

# TUESDAY



Good Morning Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today we start the second part of the book, Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive, by Thom S. Rainer. The second part is titled "Is There Hope for a Dying Church? 12 Responses." We continue on with Chapter 12 which is titled, "My Church Has Symptoms of Sickness: Four Responses." Today I am offering you the complete chapter from the book.

In Rainer's words:

"Though this book is brief, the path to get to this point must seem arduous. A lot of negative information has been communicated up to this point. I really don't know how I could have done otherwise. This book is an autopsy. I am trying to discern why churches died. It's hard to be bright and cheerful when you are talking about decay, dying, and death.

These final three chapters might not seem as dismal. I do offer some degree of hope and solutions for churches that are still alive.

But please hear me clearly.

These are no magical, easy-fix solutions. The twelve responses I offer over three chapters are not a recipe to create or repair the perfect church. To the contrary, they are more of a cry to God to intervene, and to create a willingness on the part of the church members to be obedient.

It's serious stuff. It's sobering.

## **The Path**

As we go through these final chapters, I will address three types of churches: churches that have symptoms of sickness; very sick churches; and dying churches. And, if we were to estimate the number of churches in each category, I would offer the following:

- Healthy: 10%
- Symptoms of sickness: 40%
- Very sick: 40%
- Dying: 10%
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Though the numbers are not precise, I do believe they reflect the actual condition of churches across America. In this chapter, we will look at the first group of churches that make up roughly 40% of the American church population. These are churches in early but clear stages of sickness.

## **What Are the Symptoms of Sickness?**

There are probably over 150,000 churches that fit this category. Though the process is imprecise, one of the signs that sickness might be taking hold includes a pervasive attitude in the church that the best days are in the past. If you were to ask longer-term members about the best days of the church, very few would recognize the present in that light.

While numbers are not everything, they can be telling from a symptomatic perspective. Churches with symptoms of sickness are likely to have declined some in worship attendance over the past five years. If they have grown, the rate of growth was slower than the growth rate of the community in which they are located. Many leaders stop looking at numbers when they began to decline. And when numbers are ignored, they tend to get even worse.

The ministries and programs for these churches tend to be shifting more and more for members of the congregation rather than those on the outside. In simple terms, the church is moving from an outward focus to an inward focus.

While some new members may be added each year, there is no sense of true disciple-making taking place. In fact, most of these churches do not have any clear plan for making disciples.

Finally, though by no means exhaustively, the church has a lot of program and ministry clutter. There is much busyness and activity, but a great deal of it has no meaningful purpose. Most of these activities contribute little or nothing to the making of disciples. The primary reason those programs and ministries are continued is simply because 'that's the way we've always done it.'

## **Four Responses**

In each of the final chapters, I will offer four of the twelve responses for each of the categories of the church. At the risk of redundancy, please hear that these are not quick-fix solutions. They are major categorical responses that must be adapted for each church.

1. *Pray that God will open the eyes of the leadership and members for opportunities to reach into the community where the church is located.* Jesus told His followers in Jerusalem just before His ascension that they were to be witnesses: 'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8). The first mandate is to impact your local community. Most churches with symptoms of sickness have become inwardly focused.
2. *Take an honest audit of how church members spend their time being involved.* In most of these churches, the members are involved in ministries for themselves, often to the exclusion of ministries beyond the church. The church loses outward momentum when the members start forming holy huddles.
3. *Take an audit of how the church spends its money.* Again, as churches become ill, they are more likely to use funds for their own members rather than reaching their community. Balance is the key, and most of these churches are out of balance.
4. *Make specific plans to minister and to evangelize your community.* You have prayed about it. You have honestly evaluated your time in programs and ministry, and how the church spends its funds. Now is the time to develop specific and concrete plans to impact the community. One church leader I know went to the principal of a nearby public elementary school. He asked the principal what the school needed most. That next summer, over 100 members of the church were painting walls in the school. The community ministries grew from that one commitment.

## **Prayerful Commitment 12**

*Lord, let me see my church with honesty and open eyes. Help me to grasp where we have gotten out of balance with inward and outward ministries. And give our church a vision to make a difference in our community. Even more, God, use me to be a catalyst and instrument for the changes that must take place in our church.*

### **Questions for Prayerful Thought**

1. In this chapter you read about churches that were beginning to show signs of sickness. What are some of those signs? What are other possible signs? Does your church have any signs of sickness?
2. Summarize the four responses for churches that are showing signs of sickness. What other responses could be added to the four?
3. What is the context of Acts 1:8? How can it be applicable and relevant to churches today with early signs of sickness?"

As we look at this book together, it has been challenging and interesting. There have been questions like "Is this us?" and "Where do we fall in all of this stuff?," "Do we fall in any of these categories?" As a transitional minister who has been at a church that was preparing to sell their property, CPC is not a dying church. The key here is to pay attention to the warning signs and most importantly to the words of Jesus as He commissioned His believers from Matthew 28: <sup>19</sup> *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* <sup>20</sup> *and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

May we always seek to follow Him and submit to His will for His bride...the church.

Seeking God with you,  
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*Isaiah 55:8-9*

