only characteristic of God. God is also holy and demands holiness of all who would be in a loving relationship with Him.

*The gospel is not simply that Jesus wants to be our Friend* – The Christian Gospel is not a matter of cultivating a relationship or following an example. We have a past to deal with before a relationship can be made. We must deal first with our sin and guilt. We need the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

*The Gospel is not simply that we should live right* – Christianity is not simply doing religious things and good works. The Gospel calls for a more radical response. It demand faith and repentance.

### 4. **Biblical Understanding of Conversion**

The spiritual change each person needs is so radical, so near the root of us, that only God can do it. We need God to convert us. Conversion need not be an emotionally heated experience, but it must evidence itself in godly fruit if it is to be what the Bible regards as a true conversion.

*Is Change Needed?*

*Is Change Really Possible?*

*What Change is Needed?*

*What Will the Change Involve?*

Mental Acceptance?

Moral Resolve?

Mere Relying on Christ alone? (His merits)

*How does this Great Change Happen?*

We Do Nothing?

We Do Everything?

God Works This Saving Faith in Us

## 5. Biblical Understanding of Evangelism

How someone shares the gospel is closely related to how he understands the gospel. To present it as an additive that gives non-Christians something they naturally want (i.e. joy or peace) is to present a half-truth, which elicits false conversions. The whole truth is that our deepest need is spiritual life, and that new life only comes by repenting of our sins and believing in Jesus. We present the gospel openly, and leave the converting to God.

*Who Should Evangelize?*

*How Should We Evangelize*

1. Tell people with honesty that if they repent and believe they will be saved—but that it will be costly.
2. Tell people with urgency that if they repent and believe they will be saved—but they must believe now.
3. Tell people with joy that if they repent and believe the Gospel they will be saved. However difficult it may be, it is all worth it!
4. Use the Bible.
5. Realize that the lives of individual Christians and of the church as a whole are a central part of evangelism.
6. Remember to pray.

*What is evangelism?*

1. It is Not imposition.
2. It is Not Personal Testimony.
3. It is Not Social Action or Political Involvement.
4. It is Not Apologetics.
5. It is Not the Results of Evangelism.

*Why Should We Evangelize?*

- A Desire to Be Obedient to the Great Commission.
- A Love For the Lost.
- A Love For God.

## 6. Biblical Understanding of Church Membership

Membership should reflect a living commitment to a local church in attendance, giving, prayer and service; otherwise it is meaningless, worthless, and even dangerous. We should not allow people to keep their membership in our churches for sentimental reasons or lack of attention. To be a member is knowingly to be traveling together as aliens and strangers in this world as we head to our heavenly home.

*What is a Church?*

*Why Join a Church?*

1. To Assure Ourselves
2. To Evangelize the World
3. To Expose False Doctrine
4. To Edify the Church
5. To Glorify God

### *What Does Church Membership Entail*

1. In Action Initially by Baptism
2. In Writing by Signing a Statement of Faith and Church Covenant.

### *(Special Responsibilities of Membership at Capital Hill Baptist)*

*These are also Responsibilities at Trinity Baptist Church*

1. Attend Services Regularly
2. Attend Communion Particularly
3. Attend Members' Meetings Consistently
4. Pray Regularly
5. Give Regularly

### 7. Biblical Understanding of Church Discipline

Church discipline gives parameters to church membership. The idea seems negative to people today – “didn’t our Lord forbid judging?” But if we cannot say how a Christian should *not* live, how can we say how he or she *should* live? Each local church actually has a biblical responsibility to judge the life and teaching of its leaders, and even of its members, particularly insofar as either could compromise the church’s witness to the gospel.

Dever – “If we really want to see our churches grow, we need to make it harder to join and we need to be better about excluding people. We need to be able to show that there is a distinction between the church and the world—that it means something to be a Christian. If someone who claims to be a Christian refuses to live as a Christian should live, we need to follow what Paul said and, for the glory of God and for that person’s own good, we need to exclude him or her from the membership of the church.” (*Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, Pages 170-171).

“When we’re taking in new members, we have to consider whether those who are under consideration are known to be living Christ-honoring lives. Do we understand the seriousness of the commitment we are making to them when they join the church, have communicated to them the seriousness of the commitment they are making to us” (*Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, Pages 171)?

**J.L. Dagg** – “When discipline leaves the church, Christ is soon to follow” (Dagg, J.L, *Manual of Church Order*, Harrisonburg: Gano, 1982).

In pre-Civil war days Southern Baptists excommunicated nearly 2% of their membership every year—while their churches grew at twice the rate of the population growth.

“As Baptist churches of the nineteenth century retreated from church discipline, the work of the pastor was also changing. It had subtly though certainly become more public. Previously, it had been thought that the work of a pastor was to see that souls were mended by repeated private conferences with families or individuals” (*Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, Pages 180-181).

The church is a community that is covenanted together for accountability. Today, out of the fear of hurting feelings, we seldom approach each other with issues of sin or commitment.

### ***There are five reasons discipline should be practiced***

1. *For the good of the person disciplined*

2. *For the good of the other Christians as they see the danger of sin*
3. *For the health of the church as a whole.*
4. *For the corporate witness of the church.*
5. *For the glory of God, as we reflect His holiness.*

#### 8. **A Concern for Discipleship and Growth**

A pervasive concern with church growth exists today – not simply with growing numbers, but with growing members. Though many Christians measure other things, the only certain observable sign of growth is a life of increasing holiness, rooted in Christian self-denial. These concepts are nearly extinct in the modern church. Recovering true discipleship for today would build the church and promote a clearer witness to the world.

“A healthy church has a pervasive concern with church growth—not simply growing numbers but growing members” (*Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, Page 214).

How do each of the eight other marks effect growth—individually and corporately—as Christians?

Regular pastoral visitation to aid in gaining an understanding into the spiritual condition of the membership is essential.

“Good influences in a covenanted 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 in their ability to administer discipline and to encourage discipleship. The church has an obligation to be a means of God’s growing people in grace” (*Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, Pages 215).

#### 9. **A Biblical Understanding of Church Leadership**

##### 1. *Its congregational context*

Every church is congregational in nature. The congregation is responsible to see that it has sound teaching. It is responsible to continue a faithful, evangelical ministry. It has the responsibility to make sure God is honored by having His Word rightly preached, His commands obeyed, and His character reflected. The congregation must make decisions about discipline and doctrine.

“The church is not a straightforward democracy, for in churches there is a common recognition of our fallen state, of our tendency to err, and, on the other hand, of the inerrancy of God’s Word. So the members of a church congregation are democratic, perhaps, only in the sense that they work together as a congregation to try to understand God’s Word” (*Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, Page 226).

“God does not, however, leave us merely to operate all the time as a ‘committee of the whole.’ We need to trust that God gives particular people gifts to serve as church leaders. We should therefore desire to see in our church the right balance of authority and trust” (*Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, Page 227).

##### 2. *Its biblical qualifications*

What eighteenth-century Baptists and Presbyterians often agreed upon was that there should be a plurality of elders in each local church. This plurality of elders is not only

biblical, but practical — it has the immense benefit of rounding out the pastor’s gifts to ensure the proper shepherding of God’s church (from 9marks website). The qualifications are outlined in 1 Timothy 3.

3. *Its charismatic nature*

The Greek word simply refers to gifts of grace. God’s Spirit gives His church gifts in order to build us up in the faith. “Whenever the church is working by the power of the Spirit for the upbuilding of the body, there the Spirit’s gifts are present. Any understanding we have of biblical church leadership must be seen in that context” (*Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, Page 236).

4. *Its Christlikeness*

Dever uses the mnemonic **BOSS**

**B** – *Boss* – Church leaders must sometimes command, making decisions and taking the responsibility.

**O** – *Out Front* – One who is out front, who takes the initiative and sets the example.

**S** – *Supply* – One who strategically works to give shape and focus and freedom to the work that others are called to do. Leaders direct the traffic of the church, cutting up the ministry into bite-sized bits that others will be able to do.

**S** – *Serve* – This is perhaps the most distinctly Christian kind of leadership – self-sacrificial service.

5. *Its relationship to God’s nature and character*

“To live as God meant us to live, we must be able to trust Him, and we must be able to trust those made in His image. Authority and leadership are not matters of indifference to us as Christians; they are matters of concern, because they are a part of the image of God that we are to reflect in our lives” (*Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, Page 241).