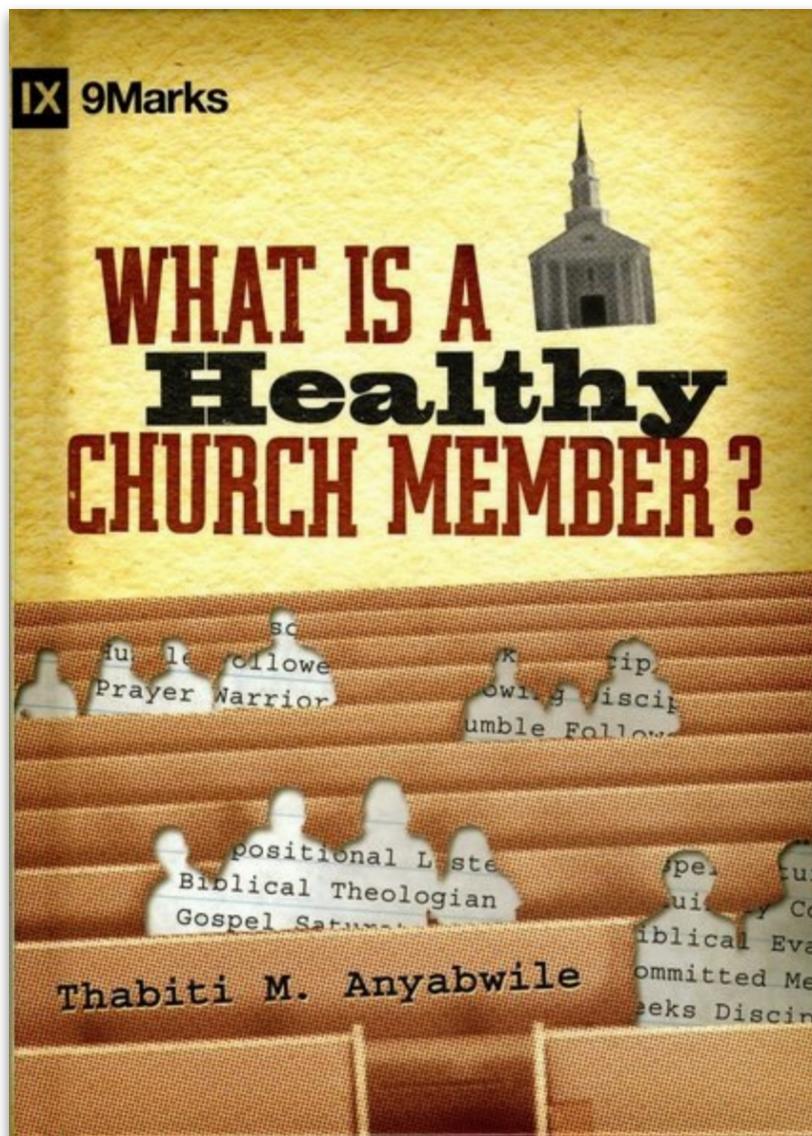


Growth Group Study Guide

based on Thabiti Anyabwile's book *What is a Healthy Church Member?*



Introduction

The hope of us walking through this book together as a church is to cultivate a deeper understanding of the significance of church membership and the vital involvement all members have in the life of the church. It is our hope that every member at Christ Fellowship Church will become a deeply committed member, not for the sake of Christ Fellowship Church's name or reputation, but for the spiritual health of our overall body as well as the individual soul of every member. Ultimately, though, the over-arching goal that encompasses those other goals is the advancement of the Kingdom of God on this earth to the glory of God.

In our contemporary church culture, church membership is devoid of much meaning. Commitment is low and comfort is high. When something requires much of us, we tend to shirk those responsibilities in favor of that which is easier and less sticky. However, that is not the Biblical picture of the church. And that is not what we want for and from our church members. As we seek to produce healthy and committed members of our church, it is not for the sake of some rigid discipline, but for the flourishing of the souls that have been entrusted to the care of our church.

Now, a few things about how to prepare for these discussions. **First of all**, on the Scripture given for discussion, it would be best if you read through those before your meeting. Not that you need to have detailed notes on every passage, but it will help you facilitate discussion if you have some idea of what the passage is saying. **Second**, you do not have to ask all of the questions listed. They are simply there so that you do not have to reach for topics of conversation. If you have additional questions you would like to add, please do. The questions we have provided are to help you keep the discussion flowing and on track. But we do think they will provide fruitful discussion. **Third**, because it may help people to have the questions before them, as well as the various lists of Scriptures and occasional sidebar, we recommend that you print a copy of the page(s) from each session. This is typically a helpful practice whenever possible. **Fourth and finally**, we do not expect you to read any of the recommended books for your discussions. Those suggestions are provided if you or any of your group members would like to dive more deeply into one or more of these specific topics. We endorse them and feel confident that they are both helpful and readable for all members of our congregation.

We pray that this will be a growing time of discussion in your groups that will bear much fruit in the life of our church. Please join us in praying along those lines.



Recommended Schedule

Session 1 - Chapter 1, A Healthy Church Member is an Expository Listener

Session 2 - Chapter 2, A Healthy Church Member is a Biblical Theologian

Session 3 - Chapter 3, A Healthy Church Member is Gospel Saturated

Session 4 - Chapter 4, A Healthy Church Member is Genuinely Converted

Session 5 - Chapter 5, A Healthy Church Member is a Biblical Evangelist

Session 6 - Chapter 6, A Healthy Church Member is a Committed Member

Session 7 - Chapter 7, A Healthy Church Member Seeks Discipline

Session 8 - Chapter 8, A Healthy Church Member is a Growing Disciple

Session 9 - Chapter 9, A Healthy Church Member is a Humble Follower

Session 10 - Chapter 10, A Healthy Church Member is a Prayer Warrior



Mark 1 – A Healthy Church Member is an Expository Listener

Questions for Further Discussion

- Discuss the questions in the “For Further Reflection” section on Page 26.
- Of the 6 practical ideas to help assist expository listening, what ones do you need to implement?
- Which of the five benefits of expository listening have you never considered before? How can you see those things edifying the church through expository listening?
- Do you take notes? Is that helpful/less helpful? What are the things you write/listen for?
- Why is it hard for us to talk about/pray about the sermon with others after the service? Have you ever tried to put this into practice?
- How can infrequent attendance on Sundays or even catching the sermon later online/podcast hinder your ability to listen expositionally?
- Was there anything else from the reading that you found helpful, challenging, or even wrong that we have not yet discussed?

Listen Up!: A Practical Guide to Listening to Sermons

by Christopher Ash

7 Suggestions:

- 1) Expect God to speak.
- 2) Admit that God knows better than you.
- 3) Check the preacher says what the passage says.
- 4) Hear the sermon in church.
- 5) Be there week by week.
- 6) Do what the Bible says.
- 7) Do what the Bible says today – and rejoice!

Ash, Christopher. *Listen Up!: A Practical Guide to Listening to Sermons* (The Good Book Company, 2009).

Additional Scripture to Read and Discuss

- Psalm 119:33-40, 129-131
- Acts 17:10-11
- 2 Timothy 4:3-4



Prayer Time

Take time as a group to pray for the truths discussed in your meeting to take root in your heart.

- Pray that any helpful practices that were mentioned would be more consistently unitized by your group members.
- Pray for fruit from hearing last Sunday's sermon, and pray in preparation to hear next Sunday's sermon.

Recommended Books for Further Reading

- Christopher Ash - Listen Up!: A Practical Guide to Listening to Sermons



Mark 2 – A Healthy Church Member is a Biblical Theologian

Questions for Further Discussion

- Discuss the questions in the “For Further Reflection” section on Page 37.
- What is your overall attitude toward *theology*? Is it something that seems lofty and impractical? Or do you simply find it interesting? Or is it of real, practical value to you?
- Anyabwile mentions that the reason for practicing biblical theology is to know God and to know God’s grand story of redemption. Do we suffer from ignorance in these two matters?
- Are there particular sections of the Bible that you find harder to understand than others? Particularly as they relate to Christ?
- Anyabwile talks about the importance of a church statement of faith. Why do we have a statement of faith? Why is it important? How familiar are you with it? Does it reflect the importance of Biblical theology?
- Was there anything else from the reading that you found helpful, challenging, or even wrong that we have not yet discussed?
- Select a major story line of the Bible (the story of the fall, the story of love, the story of sacrifice, the story of promise) and work together to trace it through all of Scripture. As you do, keep in mind the gospel elements of God-Man-Christ-Response.
- Or, have everyone turn to the Table of Contents in their Bibles and try to trace in particular the major developments of the story of Scripture book by book.
 - For instance, in Genesis, which major characters, covenants, and developments in the Biblical storyline do we encounter? Exodus? And so forth.
 - This should take at least 10 minutes. And this, of course, will lead you to focus on more historical books, and less on books like the prophets or Proverbs.



-This goes right in line with Anyabwile's question on page 37, "Could you explain to a new Christian or non-Christian how the entire Bible fits together as one Book?" And how everyone does with this exercise is an indicator of that.

Additional Scripture to Read and Discuss

- Luke 24:27, 44-45
- John 5:39-40

Prayer Time

Take time as a group to pray for the truths discussed in your meeting to take root in your heart.

- Pray for a greater understanding of the whole story of the Bible.
- Pray for a greater hunger and thirst to know Scripture and to be able to teach and share it with others.

Recommended Books for Further Reading

- Vaughn Roberts - *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible*
- Michael Lawrence - *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*



Mark 3 – A Healthy Church Member is Gospel Saturated

Questions for Further Discussion

- Discuss the question in the “For Further Reflection” section on Page 46.
- One of the things that the elders typically ask potential members in their membership interviews at CFC is to describe the gospel. Walk through a description of the gospel, letting several members of the group hash it out (use side-bar to help).
- Anyabwile states that the greatest need in the world is the gospel. Do we believe this? If we say we do, is it evident? Does such a belief reveal itself in your life?
- Reflect on the John Piper quote on Page 42 about taking the gospel to its conclusion. What does this mean?
- How often do you preach the gospel to yourself? How could doing so make you more mindful of your need for the gospel and the same need of others around you?
- How could being more gospel saturated open up our Growth Group to more honest and appropriate self disclosure and confession of sin, and thus deepen our dependence on Christ and genuine fellowship with one another?
- Was there anything else from the reading that you found helpful, challenging, or even wrong that we have not yet discussed?

The Gospel: God-Man-Christ-Response*

1. God. God is the creator of all things (**Gen. 1:1**). He is perfectly holy, worthy of all worship, and will punish sin (**1 John 1:5, Rev. 4:11, Rom. 2:5-8**).

2. Man. All people, though created good, have become sinful by nature (**Gen. 1:26-28, Ps. 51:5, Rom. 3:23**). From birth, all people are alienated from God, hostile to God, and subject to the wrath of God (**Eph. 2:1-3**).

3. Christ. Jesus Christ, who is fully God and fully man, lived a sinless life, died on the cross to bear God’s wrath in the place of all who would believe in him, and rose from the grave in order to give his people eternal life (**John 1:1, 1 Tim. 2:5, Heb. 7:26, Rom. 3:21-26, 2 Cor. 5:21, 1 Cor. 15:20-22**).

4. Response. God calls everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and trust in Christ in order to be saved (**Mark 1:15, Acts 20:21, Rom. 10:9-10**).

*<http://www.9marks.org/answers/what-gospel>



Additional Scripture to Read and Discuss

- Romans 3:21-26
- Acts 20:24
- Ephesians 2:1-10

Prayer Time

Take time as a group to pray for the truths discussed in your meeting to take root in your heart.

- Pray that the gospel would become more central in your daily thoughts.
- Pray for greater boldness and confidence to speak the gospel to the lost around you.

Recommended Books for Further Reading

- Greg Gilbert - *What is the Gospel?*



Mark 4 – A Healthy Church Member is Genuinely Converted

Questions for Further Discussion

- Instead of discussing the questions in the “For Further Reflection” section on Page 55, you may seek to break into smaller groups and discuss them more intentionally. You can save this for the end of the discussion, after you have covered the other material. But be sure to leave sufficient time in your meeting to allow for this.
- What are the dangers of nominal Christianity? What are the implications of this individually and corporately?
- What are the elements of genuine conversion?
- Do you experience grief over sins you have committed? Or ways that you sinned by omission?
- Anyabwile’s questions (and associated Scriptures) on Pages 55 are great soul-searching questions. But we must, as he goes on to say, ask and answer these questions in the fellowship of the church in order to get honest and accurate feedback. What are some ways this can be fostered in our Growth Group?
- Was there anything else from the reading that you found helpful, challenging, or even wrong that we have not yet discussed?

Additional Scripture to Read and Discuss

- Romans 8:5-11
- 2 Corinthians 13:5
- 1 John 1:5-10; 3:1-24



Prayer Time

Take time as a group to pray for the truths discussed in your meeting to take root in your heart.

- Pray against spiritual deception in our church and in our group.
- Pray for a greater sensitivity to the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of your group members.

Recommended Books for Further Reading

- Mike McKinley – *Am I Really a Christian?*



Mark 5 – A Healthy Church Member is a Biblical Evangelist

Questions for Further Discussion

- Discuss the questions in the “For Further Reflection” section on Page 62.
- What is our part in evangelism? And what is God’s part?
- What is the significance of knowing that success in evangelism does not depend on our abilities?
- What can you do as a Growth Group to become more evangelistic? Individually, yes, but also as a group.
- Would you be ashamed if you were asked when was the last time you shared the gospel with someone personally?
- How do some of the previous Marks that we have discussed impact the subject of evangelism?
- Do you have a tendency to be soft on the difficult things when sharing the gospel? Do you tend to overplay or downplay certain important elements? (See Mark Dever’s list of 6 things to keep in mind on Pages 60-61)
- Was there anything else from the reading that you found helpful, challenging, or even wrong that we have not yet discussed?

Additional Scripture to Read and Discuss

- Romans 10:13-15
- Ephesians 6:18b-20



- 1 Peter 3:15
- Colossians 4:5-6

Prayer Time

Take time as a group to pray for the truths discussed in your meeting to take root in your heart.

- Pray for God to go before you and work in the hearts of the lost around you, preparing them for the gospel.
- Pray for faithfulness and boldness to share the gospel in all of its fullness with lost co-workers, family members, neighbors, and roommates.

Recommended Books for Further Reading

- Mark Dever - *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*



Mark 6 – A Healthy Church Member is a Committed Member

Questions for Further Discussion

- Discuss the questions in the “For Further Reflection” section on Page 71.
- Of the 8 ways that committed membership expresses itself on Pages 68-70, which of these do you neglect?
- To what degree does a lack of concern for committed membership reveal a lack of understanding of salvation?
- How is it that committed love, the distinguishing mark of true believers, is best displayed in the covenant community of the church?
- Do you see regular attendance in worship as the most fundamental ministry you have to your fellow members?
- Walk through the questions on this page’s side-bar. Ask people to give honest answers to these questions.
- Was there anything else from the reading that you found helpful, challenging, or even wrong that we have not yet discussed?

Additional Scripture to Read and Discuss

- Hebrews 10:24-25
- 1 John 2:7-11
- John 13:34-35

Questions for Personal Reflection from Kevin DeYoung*

1. Have you established church going as an inviolable habit in your family?
2. Do you plan ahead on Saturday so you can make church a priority on Sunday?
3. Do you order your travel plans so as to minimize being gone from your church on Sunday?
4. Are you willing to make sacrifices to gather with God’s people for worship every Sunday?

*<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2013/12/13/the-scandal-of-the-semi-churched/>

Prayer Time

Take time as a group to pray for the truths discussed in your meeting to take root in your heart.

- Pray for a greater understanding and commitment to the biblical responsibilities of church membership.
- Consider praying through parts of our Church Covenant (which can be accessed at cfcbirmingham.org/covenant).

Recommended Books for Further Reading

- Jonathan Leeman – *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus*

Mark 7 – A Healthy Church Member Seeks Discipline

Questions for Further Discussion

- Instead of discussing the questions in the “For Further Reflection” section, you may seek to break into smaller groups and discuss the questions on Pages 77-78 more intentionally. You can save this for the end of the discussion, after you have covered the other material. But be sure to leave sufficient time in your meeting to allow for this.
- Standing against the overly negative connotation that church discipline often calls to mind, what is the true character of church discipline? How does a healthy view of discipline encourage you to seek discipline?
- What are the two types of discipline that Anyabwile covers on Pages 75-76? How are they both necessary?
- How foundational is love to the act of discipline in the church? God’s love and our love?
- In every act of discipline, what must be the ultimate aim? (positive cases: growth in Christlikeness; negative cases: restoration to the church)
- What must be cultivated in our Growth Group to help create an environment where loving discipline is humbly sought and humbly administered by all?
- Was there anything else from the reading that you found helpful, challenging, or even wrong that we have not yet discussed?

Additional Scripture to Read and Discuss

- Philippians 2:3-11
- James 1:21 (with help from Page 77)
- Hebrews 12:3-11
- 1 Corinthians 5:1-13
- Matthew 18:15-20

Prayer Time

Take time as a group to pray for the truths discussed in your meeting to take root in your heart.

- Pray for a spirit of humility and a spirit of gentleness to mark our church as we seek to confront and receive correction from one another in accordance with a New Testament understanding of church discipline and restoration.
- Pray for genuine love to mark our congregation as we seek to help one another fight sin and follow Jesus.

Recommended Books for Further Reading

- Jonathan Leeman - *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus*

Mark 8 - A Healthy Church Member is a Growing Disciple

Questions for Further Discussion

- Discuss the questions in the "For Further Reflection" section on Page 93.
- One of the words we often use in church regarding Christian growth is sanctification. What exactly do we mean by that word? Is the process of sanctification easy? Is it ever finished? What role do we play and what role does God by His Holy Spirit play in our sanctification? (Use Philippians 2:12-13 to help)
- Anyabwile mentions on Pages 85-87 three of the ways that we fool ourselves into thinking that we are more spiritually mature than we are. Which ones have you found to be true of you?
- How foundational must the gospel remain in the process of Christian growth?
- Among the suggestions for true ways to cultivate growth (Pages 89-92), he mentions "abiding in Christ" as one of the primary ways. What does it mean to abide in Christ?
- How does looking to the return of Christ spur us along in growth in Christlikeness? Do we consider this enough?
- Several theologians over the years have reasoned that if we never grow in our hunger for holiness on this earth, we will not be ready for the life of complete holiness in eternity. Therefore, we must grow in godliness on this side of eternity to better whet our appetites for the next side. Have you ever considered this? Do you agree with this statement?
- Was there anything else from the reading that you found helpful, challenging, or even wrong that we have not yet discussed?

Additional Scripture to Read and Discuss

- John 15:4-9
- Colossians 3:1-17
- Hebrews 12:1-3

Prayer Time

Take time as a group to pray for the truths discussed in your meeting to take root in your heart.

- Pray that we as individual would continually abide in Christ.
- Pray that we would be faithful to make use of the means of grace (Word, prayer, worship, etc.) as we strive to grow in our knowledge of and likeness to Christ.

Recommended Books for Further Reading

- Donald Whitney - *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*

Mark 9 - A Healthy Church Member is a Humble Follower

Questions for Further Discussion

- Discuss the questions in the "For Further Reflection" section on Pages 103-104 (these are very helpful this time, and may very well be all you need for discussion)
- Do you take seriously your responsibility in electing/affirming elders? If not, consider the responsibility placed on elders in James 3:1 and 1 Peter 5:1-4, as well as the church members' responsibility of submitting to them in Hebrews 13:17.
- John Calvin once stated that, "We ought not to follow any man except in so far as he leads us to Christ." This should be true of our elders. How can we help our elders in doing that for us?
- Have you ever considered the importance of encouraging the elders of CFC? What are some tangible ways that this can be done?
- Do you take time as a Growth Group to pray for our elders? Do you do so individually? Please take the time to do so tonight, keeping in mind 1 Timothy 3:1-7 as you do.
- Was there anything else from the reading that you found helpful, challenging, or even wrong that we have not yet discussed?

Additional Scripture to Read and Discuss

- Hebrews 13:7; 17
- James 3:1
- 1 Peter 5:1-5
- Acts 6:4

Prayer Time

Take time as a group to pray for the truths discussed in your meeting to take root in your heart.

- Pray for our elders. And use 1 Timothy 3 or 1 Peter 5 to shape your prayers for them.
- Pray for a spirit of humility to mark both our elders and all of our church members.

Recommended Books for Further Reading

- Mark Dever - *A Display of God's Glory: Basics of Church Structure - Deacons, Elders, Congregationalism, & Membership*

Mark 10 – A Healthy Church Member is a Prayer Warrior

Questions for Further Discussion

- Discuss the questions in the “For Further Reflection” section on Page 114.

- We would all agree that prayer is a vital activity for the Christian. But many of us would also confess frustration with our faithfulness in prayer. Why is this a common experience?

- How can praying Scripture help us to be more faithful in prayer? (read the 12 reasons from the side bar for help in answering this question)

- What things ought we to be praying for that we are neglecting, both in our Growth Group and individually? (See Anyabwile’s list on Pages 111-113)

- Do you ever pray for fellow church members that are not in your Growth Group or close friend circles at CFC? Consider the benefits of praying through a page of the church directory in your Growth Group meetings as well as your personal times of prayer.

- When we consider the great promises of Jesus regarding prayer in the Bible, how is it that we so often devote such little time and intensity to it? (See Matthew 7:7-11)

- Was there anything else from the reading that you found helpful, challenging, or even wrong that we have not yet discussed?

12 Reasons to Pray Scripture by Andy Naselli*

1. You should pray Scripture because God’s people in the OT and NT did.
2. You should pray Scripture because Jesus did.
3. You should pray Scripture because it glorifies God the Father.
4. You should pray Scripture because it helps you focus on what is most important.
5. You should pray Scripture because it helps you focus on praying.
6. You should pray Scripture because it is entirely truthful.
7. You should pray Scripture because it helps you pray confidently.
8. You should pray Scripture because it kindles your affections.
9. You should pray Scripture because it helps you express yourself appropriately.
10. You should pray Scripture because it keeps your prayers fresh and specific.
11. You should pray Scripture because it keeps your prayers in scriptural proportion.
12. You should pray Scripture because it helps you understand Scripture better.

*<http://thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/12-reasons-you-should-pray-scripture>

Additional Scripture to Read and Discuss

- Matthew 6:5-15
- Luke 18:1-8
- 1 Timothy 2:1-2
- Matthew 7:7-11

Prayer Time

Take time as a group to pray for the truths discussed in your meeting to take root in your heart.

- Pray according to Anyabwile's suggestions on Pages 111-113. Pray for laborers and shepherds. Pray for all the saints. Pray for those in authority. Pray for the persecuted and those who persecute them.
- Pray the Lord's Prayer together.

Recommended Books for Further Reading

- Tim Keller - *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*