Seven Metaphors

PERSONAL HEALTH WORKSHEETS

David McCrum
David Brown

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Healthy Church
NETWORK

Personal Health Worksheet

Seven Metaphors for Building a Healthy Church

Body

The Big Idea
Healthy Churches Value Connectedness and Biblical Diversity

SEE – Here's the picture God painted

When the Apostle Paul wanted to describe what the church is, he didn't reach for an organizational chart. He reached for the human body. "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" (1 Corinthians 12:12, ESV).

This was a radical picture. The early church included people from opposing ends of society—Jewish and Gentile, slave and free, wealthy merchant and struggling laborer. Humanly speaking, they had nothing in common. But Paul says they were one body, each part essential, each part connected to every other part.

Unity, Not Uniformity

The body of Christ is not meant to be a room full of people who look alike, think alike, or come from the same background. God designed the church to be a living testimony to the world that very different people can be made one—not because they chose each other, but because Christ chose them all.

The body metaphor carries several vital truths about how a healthy church functions:

- **Every part matters.** There are no spectators in a healthy body. Every member carries gifts given by the Holy Spirit and is called to use them in service to the whole (1 Corinthians 12:7).
- **Interdependence is a design feature, not a weakness.** When one part suffers, the whole body feels it. When one part is honored, every part shares in that joy. We were made to need each other (1 Corinthians 12:26).
- **Christ is the head.** All actions, decisions, and directions of the church must ultimately align with the will and guidance of Jesus—not personality, tradition, or preference (Ephesians 1:22–23).
- **Biblical diversity is a witness.** A multi-ethnic, multi-generational, multi-background church sends a message to a divided world: the gospel reconciles what human effort never could (Revelation 7:9).

A healthy church doesn't just have diverse members—it celebrates them. It doesn't just tolerate different gifts and backgrounds; it creates space for every part to function as God designed.

READ – Go find it in the Scriptures

Before your group meets, read some of these passages and note what you observe about this metaphor. Mark phrases that stand out to you.

Main Passages

1 Corinthians 12:12–27
Romans 12:1–8
Ephesians 4:11–16

Additional Passages

1 Corinthians 10:17
Galatians 3:26–29
Ephesians 1:22–23; 3:6; 5:23-30
Colossians 1:18–24; 2:19; 3:8-16

One thing that stood out to me as I read:

REFLECT – Five personal questions

These questions are for you—honest, personal, no right answers. Work through them before your group meets. The more you bring to the table, the richer the conversation will be for everyone.

1. **Think of someone in your church whose background, personality, life experience, or personal and spiritual gifting is quite different from yours.** What have you genuinely learned from them about faith and life?

2. **The Sympathy Principle says your pain is my pain; your joy is my joy.** Describe a moment when someone in your church actually lived that out for you—or when you lived it out for someone else. What made it possible?

3. **God placed you in this body on purpose, with gifts meant to serve the whole.** What is one thing you bring to your church that you sense is going underused? What's honestly getting in the way of offering it more fully?

4. **Pride quietly resists interdependence, avoiding others and struggling to let them in.** Where do you find it hardest to depend on the people around you in your church, and what would it look like to take one small step toward that?

5. **As you think about your church as a body, what's one thing you see working beautifully that deserves to be celebrated, and one thing you hope your group has the courage to talk about honestly?**

YOUR HEALTH SNAPSHOT – Take your own temperature

Rate each statement honestly. This isn't a test—it's a personal baseline. Circle or mark the number that best reflects where you are right now.

1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Always

Embracing Difference	I genuinely value and learn from people in my church who come from different backgrounds or have different gifts than my own.	1	2	3	4	5
Sympathy Principle	When someone in my church experiences joy or pain, I feel moved to share in that experience with them.	1	2	3	4	5
Assistance Principle	When I see someone struggling, I look for practical ways to help—even when it costs me something.	1	2	3	4	5
Active Service	I actively use my gifts to serve others rather than simply attending as a passive participant.	1	2	3	4	5
Gracious Truth-Telling	I am willing to have honest, loving conversations when needed—and I stay open when others do the same with me.	1	2	3	4	5
Coordination and Unity	I prioritize the church's health and mission over my own preferences and expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
Honoring the Unseen	I intentionally notice and appreciate the people who serve quietly behind the scenes.	1	2	3	4	5

After rating yourself: Which area scored lowest? Which scored highest? Bring both to your group—the strengths are worth celebrating, and the gaps are worth exploring together.

"For the body does not consist of one member but of many."
—1 Corinthians 12:14 (ESV)

Healthy Church
NETWORK

Personal Health Worksheet

Seven Metaphors for Building a Healthy Church

Family

The Big Idea
Healthy Churches Love Deeply and Care for One Another

SEE – Here's the picture God painted

When God describes believers as part of a family, it's more than a metaphor—it's a declaration of a new relationship and identity. Through faith in Jesus Christ, you have been born again into God's own household. You are not a guest or distant relative. But you are now a son or daughter, with every family right and the inheritance that belongs to the family.

The Apostle John states it plainly: "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God," (John 1:12, ESV). And Paul adds that the Spirit Himself confirms it, bearing witness within us that we are God's children and heirs with Christ (Romans 8:16–17). This is the foundation of everything the church is called to be.

More Than an Idea

A local church is like an immediate family within God's much larger global family. When believers gather, they are not merely attending a religious service, they are brothers and sisters sharing the same Father, the same Spirit, and the same eternal inheritance.

Family bears resemblance from the inside out. Though we look different, speak different languages, and carry vastly different life stories, every genuine believer shares the indwelling Spirit of God, a love for the same Father, and an ever-growing likeness to the same Brother, Jesus Christ. That shared inner life is the DNA of God's family.

The church-as-family metaphor carries several truths that shape what healthy community looks like:

- **You are a full heir, not a foster child.** God adopted you with every intention of keeping you. Your belonging is secured not by performance but by the new birth (John 3:3–8; Galatians 4:7).
- **Family resemblance is internal.** It isn't ethnicity, culture, or background that unites God's household—it's the shared life of the Spirit within each member (Romans 8:9; Colossians 1:27).
- **Identity shifts when you join God's family.** Your primary allegiance moves from biological family, career community, or cultural tribe to being God's child—a shift that changes how you see yourself, your people, and your purpose (Matthew 12:48–50).
- **Spiritual growth depends on family relationships.** Most lasting transformation happens not in isolation but through consistent, committed life together where we imitate godly examples and spur one another toward Christlikeness (Ephesians 5:1; Hebrews 10:24–25).

When God's people become my people, something begins to shift in a believer's heart. They start absorbing the perspectives, values, and moral character of God and His family. That is why the church acting like a true family matters so deeply—most of our spiritual growth depends on cultivating strong church relationships.

READ – Go find it in the Scriptures

Before your group meets, read some of these passages and note what you observe about this metaphor. Mark phrases that stand out to you.

Main Passages	Additional Passages	
John 1:12	Matthew 12:48–50	Hebrews 3:6; 12:7–8
Romans 8:16–17	Galatians 6:10	1 John 3:1, 10; 4:7–8, 21
Ephesians 2:19	Ephesians 5:1	
1 Timothy 3:15	1 Timothy 5:1–2	

One thing that stood out to me as I read:

REFLECT – Five personal questions

These questions are for you—honest, personal, no right answers. Work through them before your group meets. The more you bring to the table, the richer the conversation will be for everyone.

1. **Think about what it means to be a full heir in God's family—not just a guest or volunteer, but a son or daughter.** How well does that identity shape the way you relate to other believers in your church? Where does it feel more like a transaction than a family relationship? What might need to shift?

2. **The lesson describes a moment of recognition—suddenly finding another believer and feeling immediately at home!** Have you ever met another believer and suddenly felt like you'd met family? If you've rarely experienced that kind of connection in your local church, what might be missing?

3. **The Imitation Principle says we grow by watching godly brothers and sisters—observing how they think, speak, handle conflict, and love God.** Who has played that role for you, and what did you learn from them? With whom could you have that role with right now, and in what way?

4. **This metaphor highlights how past family or church wounds can make it difficult to embrace this new identity.** Is there a wound in your life that makes the family of God feel complicated rather than comforting? What has helped you (or might help you) begin to renew your mind in that area, as the material encourages?

5. **Acts 2 describes a community of believers that gathered daily and even shared meals and resources.** What would that level of family commitment look like in your church context today? What is one thing you could personally do to close that gap?

YOUR HEALTH SNAPSHOT – Take your own temperature

Rate each statement honestly. This isn't a test—it's a personal baseline. Circle or mark the number that best reflects where you are right now.

1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Always

Family Identity	I see my identity as a child of God as more central to who I am than my career, ethnicity, social status, or other cultural identities.	1	2	3	4	5
Sense of Belonging	I genuinely feel at home and welcomed when I gather with other believers, even those from very different backgrounds than my own.	1	2	3	4	5
Imitation Principle	I intentionally observe and learn from more mature believers in my church, and I let their godly example shape how.	1	2	3	4	5
Intergenerational Respect	I treat older believers as spiritual parents and younger believers as siblings, and I show care and honor across age differences.	1	2	3	4	5
Deep Investment	My commitment to my church family goes beyond attendance—I am willing to share time, resources, and emotional support when others have genuine needs.	1	2	3	4	5
Family-Like Gathering	I come to church gatherings looking for meaningful connection, not just to be a listener or spectator.	1	2	3	4	5
Overcoming Past Hurts	When painful experiences with family or church surface, I actively work to renew my mind with biblical truth rather than letting past wounds keep me from community.	1	2	3	4	5

After rating yourself: Which area scored lowest? Which scored highest? Bring both to your group—the strengths are worth celebrating, and the gaps are worth exploring together.

"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,"
—Romans 8:16 (ESV)

Healthy Church
NETWORK

Personal Health Worksheet

Seven Metaphors for Building a Healthy Church

Building

The Big Idea

Healthy Churches Establish Themselves in Truth and Astonish the World

SEE – Here's the picture God painted

When the Apostle Paul looked at the church he was planting, he didn't reach for institutional language. He thought of a construction site. "You are God's building," he wrote. Then he carefully identified that the whole structure was resting on Jesus Christ as the Cornerstone, with apostles and prophets forming the foundation extending from Him (1 Corinthians 3:9–11; Ephesians 2:19–22).

This provides practical imagery. For centuries, God's presence had dwelt in physical structures, first in the tabernacle and then in Solomon's temple. God wanted to be near His people. But when Jesus came, everything changed. He told the woman at the well that a location was no longer the point (John 4:21–24), and God's temple is no longer constructed of stone and mortar. His church is people.

People, Not a Place

People do not gather in the house of the Lord—they are the house of the Lord. When believers gather in Jesus' name, the assembled church is the dwelling place of God's Spirit in this age.

Peter calls us "living stones"—each one chosen, prepared, and placed by the Builder Himself to form something that no human architect could design (1 Peter 2:5). And Paul's image in Ephesians is breathtaking: all the building fits—is framed—together, growing into a holy temple where God dwells through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:21–22).

The building metaphor carries several truths that matter deeply for how healthy churches function:

- **Christ is the cornerstone—not a local personality, not a program, not a tradition.** A cornerstone sets the position, alignment, and direction of everything built from it. When churches drift from Christ as their cornerstone, the whole structure is compromised, no matter how impressive it looks from the outside (1 Corinthians 3:11).
- **Every stone has a place—and that place is specific.** Living stones aren't randomly piled—they are placed by the Builder to integrate and collaborate with the stones around them. Your particular placement in your local church is not accidental (Ephesians 2:10).
- **Offset bonding builds strength.** A skilled mason never stacks stones in a straight vertical line because this would create a weak wall. Instead, he staggers the stones so they are offset. Healthy believers are connected to

multiple people. This allows them to draw from a range of godly voices, and not depend on a single teacher or leader as their only spiritual footing.

- **The construction has been underway for 2,000 years—and it is on schedule.** The Cologne Cathedral took 632 years to build. The Milan Cathedral, 579 years. And yet, with His church, God keeps on building a magnificent edifice with every stone in its place. The gates of hell have not prevailed.

A healthy church knows that it is built on Jesus Christ. It invests in doctrine, character, good works, and relationships—not because these grow the building faster, but because they are the only materials that last. When the world sees such a community of believers—anchored, stable, mutually supporting—it begins to see God's majesty.

READ – Go find it in the Scriptures

Before your group meets, read some of these passages and note what you observe about this metaphor. Mark phrases that stand out to you.

Main Passages	Additional Passages	
1 Corinthians 3:9–17	Matthew 16:18	2 Corinthians 6:15–16
Ephesians 2:19–22	John 4:21–24	Colossians 2:7
1 Peter 2:5	1 Corinthians 6:19	

One thing that stood out to me as I read:

REFLECT – Five personal questions

These questions are for you—honest, personal, no right answers. Work through them before your group meets. The more you bring to the table, the richer the conversation will be for everyone.

1. **The cornerstone sets the alignment for everything built from it.** In your own faith life right now, what does your spiritual stability rest on most—pastors, traditions, programs, or a theological position? What would it look like practically to reorient around Christ as your "cornerstone"? How would that be different from what you're doing now?

2. **Peters says God placed us as "living stones" to touch, draw from, and strengthen the stones around us.** Whose lives are you strengthening most? Who are you drawing strength from? Is there a "stone"—someone in your church whose influence or perspective you've been missing?

3. **The masonry illustration warns against "stacking vertically" where one depends on a single influence.** Is your spiritual formation connected by interacting with a diverse range of believers? Where might you be spiritually under-supported because your connections are too narrow?

4. **Sometimes churches and ministries collapse.** Have you experienced a church or ministry where the wrong thing was functioning as the foundation? What did you observe, and what did you learn from it? How has that experience shaped what you look for—or what you guard against—in your current church involvement?

5. **This chapter closes with the image of some stones being placed, but never fully anchored.** How firmly anchored are you right now, not in terms of attendance, but in mutual investment with people around you? What would it take to become more firmly set in place—and what is honestly getting in the way?

YOUR HEALTH SNAPSHOT – Take your own temperature

Rate each statement honestly. This isn't a test—it's a personal baseline. Circle or mark the number that best reflects where you are right now.

1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Always

Christ as Cornerstone	I consistently build my faith, decisions, and church involvement on Jesus Christ rather than on personalities, programs, or past traditions.	1	2	3	4	5
Structural Integrity	I support the health and stability of my church through sound biblical convictions and consistent godly character, rather than causing division or drift.	1	2	3	4	5
Offset Bonding	I actively cultivate spiritual relationships with multiple believers—drawing from a range of voices rather than relying on a single teacher or mentor.	1	2	3	4	5
Living Stone Identity	I see my role and placement in this church as specific and significant—part of what holds the broader structure together.	1	2	3	4	5
Sacrificial Worship	I regularly offer spiritual sacrifices to God—worship, prayer, praise, and generous giving—while recognizing that our gathered community is His dwelling place.	1	2	3	4	5
Firm Anchoring	I am genuinely committed and rooted in my local church, not loose or peripheral due to busyness, distraction, or misplaced priorities.	1	2	3	4	5
Building Others Up	I intentionally invest in the stability and faith of the believers around me, rather than pulling away from community or pushing others aside.	1	2	3	4	5

After rating yourself: Which area scored lowest? Which scored highest? Bring both to your group—the strengths are worth celebrating, and the gaps are worth exploring together.

"In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."
—Ephesians 2:22 (ESV)

Healthy Church
NETWORK

Personal Health Worksheet

Seven Metaphors for Building a Healthy Church

Flock

The Big Idea
Healthy Churches Follow God and Cultivate Dependence on Him

SEE – Here's the picture God painted

God calling His people "sheep" is endearing, but it is not entirely a compliment. Sheep are lovable and useful, but they are also known for wandering, for being afraid, and for blindly following a wayward member of the flock. When Jesus chose this image for His people, He was being honest about what we are like when left to ourselves—and He tenderly helps us understand what we need.

The flock metaphor runs deep in Scripture. Yahweh-Ra'ah—the Lord, my Shepherd—is one of God's own names (Psalm 23, 100:3). Israel's leaders were called shepherds, and many of them failed miserably at the role, pursuing their own gain while scattering the sheep (Jeremiah 23:1–2; Ezekiel 34). Then Jesus arrived. He, the Good Shepherd, knows His sheep by name, leads them to pasture, and lays down His life for them (John 10:11–15).

Shepherds and Sheep Love Each Other

Sheep are safest and healthiest when they stay close to their Shepherd. Healthy churches are communities that cultivate affection and closeness—in prayer, in the word, in spending time with one another.

The flock metaphor carries several truths that shape what a healthy, dependent church looks like:

- **Sheep must learn to recognize the Shepherd's voice.** True sheep know their Shepherd and flee from strangers. In a world full of competing voices—cultural trends, dominant personalities, the pull of independence—discerning Christ's voice requires intentional closeness to Him (John 10:4–5, 27).
- **Sheep are meant to give back, not just be cared for.** A sheep that only consumes without contributing wool, milk, or offspring is a sheep failing its purpose. Healthy believers look for ways to serve the Shepherd and the flock, not merely for what the flock can offer them.
- **Sheep need a big Shepherd, not a small one.** Many believers live with a "small Shepherd" mentality, assuming God is distant, distracted, or unable to help in the valley. But the Shepherd leads through dark shadows, not around them, and He is present every step (Psalm 23:4; Romans 8:28–29).
- **Wandering sheep can be restored.** The Shepherd pursues straying sheep, sometimes through gentleness and sometimes through discipline. Restoration is possible, and it is meant to end in rejoicing, not shame (Luke 15:4–7; Hebrews 12:5–13).

Jesus did not call us moose, bears, or leopards. He called us sheep. That is an invitation to a fundamentally communal, dependent, and relational way of living—one that reflects the Shepherd's own heart for His flock.

READ – Go find it in the Scriptures

Before your group meets, read some of these passages and note what you observe about this metaphor. Mark phrases that stand out to you.

Main Passages

John 10:11–16, 27–28
Acts 20:28–30
1 Peter 5:1–4

Additional Passages

Psalm 23, 100:3
Jeremiah 3:15, 23:3–4
Matthew 26:31
Luke 12:22–34
Hebrews 13:20–21
1 Peter 2:25
Revelation 7:17

One thing that stood out to me as I read:

REFLECT – Five personal questions

These questions are for you—honest, personal, no right answers. Work through them before your group meets. The more you bring to the table, the richer the conversation will be for everyone.

1. **Sheep are safest and healthiest when they stay close to their Shepherd by learning to recognize His voice in His word and through His Spirit.** How would you describe your closeness to the Shepherd right now? What tends to crowd out that closeness most consistently—and what has helped you recover it when it slips?

2. **Sheep that isolate themselves act against their spiritual nature.** What has helped you to integrate with the flock or draws you toward isolation, and what draws you back? Is there a practical step you could take this week toward being more present with and known by your flock?

3. **The chapter describes a "small Shepherd" mentality—the quiet assumption that God is distant, busy, or not strong enough to help in your valleys.** What anxieties are hardest for you to surrender to His care? What would it look like to actively practice trusting a big Shepherd? What changes would living that way require?

4. **Sheep give back—wool, milk, offspring, and ultimately their lives.** Are you approaching your church as a regular contributor or primarily as a consumer? What is one specific way your time, talent, or resources could serve your church community in the coming month?

5. **Sometimes it's easy for us to follow "dominant sheep"—people who are loud, confident, and influential, but who may not be closely following the Shepherd themselves.** How have you been pulled in that direction? How do you currently evaluate whether a someone in your life is genuinely aligned with the Chief Shepherd's voice?

YOUR HEALTH SNAPSHOT – Take your own temperature

Rate each statement honestly. This isn't a test—it's a personal baseline. Circle or mark the number that best reflects where you are right now.

1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Always

Shepherd's Voice	I consistently recognize and follow Jesus' voice through Scripture and the Spirit's leading, rather than being shaped by cultural trends or my own personal desires.	1	2	3	4	5
Flock Connection	I actively stay close to the other sheep in my local church, knowing that isolation works against my spiritual nature and health.	1	2	3	4	5
Giving Back	I regularly contribute my time, talents, and resources to serve my church community rather than approaching church primarily as a consumer.	1	2	3	4	5
Humble Dependence	I trust in God's protection and provision during difficult seasons, actively fighting the tendency to act as though I have a small or distant Shepherd.	1	2	3	4	5
Wise Following	I submit to godly leadership in my church and stay alert to the difference between following Christ and following dominant or charismatic personalities.	1	2	3	4	5
Spiritual Hunger	I actively seek nourishment from God's Word, prayer, and fellowship with other believers; I maintain a healthy appetite for the things of God.	1	2	3	4	5
Restoration and Welcome	When I stray or struggle, I seek repentance and return to the flock rather than pulling away in shame; I also extend genuine welcome to those who are new.	1	2	3	4	5

After rating yourself: Which area scored lowest? Which scored highest? Bring both to your group—the strengths are worth celebrating, and the gaps are worth exploring together.

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."
—Jesus, John 10:27 (ESV)

Healthy Church
NETWORK

Personal Health Worksheet

Seven Metaphors for Building a Healthy Church

Garden

The Big Idea
Healthy Churches Root People in God and His Word To Produce Fruit

SEE – Here's the picture God painted

Agricultural images were everywhere in the world of the New Testament. Fields, vineyards, and orchards were part of everyday life, and Jesus and Paul drew on them deeply to describe what the church is and how it grows. At the center of the garden metaphor is a single, non-negotiable conviction: fruitfulness comes from connection, not from effort alone.

In John 15, Jesus gives one of the most intimate pictures of the Christian life in all of Scripture. He is the vine, His Father is the vinedresser, and every believer is a branch. Branches don't generate life from within themselves—they receive it. The sap flows from the root through the vine and into the branches, and it is that flow of life that produces fruit. Abiding is not striving. It is staying connected, staying open, and letting nothing choke the flow.

Healthy Things Grow

The branch does not bear fruit by trying harder. It bears fruit by staying attached. Abiding means consistent intake of Scripture, honest prayer, and worshipful obedience—allowing Christ's life to move through you naturally.

Paul adds another layer to the garden image: We are not just branches on a vine, but we are also plants growing side by side in the same field. "You are God's field" (1 Corinthians 3:9, ESV). You are a community of plants, rooted together in the same soil, dependent on the same Farmer, bearing fruit in the same season. The garden metaphor carries several truths that shape how a healthy church grows:

- Abiding is more than attachment. A branch can be loosely connected and still wither. Abiding involves genuine intimacy that loves God's word, cultivates prayer, practices obedience, and keeps the flow of spiritual nourishment unobstructed (John 15:4–7).
- Pruning is part of fruitfulness, not a punishment. The vinedresser cuts back branches that have borne fruit so they will bear even more. Difficult seasons, correction, and discipline are not signs that something has gone wrong. This is how the Farmer is preparing greater fruitfulness (Hebrews 12:11).
- Fruit comes in two forms: new souls and acts of righteousness. Fruitfulness is both evangelistic and ethical. Healthy churches are communities where the gospel spreads into new lives and where love, joy, peace, patience, and gentleness are visibly growing in the people (Galatians 5:22–23; Colossians 1:6, 10).

- The field is plural—we grow together, not alone. Branches intertwine on a trellis. Plants grow side by side. God's design for fruitfulness is communal (Ephesians 4:12–16).
- Fruitfulness reveals what is real. False wheat and genuine wheat look the same until harvest time. A fig tree with impressive leaves but no fruit has no benefit. Over time, what is genuinely rooted in Christ becomes visible, and what is not real also becomes clear (Matthew 7:17–19, 13:24–30).

This is what makes the garden metaphor both encouraging and sobering. It invites us to examine not just what we are doing for God, but whether we are genuinely connected to Him—and whether the evidence of that connection is visible in the fruit our lives are producing over time.

READ – Go find it in the Scriptures

Before your group meets, read some of these passages and note what you observe about this metaphor. Mark phrases that stand out to you.

Main Passages

John 15:1–8
Romans 11:16–21
1 Corinthians 3:6–9
Galatians 5:22–26
Colossians 2:6

Additional Passages

Matthew 7:15–23
Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23
Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43
James 5:7–9
James 3:17–18

One thing that stood out to me as I read:

REFLECT – Five personal questions

These questions are for you—honest, personal, no right answers. Work through them before your group meets. The more you bring to the table, the richer the conversation will be for everyone.

1. **Abiding involves more than being casually connected to Christ; it means absorbing Scripture, praying without pretense, and aiming to obey God.** How would you describe the quality of your abiding right now? What one thing, if changed, would most improve the quality of your connection to the vine?

2. **The chapter traces Paul's growing humility over three decades—his vision of himself was getting clearer.** How has your spiritual growth changed how you see yourself before God? What would it look like for your self-awareness to keep moving in a direction similar to Paul's?

3. **Pruning is described not as punishment but as an investment in greater fruitfulness.** Think about a season in your life when God was clearly cutting something back in your life—and what came from it? Is there something being pruned in your life right now that you are still struggling to receive as care rather than loss?

4. **Not everyone who is bearing leaves is bearing fruit—this is meant to provoke open self-examination, not anxiety.** As you look at your own life, what fruit do you see, and where are there just leaves? What conditions in your current season seem to be helping fruit grow, and what is working against it?

5. **The fruitfulness God has in mind is communal, not just personal.** How are you currently growing in connection with the other branches and plants around you in your local church? Who are one or two people in your church community whose growth is genuinely intertwined with yours right now?

YOUR HEALTH SNAPSHOT – Take your own temperature

Rate each statement honestly. This isn't a test—it's a personal baseline. Circle or mark the number that best reflects where you are right now.

1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Always

Abiding Connection	I maintain a consistent, intimate connection with Christ through regular Scripture intake, prayer, and worshipful obedience—allowing His life to flow through me like sap through a branch.	1 2 3 4 5
Fruit of Righteousness	My life shows genuine evidence of spiritual fruit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—rather than just an outward appearance of religion.	1 2 3 4 5
Deep Roots	I am firmly grounded in God's truth and love, which gives me stability when popular—but incorrect—ideas press in from around me.	1 2 3 4 5
Evangelistic Fruitfulness	I intentionally share the Gospel and see myself as part of God's harvest work, rather than focusing only on my own spiritual growth.	1 2 3 4 5
Intertwined Community	I am genuinely connected with other believers in my church; I give and receive mutual support rather than trying to grow in spiritual isolation.	1 2 3 4 5
Receptive to Pruning	When God allows difficult circumstances or correction in my life, I respond with trust and submission, understanding that pruning leads to greater fruitfulness.	1 2 3 4 5
Growing Humility	As I mature spiritually, I grow in honest self-awareness and dependence on God's grace, rather than becoming more self-satisfied with my spiritual progress.	1 2 3 4 5

After rating yourself: Which area scored lowest? Which scored highest? Bring both to your group—the strengths are worth celebrating, and the gaps are worth exploring together.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."
—Jesus, John 15:5 (ESV)

Healthy Church
NETWORK

Personal Health Worksheet

Seven Metaphors for Building a Healthy Church

Kingdom

The Big Idea

Healthy Churches Represent Christ Well and Reach New Areas With the Gospel

SEE – Here's the picture God painted

Every human being wakes up with a built-in instinct to be king. We want to set the agenda, control the outcome, and have things run the way we think they should. The Kingdom metaphor confronts that instinct directly—and redirects it. There is already a King. The whole question is whether we will recognize Him, submit to Him, and live accordingly.

The Kingdom of God is, like the family metaphor, actually more than a metaphor—it is reality. God is the Creator and true ruler of all things. When humanity aligned with the enemy's rebellion, we defected from the rightful King and joined a kingdom of self-rule and darkness. But Jesus came as the suffering King, paid the death penalty for every rebel, and made it possible for traitors to be fully pardoned, re-enrolled as citizens, and even commissioned as soldiers and ambassadors of the Kingdom they once opposed.

Changing Citizenship

A redeemed rebel is surrounded by others who have been redeemed in the same way. No one is born into this Kingdom (or God's family)—it requires rebirth. The new citizen receives training to reprogram his or her understanding of what is true, right, virtuous, and beautiful.

The Kingdom metaphor opens up several sub-images—citizens, soldiers, ambassadors, and exiles longing for home—each of which illuminates a different dimension of what it means to belong to a different King. Together they shape what a healthy, outward-facing church looks like:

- **Citizens of a foreign Kingdom.** Our true homeland is not the country on our passport. Believers are strangers and pilgrims on earth, who are living in exile and longing for the holy City that is being prepared (Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 11:13–16). This identity relativizes every earthly allegiance—national, political, and cultural—without dismissing them.
- **Soldiers in a real conflict.** The enemy is not unbelievers—they are simply doing what sin has programmed them to do. The enemy is the adversary and the system of lies he spreads. We are enlisted soldiers, but we fire no bullets. We cross enemy lines daily to carry news of a King who died so rebels could be forgiven (2 Timothy 2:3–4; Ephesians 6:19–20).
- **Ambassadors with a message.** We do not create our own message or act on our own authority. We deliver a message from the King. Our conduct must not bring shame on the Kingdom or the King we represent. The

gospel is not a weak plea but a command—an urgent call for rebels to repent, defect, and be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20–21).

- **Investors in the coming Kingdom.** Everything we see will eventually burn. But we can dedicate our time, talents, prayers, and money from earth to the eternal realm, thereby storing up treasures that are fireproof, moth-proof, inflation-proof, and theft-proof. Using money to build a small heaven on earth only leaves us impoverished when the true Kingdom arrives (Matthew 6:19–24).
- **The church as a military base and embassy.** When believers gather, they are not just going to church. They are regrouping—comforting soldiers who have been hit, worshipping the King they serve, studying His messages, and training for the mission before heading back out into foreign territory.

The Kingdom metaphor is perhaps the most outward-facing of the seven. It presses us past comfort and self-focus toward a life lived on mission—with the urgency of soldiers, the dignity of ambassadors, and the hope of citizens who know their King is coming back.

READ – Go find it in the Scriptures

Before your group meets, read some of these passages and note what you observe about this metaphor. Mark phrases that stand out to you.

Main Passages			Additional Passages
Matthew 5–7	2 Corinthians 5:20–21	Hebrews 11:10, 13–16	Ephesians 6:19–20
Luke 17:21	Ephesians 2:19	Hebrews 12:22–29	1 Thessalonians 2:10–12
John 18:36	Philippians 3:20	1 Peter 2:9–10	Philemon 1:2
Acts 28:30–31	2 Timothy 2:3–4	Hebrews 13:14	Revelation 1:5–6, 11:15, 19:14

One thing that stood out to me as I read:

REFLECT – Five personal questions

These questions are for you—honest, personal, no right answers. Work through them before your group meets. The more you bring to the table, the richer the conversation will be for everyone.

1. **Most of us have a deep human instinct to be king—to want everyone to see things our way, run things our way, and organize life around our preferences.** Where do you find this instinct most alive in you right now? What would it look like to "die daily" to self-rule in that specific area this week?

2. **The Kingdom metaphor in Scripture reminds us that we are first citizens of heaven, and strangers and pilgrims on earth.** How does this identity shape how we relate to people and engage with the culture? What would shift in a practical way if your heavenly citizenship became genuinely primary in how you see yourself?

3. **As ambassadors, we represent a King whose honor is at stake in how we conduct ourselves.** Where is the gap between your ambassador identity and your actual day-to-day behavior most visible to you? What is one specific change that would help you be a more credible representative of the Kingdom?

4. **How would you assess the balance between your earthly investments (comfort, security, possessions, experiences) and your Kingdom investments (people, gospel work, giving)?** How might you make a financial or time-based decision to better reflect this eternal perspective seriously?

5. **When you gather with your church, does it feel more like a religious service you attend rather than a strategic gathering of fellow Kingdom citizens?** What would need to change for your gatherings to feel more like meaningful fellowship among soldiers and ambassadors?

YOUR HEALTH SNAPSHOT – Take your own temperature

Rate each statement honestly. This isn't a test—it's a personal baseline. Circle or mark the number that best reflects where you are right now.

1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Always

Kingdom Allegiance	I prioritize my identity as a citizen of God's kingdom over my earthly nationality, career, or cultural background, and that priority visibly shapes my decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
Surrendering Self-Rule	I consciously resist the instinct to be king of my own life by choosing to submit to Jesus' authority in both significant decisions and daily choices.	1	2	3	4	5
Heavenly Investment	I invest my time, talents, and resources for eternal kingdom work rather than becoming emotionally attached to material comfort or earthly security.	1	2	3	4	5
Ambassador Conduct	My behavior, speech, and character in daily life consistently represent Christ's kingdom in a way that honors—rather than embarrasses—my King.	1	2	3	4	5
Gospel Mission	I actively share the Gospel with unbelievers, seeing myself as a soldier and ambassador whose calling is to invite others to be reconciled to God.	1	2	3	4	5
Kingdom Community	When I gather with my church, I approach it as meaningful fellowship with fellow citizens of God's kingdom, not simply as attending a religious event.	1	2	3	4	5
Eternal Perspective	I live with genuine hope in Christ's coming Kingdom, and that hope shapes how I navigate current struggles, priorities, and relationships.	1	2	3	4	5

After rating yourself: Which area scored lowest? Which scored highest? Bring both to your group—the strengths are worth celebrating, and the gaps are worth exploring together.

"...My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."
—Jesus, John 18:36 (ESV)

Healthy Church
NETWORK

Personal Health Worksheet

Seven Metaphors for Building a Healthy Church

Bride

The Big Idea
Healthy Churches Anticipate and Prepare for Christ's Return

SEE – Here's the picture God painted

The Bible opens in a garden and closes at a wedding. These are not incidental bookends—they are the arc of the whole story. God created human beings for fellowship, for the joy of being known and loved and knowing and loving in return. Sin shattered that intimacy. The rest of Scripture is the story of God working to restore it—fully, permanently, and at a scale more magnificent than Eden.

The bride metaphor is the most intimate of the seven. It speaks of a relationship so close that Paul reaches for the language of marriage to describe it—not as an illustration, but as a reality that marriage itself was always pointing toward (Ephesians 5:32). Jesus Christ gave Himself for the church to make her clean, holy, and beautiful—presenting her to Himself without spot, wrinkle, or blemish. And Revelation closes with the great crowd in heaven crying out that the wedding day has finally come and the bride has made herself ready (Revelation 19:6–8).

Wedding Bells

God longs for closeness, caring, tenderness, affection, warmth, and friendship—love both felt and expressed through words and service. Our lives are intertwined with His, allowing us to enjoy a succession of close relational experiences and conversations with Him.

This is not a distant religious obligation. The bride metaphor is an invitation into the deepest possible relationship—and a calling to live in light of the wedding day that is coming.

We are currently in the engagement period—the stretch between the promise and the wedding day. This metaphor names what that season requires, and what threatens it. Several truths shape what it means for a healthy church to live as the bride:

- **The Groom chose the Bride at great cost.** The people who would become the church were not impressive candidates—the chapter does not soften this. Jesus saved and cleansed a deeply broken people. That radical grace, not our worthiness, is the foundation of the relationship. Understanding this should produce profound love and profound humility (Ephesians 5:25–27).
- **Our standing before Him is already spotless.** Positionally, because of the blood of Christ, we are declared holy and without blemish. When we confess our sins, our consciences are cleansed as well (1 John 1:9; Hebrews 10:22). Many believers live as though God still frowns when He thinks of them. Training our minds on this truth changes everything.

- **The engagement period requires undivided devotion.** This world's good things—comfort, beauty, leisure, connection, the good life—can gradually shift the bride's affections so that the Groom's return feels like an interruption rather than the longed-for arrival (2 Corinthians 11:2–4).
- **Readiness is visible in how we live now.** The wise virgins in Matthew 25 were not more spiritual than the foolish—they were simply prepared. Readiness involves moral purity pursued out of love, investments of time and energy that will survive the fire of the Judgment Seat of Christ, and an urgency about the gospel because every delay in the Groom's return is another day of mercy for the lost (2 Peter 3:9).
- **The wedding day is the goal of all history.** In Revelation 21, the City descends—called both the New Jerusalem and the bride. Eden returns. Tears and death vanish. God is with His people forever. This is not the background of the story; it is the destination everything has been moving toward.

The bride metaphor is the final word in this curriculum for good reason. It is the metaphor that most directly answers the question of why any of this matters. We are not simply a body, a family, a building, a flock, a garden, or a kingdom—we are ultimately the beloved of the King, waiting for the day He comes. Everything else is preparation for that reunion.

READ – Go find it in the Scriptures

Before your group meets, read some of these passages and note what you observe about this metaphor. Mark phrases that stand out to you.

Main Passages	Additional Passages	
Ephesians 5:25–32	Matthew 25:1–13	2 Peter 3:9
2 Corinthians 11:2–3	1 Corinthians 3:12–15	1 John 2:28, 3:2–3
Revelation 19:6–9; 21:2, 9	2 Timothy 4:8	

One thing that stood out to me as I read:

REFLECT – Five personal questions

These questions are for you—honest, personal, no right answers. Work through them before your group meets. The more you bring to the table, the richer the conversation will be for everyone.

1. **The chapter describes God's desire for intimacy with us—closeness, tenderness, and friendship.** How would you describe your relationship with Him right now—as someone you love, or as a religious practice you do? What has helped you experience genuine closeness with Christ in the past—and what tends to crowd that out?

2. **Because of Christ, God declares you holy and without blemish.** How deeply does this shape your day-to-day sense of who you are before God, or does it remain only as a theological idea? What would shift in a practical way if you understood that God loves you deeply and has prepared a home for you in heaven?

3. **Good things—comfort, leisure, relationships, the pleasures of life—can gradually capture our attention so that the Groom's return feels like an interruption.** What makes you hesitant for Jesus' return? How do you tell the difference between enjoying God's gifts with open hands and becoming too attached to them?

4. **Looking at how you are actually investing your time, energy, and money right now, how much of it falls into the category of temporary, and how much would have eternal significance?** What one thing could you do differently in the next month that would shift your investments towards what will last?

5. **The chapter closes with a vivid image: Jesus returning and finding His bride—either shocked and confused, or eager with joy.** Which of those pictures better describes how you would greet Him today, and why? What is one specific step you could take to make your answer to that question different—better—six months from now?

YOUR HEALTH SNAPSHOT – Take your own temperature

Rate each statement honestly. This isn't a test—it's a personal baseline. Circle or mark the number that best reflects where you are right now.

1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Always

Intimate Relationship	I cultivate a genuine bond with Christ through consistent prayer, worship, and spiritual connection—our lives feel genuinely intertwined rather than distant or transactional.	1	2	3	4	5
Eager Anticipation	I live with joyful expectation of Christ's return, seeing it as my blessed hope rather than an unwelcome interruption to my earthly plans and comforts.	1	2	3	4	5
Moral Purity	I actively pursue purity in my thoughts, affections, and actions—motivated by love for Christ and a desire to be unashamed when He returns.	1	2	3	4	5
Undivided Devotion	I guard against allowing good things—possessions, comforts, pleasures, or relationships—to draw my heart's primary affection away from Christ.	1	2	3	4	5
Righteous Living	I invest my time and energy in work that will have eternal value rather than in activities that feel productive but carry no lasting weight.	1	2	3	4	5
Evangelistic Urgency	I actively share the Gospel with the lost, understanding that every day Christ delays His return is another day of mercy extended to people who need to hear the Good News.	1	2	3	4	5
Readiness and Preparation	I regularly examine my heart and life so that I am genuinely ready for Christ's return—not fearful, but eager and prepared.	1	2	3	4	5

After rating yourself: Which area scored lowest? Which scored highest? Bring both to your group—the strengths are worth celebrating, and the gaps are worth exploring together.

"Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready;"
—Revelation 19:7 (ESV)

Bring the Great Commission Home