

Positive lists are helpful; negative lists can be discouraging. For example, as it relates to negative lists, let's say you come across a list of "Seven Signs That You Worry Too Much" and diagnose yourself as displaying 6 of the 7 signs on the list. Now what? Now you're worried that you worry too much!! Negative lists are good about highlighting what's wrong; positive lists are about steering us to what is good and healthy and encouraging.

By now you've deduced out that I'm going to share with you a list. This is a positive list — a list that points in the direction of a spiritually vital and healthy church. Thom Rainer, former CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, published this particular list and I want you to appraise how well our church "fits" the list. Thom titled his list "Seven Traits Of Healthy Churches". Are we healthy?

They truly believe in the power of the gospel. Sure, most church members and leaders would affirm their own belief in the power of the gospel. But few would actually act on that belief. Few actually move into areas and directions that can only be accomplished in God's power. For most churches, it's lip service. But not so for these healthy churches.

They have courageous leaders. I call them 'Joshua leaders.' They are ready to lead the people into the community and storm the gates of hell. They remind the members to be courageous, even as they are courageous. One pastor put it this way: "I don't want to live a life without making a difference in God's power. I will accept the challenges, the risks, and the criticisms to be able to make a difference."

They embrace change. Most church members, and some church leaders, fiercely resist change. They idolize the past, the way we've always done it. Or they fear the future and God's provisions for the future. But the healthy churches on my watch list embrace change as long as it does not go counter to biblical truth. These churches don't spend their energies and resources trying to convince people to move forward. They are ready to go!

They are not nostalgic. Sure, these church members honor and respect the past. But they don't live there. They are constantly anticipating what God will do in the present and the future. They don't have time to be nostalgic, because they are too busy moving forward.

They see reality. They don't just see reality; they make highly intentional efforts to see reality more clearly. They often have secret guests evaluate their churches. They use tools to help them improve. They don't fear finding something negative with their churches, because those findings become areas for improvement.

They intentionally intersect their lives with non-Christians. They see their weekday vocation as a mission field. They see their neighborhoods as their Jerusalem in Acts 1:8. They intentionally work and do business with non-Christians. They are highly intentional about inviting people to church.

They accept responsibility. Too many church members and leaders blame the changes in culture. Healthy churches see those changes as opportunities. Too many church members and leaders blame their denominations for not providing for them. Healthy churches accept their own responsibility for impacting the community. Too many church members and leaders blame other churches for taking their members and guests. Healthy churches realize the fields are truly white unto harvest. They believe other churches are partners in mission, not competitors.

Grace & peace, love you so very much. PK

