

Creating healthy Christian Community



We are now living in times where we are seeing more and more families breaking up. We are now also living in a world which is becoming less and less personal, as the pursuit of material things becomes a greater focus and where many people are now more comfortable relating to their phone devices than to people. Social media has also reduced our time spent with family.

We are now also living in times which are becoming more challenging and uncertain. People are now looking for answers to life's problems as well as seeking genuine fellowship with other people. It is within the context of a healthy local church that people can see both of these needs being met.

It is within a loving Christian community that people can both meet Christ (who is the answer to life's problems) and be encouraged to grow in their faith through having fellowship with other caring and supportive believers. A loving local church fellowship has the potential to help bring transformation to their community as they provide opportunities for people to become connected in fellowship with other believers in a church family. PEOPLE NEED PEOPLE IN THEIR LIVES.

For this reason as leaders of churches and ministries, a key focus of what we do should be to help see healthy Christian Community being cultivated and encouraged in all of our church meetings and small group fellowships. When we look at the early church, which grew rapidly, we see that they had a great emphasis on developing healthy Christian community.

In the book of Acts we read, "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need." (Acts 4:32-35)

The primary goal in all of our church meetings should be to help people to encounter Christ and to come to maturity in their faith as we help equip and encourage all believers to grow in their love for God and for others.

Jesus Himself emphasised the importance of LOVE when He said,

"And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment."

"And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:30-31)

The Apostle Paul also emphasised the importance of love when he wrote,

“Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.” **(Romans 13:8)** “Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.” **(1 Corinthians 14:1)**

The Apostle Peter also emphasised the importance of love when he wrote,

“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit^[a] in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,²³ having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,” **(1 Peter 1:22-23)**

The existence of genuine agape love in our fellowship meetings is a great key to having healthy Christian community in our churches.

This is why the writer of the book of Hebrews wrote, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,” **(Hebrews 10:24)**

A GREAT KEY TO OUR CHURCHES MAKING A GREAT DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITIES IS IN DEVELOPING HEALTHY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY WHERE THOSE WHO ATTEND FEEL LOVE AND ACCEPTED AND PART OF A CHURCH FAMILY

It is when all churches develop a focus of creating healthy loving Christian community in which all people have a genuine love for one another, that we will see our churches helping to see our communities being transformed by the love of Christ and the message of the gospel

Jesus Himself said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” **(John 13:34-35)**

Heidi Baker gave a prophecy over Australia of a coming revival and what would be a key feature of this revival. A key part of this prophecy was that churches would become loving communities and families. I believe that this prophetic word is also relevant for all churches in every nation today. People need to feel loved and embraced when they come to our churches. With times getting more and more challenging for Christians to live in, more than ever before our churches need to become loving Christian communities and families.

The Apostle Paul wrote about the times that we are now living in. He wrote,

“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!” **(2 Timothy 3:1-5)**

As loving Christian communities we can make a great difference in our world by helping people to experience healing and wholeness in their lives as they are encouraged to come to Christ within the context of a loving church family

For this reason we must never allow our churches to just become traditional or religious places of worship, but that we always aim to see healthy Christian community being developed in our church fellowship meetings. A church full of God's tangible presence and made up of Christians, who have a genuine love for one another, will make a great difference in any community.

We need as leaders to therefore encourage those in our churches to have an attitude of caring and sharing where we all begin to look out not so much at how we can always have our own needs met, but how we can be used of God to help OTHERS to have their spiritual and practical needs met.

This was clearly evident in the early church which was characterized by love and unity and genuine community.

In the book of Acts we read, "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:44-47)

In this study we will be looking firstly at some reasons why creating healthy community is so important and crucial in helping to see all Christians realise their full potential in Christ, before looking secondly at how, as leaders, we can help to cultivate healthy Christian Community in all of our church meetings.

As Christians we are not meant to do life alone. It is as all believers work together in unity with each flowing in their own unique gifts and callings, that the church makes a great impact in our world for eternity. (Ephesians 4:16)

We will now firstly look at some of the reasons why creating healthy Christian Community in our churches is so important: Some of these reasons include;

1) That people who come to our church have a sense of being loved and accepted and being part of a church family.

For some people the only family that they have is their church family. Loving Christian community helps people to have a sense of belonging. We were never meant to do life alone. When we look at the Trinity we see that God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ) and the Holy Spirit have existed and fellowshiped together in perfect unity for all eternity.

As people made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) we also were designed to have fellowship both with God and with others.

God's heart is that all people would be connected in fellowship both with Him and with other loving believers. The bible clearly emphasise the importance of having Christian fellowship.

The Apostle John wrote, "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." **(1 John 1:7)**

In the book of Hebrews we read, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." **(Hebrews 10:23-25)**

The early church had a great emphasis on all Christian's fellowshiping together with other believers. In the book of Acts we read, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." **(Acts 2:42)**

JESUS HIMSELF ENCOURAGED BELIEVERS TO MEET TOGETHER WHEN HE SAID, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." **(Matthew 18:20)**

2) Being part of a healthy Christian Community helps us to do things together with others. There is greater joy and purpose in life when we do things as part of a team and do life together with others.

As a team and church family we can share life's experiences and successes together and achieve much more working together with others than what we would accomplish by ourselves. There is a synergy that comes from working together with others. One will put a thousand to flight but two will put ten thousand to flight. (Deuteronomy 32:30) Even mundane tasks are more enjoyable when we do things together with others as part of a team. We were not designed to do life by ourselves but to live together in community with others. In the book of Genesis we read,

"And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." **(Genesis 2:18)**

In the book of Ecclesiastes we read, "Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labour." **(Ecclesiastes 4:9)**

3) We learn how to love people in a greater way as we learn to love and embrace other people that are different to ourselves.

Being in a loving and healthy church family helps us to also grow in our love for others as we see other mature Christians modelling what it is to love others unconditionally with the love of Christ.

It is within the context of a loving Christian community that people are able to develop healthy relationships with others as they are nurtured and encouraged in their own walk with the Lord.

It is within the context of a loving Christian community where we can learn to love and accept people of different backgrounds and cultures as we do life together with them in a loving Christian environment.

When there is a strong presence of God's love in our meetings and loving fellowship between all believers, we create an environment in which Christians can grow in maturity in their walk with the Lord and in their love for others.

The Apostle Peter wrote, "But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love." (2 Peter 1:5-7)

4) We have a support network and church family that provides encouragement and support for us during the valley seasons of our life

When we are connected to a loving Church community we can receive encouragement and support from others within our fellowship. At times this can also include receiving practical expressions of love from others as God places on the hearts of others in our church to help us in time of need. Having the support of others is a great key to helping us through the challenging seasons of our life. Being part of a loving church community helps us to receive the support of others during our trials as we do life together with other caring believers

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing." (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

The Apostle Paul also wrote, "...that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me." (Romans 1:12)

We all need the support of other believers in our walk with the Lord.

5) We create an environment where all believers can be encouraged and equipped to grow in their faith and to develop in the fruit of the Spirit

It is within the context of a loving church fellowship that believers can be encouraged to grow in their faith and be equipped to flow in God's plan for their lives.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself IN LOVE." **(Ephesians 4:16)**

Having the support of other Christians is a great key to remaining strong in our walk with the Lord. In the book of Hebrews we read, "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end," **(Hebrews 3:12-14)**

6) We provide a place of belonging for the lonely and marginalised so that they can enjoy the benefits and support that come from being part of a church family

King David wrote about God's heart to see people connected in fellowship with others in Psalm 68. King David wrote, "God sets the solitary in families; ..." **(Psalm 68:6)**

Being part of a healthy Christian Community and family is a great key to helping people to become both spiritually and emotionally healthy. Having healthy relationships with others is vitally important for all people and is a big key to people enjoying the life and life more abundantly that Jesus spoke of in John 10:10. Having healthy relationships with others helps to enrich our lives and to give us greater stability and meaning in life. People are more prone to becoming depressed if they become isolated and disconnected from fellowship with others. Having fellowship with other believers is crucial for all Christians.

Being part of a loving church family enables people to receive encouragement and support from others which is a great key to helping them to become emotionally healthy and stable.

The Apostle John wrote, "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers." **(3 John 2)**

7) It is a great key to cultivating unity in our church fellowships so that our churches truly become a shining light in our communities and a beacon of hope where people can find Christ. (Matthew 5:14-16)

When we have unity in our fellowships:

- i. God commands a blessing upon our churches and on our own lives
- ii. We experience God's tangible presence in our meetings in a greater way
- iii. People in the world can see by our love for one another that we are Christ's disciples
- iv. We see teamwork cultivated in our church fellowships, and
- v. Those in our church life are able to develop loving and healthy relationships with other believers

King David wrote, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. It is like the precious oil upon the head, Running down on the beard, The beard of Aaron, Running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, Descending upon the mountains of Zion; For there the LORD commanded the blessing –Life forevermore." **(Psalm 133:1-3)**

Jesus Himself also said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." **(John 13:34-35)**

Jesus in His prayer to His Father in heaven as He prepared to return to heaven prayed for unity amongst all believers. Jesus prayed,

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that you sent Me."

"And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me." **(John 17:20-23) AND**

8) It is a great key to seeing believers being encouraged to use their spiritual gifts and to realize their full potential in Christ. People thrive in an atmosphere of genuine love and acceptance

Being part of a loving church family provides an environment in which people are encouraged to flow in their own unique gifts and calling so that they become a blessing for the body of Christ. Every believer has a unique ministry calling to help bless the wider Body of Christ and to build the Kingdom of God. The Apostle Paul wrote, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." **(Ephesians 2:10)**

Christians are most fulfilled when they are flowing in their own unique gifts and calling. It is in the context of a loving and caring church fellowship that believers can be helped to identify their gifts and calling and be encouraged to flow in them to help see God's Kingdom expanded here on earth

In the Parable of the Talents Jesus shared about the privileges and the joy that comes from fully utilising our spiritual gifts and talents.

“So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, ‘Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.’ His Lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.’ He also who had received two talents came and said, ‘Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.’ His Lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.’” **(Matthew 25:20-23)**

HEALTHY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IS CHARACTERIZED BY THE FOLLOWING TRAITS:

- i) There is a hunger for the things of God in those attending our fellowship. When Christ is truly the focus of our church meetings we will invariably see God's love operating in the lives of those in our fellowship
- ii) There is an atmosphere of love and acceptance in all of our meetings
- iii) There is an atmosphere of faith and a tangible presence of God which enables unbelievers to easily come to Christ during our meetings
- iv) People have a genuine care for others and are willing to help practically
- v) Discipleship and small groups are key features of the life of the church
- vi) All people within the Church community are encouraged to use their spiritual gifts and to flow in God's plan for their lives
- vii) There is a shared God given vision and objective for the fellowship
- viii) The culture of the community is one of generously giving to the work of the Lord and to those in need and serving others
- ix) There is unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3) in the community as people work together to see the vision of the Church Fellowship coming to pass, and
- x) That the Church also has a focus beyond the four walls and has a heart to reach out into the local community and beyond with the love of Christ

I will now conclude this study with some keys as to how we as leaders can we help to create a healthy loving community in our church fellowships.

1) We need to model in our own lives as leaders what it is to relate to others in a loving and caring way

As leaders the way that we live our lives has the greatest influence on those that we lead and shepherd. For this reason we have greater accountability as leaders.

In the book of James we read,

“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.” **(James 3:1)**

The Apostle Paul emphasised to the young pastor Timothy the importance of modelling Christian living when he wrote,

“Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” **(1 Timothy 4:12)**

The Apostle Peter also emphasised the importance of the elders in a church modelling Christian living when he wrote,

“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” **(1 Peter 5:2-4)**

2) That what we teach in our churches and small groups has a primary focus of helping people to grow in their love for God and for others.

A church full of loving mature Christians will be a healthy fellowship. For this reason it is important that a key focus in all that we do in our church meetings should be on helping those in our fellowships to grow in their love for God and for others.

The Apostle Paul emphasised this when he wrote,

“Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk,” **(1 Timothy 1:5-6)**

“But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless.” **(Titus 3:9)**

3) The importance of ENCOURAGEMENT and APPRECIATING what people do in serving others and ministering to those in our church.

As leaders we need to openly appreciate what others do.

As most of what takes place in our church fellowships is done by volunteers who sacrificially give of themselves, it is crucial that as pastors and leaders that we openly appreciate what others have done for the life of the church.

When people feel appreciated for what they do, it will help to create a positive environment and a healthy and loving Christian community.

Encouragement is also a great key to helping others to realise their full potential in life and in creating a good atmosphere in our church meetings. Encouragement helps to give strength to others and to empower people to fulfil God's plan for their life.

In an atmosphere of encouragement and appreciation people will embrace opportunities to serve within the church so that the church can make a great difference in the community as all believers are motivated to serve others with their spiritual gifts.

People thrive in an atmosphere of love and encouragement.

In the book of Proverbs we read, "A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!" **(Proverbs 15:23)**

4) We need to invest quality time in mentoring and training up our key leaders.

It is important to do life together with our key leaders to help them to grow in spiritual maturity and in their love for others. What is in the heart of our key leaders will greatly influence the culture of our church fellowships

It is important that we sow our lives into the key leaders in our church so that we develop a strong and healthy leadership team. The Apostle Paul invested his life in the lives of others.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us." **(1 Thessalonians 2:7-8)**

The Apostle Paul also emphasised the need for more fathers of the faith, people who are prepared to not only teach others but to also invest their lives in helping other Christians to come to maturity in their walk with the Lord. The Apostle Paul wrote,

“For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me.” **(1 Corinthians 4:15-16)**

It is in continually training up and mentoring other believers and leaders in the life of our church, that our lives will leave a lasting legacy in this world and help to see our churches becoming healthy Christian fellowships.

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” **(2 Timothy 2:2)**

5) That as leaders we look at promoting and incorporating in the life and DNA of our church meetings the following values and characteristics:

- i) *That we always seek to cultivate an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance in all of our meetings.* All people and in particular newcomers need to feel welcome and accepted when they come to our church and small group meetings. We only have one chance at a good first impression for those who attend our church meetings for the first time
- ii) Where all those attending our church meetings are greeted and made to feel welcome when they arrive at church (Having ushers at the front door is a great way of welcoming people to our church meetings)
- iii) Where all people are encouraged to look out for and to welcome newcomers that attend our church meetings
- iv) Where we encourage all those in our church to look out for opportunities to engage with people who are standing by themselves in the fellowship time after our meetings. This is a great key to preventing clichés from developing in our churches

- v) That we encourage people to have a time of fellowship after our church meetings with other people around a tea or coffee so that they can develop friendships with others in our church community. Having fellowship around some food and drinks is always a great way of creating an opportunity for people to mingle with others and to develop friendships, and
- vi) That people have the opportunity of participating in church family events where they can get to know others in the fellowship. At Church of Hope we have every two months a Christian film and pizza night where people can get to know others in a more relaxed manner. We also have a less formal weekly Cafe Church where people can grow spiritually whilst having food fellowship with other believers at the same time.

It is good as leaders and pastors to regularly seek God for His strategies as to how we can create a more loving and healthy Christian community in our churches. As the church is the people, it is crucial that we do all that we can to help make all those who attend our churches feel loved and accepted when they attend our church meetings

6) We need to look at creating opportunities for Christians to use their spiritual gifts in our church meetings and church outreaches

Every believer has something to contribute to the life of a church fellowship. We all need one another in the Body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:12-28) As believers we are most fulfilled when we maintain our first love for the Lord and are able to use our spiritual gifts. For this reason as church leaders we need to be looking at creating opportunities for all believers to be able to flow in their gifts and calling. People have significance and purpose when they flow in their spiritual gifts and calling. The Apostle Paul encouraged all believers to use their spiritual gifts. The Apostle Paul wrote,

“For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: If prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. **(Romans 12:4-8)**

It is when all Christians work together in love and unity, with each believer flowing in their own unique gifts and calling, that the church makes a difference in our world. The Apostle Paul wrote, “from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself IN LOVE.” (Ephesians 4:16)

Every believer has the potential to make a great difference in the world for eternity and to be a great blessing in the lives other believers.

People flourish when they are given the opportunity to flow in their gifts and calling. A church that is full of believers, who are committed to living for the Lord and to making a great difference in our world for eternity, will be a healthy church and a great blessing to the community.

As Senior Pastors we need to encourage all believers to find and follow God’s plan for their lives. There are many ways in which believers can be used in the community to minister the love of Christ to others.

An increasing trend now in Australia has been the request for chaplains in many different areas of society. Schools, Hospitals and Prisons are all now looking for Chaplains to minister into the lives of people in their care. Often now Chaplains are far more accepted than pastors or priests.

With many open doors now for ministry we need as pastors to be actively encouraging all those in our church to wholeheartedly embrace God’s plan for their lives so that they can help to create healthy Christian community both in our church meetings and within our local community.

A church full of active loving Christians will be a healthy church and a community changing church.

7) As leaders of our church fellowships we need to continually allow the Lord to change us so that we continually grow in the fruit of the Spirit over time.

It is important as leaders that we are continually willing to grow ourselves in Christlike character so that we can better demonstrate and model what it is to live a God glorifying life.

We have never arrived in our walk with the Lord. We need to continually yield to the work of the Holy Spirit in our own life so that we can become more Christ-like over time as we grow in the fruit of the Spirit.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” **(Galatians 5:22-23)**

It is important that we continually allow the Lord to do a work of change in our life so that we can be cleansed of old habits

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” **(2 Corinthians 7:1)**

We have always room to grow in our walk with the Lord. We must continually remain humble and teachable as leaders.

In the book of Proverbs we read, “Listen to counsel and receive instruction, That you may be wise in your latter days.” **(Proverbs 19:20)**

8) We need to quickly deal with any divisive behaviour in our church fellowship meetings in a loving and sensitive manner before it begins to negatively impact the culture of our church

We need to continually look at maintaining a right culture of genuine love in all of our church fellowship meetings – If we do not continually focus on maintaining this important aspect of church fellowship, we can so easily see people negatively influencing our church culture through gossip, or speaking negatively about other people or other churches. We must be quick to deal with any negative attitudes before they cause harm to our church.

Jesus emphasised the consequences of disunity when He said,

“Every Kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.” **(Matthew 12:25)**

For the sake of the entire church fellowship, it is crucial that Church leaders deal quickly with any divisive attitudes that have the potential to cause strife and harm to their churches.

The Apostle Paul made this clear when he wrote,

“Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.” **(Titus 3:10-11)**

Maintaining unity within a church is crucial to having healthy Christian Community. The enemy will continually try and sow strife within our meetings to undermine the stability of our churches. If possible the enemy would love to destroy our homes and church fellowships. For this reason we must deal quickly with any divisive behaviour by others in our churches.

9) As leaders and pastors we need to be also personally praying for those in our church fellowships and for our church meetings. We can never pray too much. Our prayers have the power to help see the lives of others being transformed. The Apostle Paul prayed much for the Body of Christ. Prayerless people are powerless. Every believer is in a continual spiritual battle. The enemy will continually try and sow strife in our homes and churches through targeting the minds of the people in our churches. We must continually pray for all Christians in our church that they would become disciplined in their thought life and strengthened in their faith. The Apostle Paul wrote, “pray without ceasing.” **(1 Thessalonians 5:17)**

10) We need to encourage all those in our church fellowships to grow into maturity in their walk with the Lord by creating opportunities for them develop in their faith and by encouraging them to develop a private devotional life

This is a key to having unity in our churches. A church full of mature disciples will be a healthy and loving fellowship

A church full of disciples and not just converts will be a healthy church. This is why Jesus gave His commission to the church to make disciples of all the nations.

Jesus Himself said,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

“teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen” **(Matthew 28:19-20)**

11) The importance of cultivating worship and prayer in all of our meetings.

Worship helps us to gain God’s heart of love and compassion for other people. Praying together with other believers is a great key to maintaining unity in our fellowships. There is a saying that those who pray together stay together.

Jesus Himself shared about the importance of true worship when He said, “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” **(John 4:23-24)**

We see the importance and power of prayer in the early church. In the book of Acts we see how the disciples put a great emphasis on prayer,

“So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said, “Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them.” **(Acts 4:24)**

“Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, ‘by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the Name of Your Holy Servant Jesus.”

“And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” **(Acts 4:29-31)**

Worship helps to usher God’s tangible presence into all of our meetings. In His presence is fullness of joy. Creating a culture of true worship in our church meetings is a great key to helping to see healthy Christian community being established in our church meetings

King David wrote, “But You are holy, Enthroned in the praises of Israel.” **(Psalm 22:3)**

God inhabits the praises of His people. A church full of believers who have a heart for true worship will invariably be a healthy church

12) Encouraging all believers to become part of a healthy small group.

The larger a church grows the more important it is for those in our church to be being connected to a healthy loving small group. Small groups were a key feature of the early church which grew rapidly

It is within the context of small groups that people have a sense of connectedness and belonging and where believers can have their pastoral needs met. Without this small group interaction a person can easily feel disconnected within a church as it grows in size.

In fact the larger a church becomes the more crucial it is for its members to be connected to the life of a healthy bible based small group so that they can continue to grow in their walk with the Lord. It is within the context of a loving small group that believers can be encouraged to work through issues in their life so that they can become healed and whole.

13) The importance of having a good follow up system in place.

It is important as a church that we follow up and encourage those who have drifted out of fellowship. Part of having a healthy Christian community is that we have a genuine concern for those who are connected to the life of our church.

It is important that we actively follow up those who are out of fellowship and struggling and let them know that we are thinking about them and that they are greatly valued by those in our church. Sending text messages is a great way of connecting with people to let them know that we are thinking about them.

Having a membership data base and a follow-team is important particularly as the church begins to grow in size. Having a good follow up system in place helps to make people feel loved and accepted when we communicate with them after they have been out of fellowship for a while.

Jesus Himself emphasised the importance of looking out for those who have gone astray in life and who have fallen out of fellowship.

In the Parable of the Lost Sheep Jesus said,

“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing.

And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which is lost!’ I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance. **(Luke 15:4-7)**

14) That the pastoral needs of those in the church are met.

It is important that those who attend our church fellowship meetings have the opportunity to work through the issues in their lives such as suffering from rejection. Having support groups and pastoral care counselling helps people to work through the issues in their life so that they can begin to live in a victorious and overcoming way.

Small groups are a great vehicle for helping Christians to have their pastoral needs met. There is a saying that hurt people hurt people.

If people are not given the opportunity to work through the issues in their life they will invariably be more prone to reacting out of rejection and bring strife and division into our fellowship meetings.

For this reason it is so crucial that all Christians are given the pastoral support to help them to work through issues in their life so that they can be free to love others unconditionally and be able to embrace the fullness of life that God has planned for every believer's life.

When pastoral care is readily available in our church, all believers have the opportunity to work through issues and to learn to walk in victory as a believer as they learn to walk in the Spirit and in love towards others.

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!”

“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.”

(Galatians 5:14-15)

15) That we encourage all those in our church to build their lives on the Word of God.

If those in our church are encouraged to meditate on the Word of God we will see growth in their spiritual maturity and love for others.

It is crucial for all believers that they build their lives on the Word of God. As pastors we need to actively encourage all believers to renew their minds with the Word of God and to build their lives on the wisdom and promises contained in God's Word

In the book of Joshua we read,

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” **(Joshua 1:8)**

As pastors and leaders we need to actively preach the Word of God to those in our congregations to both help bring transformation to their lives and to give them a greater hunger for God's Word

Jesus Himself said,

“If you abide in My word you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” **(John 8:31-32)**

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” **(2 Timothy 3:16-17)**

If we can encourage those in our fellowships to build their lives on the Word of God we will invariably have a church of mature believers who will help to create a loving and healthy Christian Community in our church fellowships

16) The value of having new believers classes

It is so important that all new believers have a good start to their Christian walk. New believer's classes enable Christians to immediately build their faith on a firm foundation so that they are less likely to fall away when persecution arises for the word's sake. (Mark 4:16-17)

It is always harder to win someone back to Christ when they have been offended and drifted back into the world.

It is so important that right from the outset every new believer has a clear understanding of the basis of their salvation and right standing with God. (2 Corinthians 5:21) (Philippians 3:9)

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” **(Ephesians 2:8-9)**

It is also important that all new believers right from the outset are encouraged to adopt the spiritual disciplines of prayer and meditating on the Word of God in their own lives and to have fellowship with other believers. As a pastor it is good to initially take all new believers through a new believers study.

As the church continues to grow it is then good for the senior pastor to also train up other leaders to run new believers classes as more and more people come to faith.

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” **(2 Timothy 2:2)**

NEW BELIEVERS CLASSES HELP ALL NEW CHRISTIANS TO HAVE A SOLID START TO THEIR WALK WITH THE LORD AND TO BECOME MORE QUICKLY ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN THE LIFE OF OUR CHURCH

17) That as pastors and leaders we need to continually seek the Lord for a word in season to preach at our weekly meetings.

It is important that each week we are preaching a message that is relevant to the needs of those in our church. God knows the spiritual needs of those in our church. We need to actively seek the Lord for a word in season as we prepare for our weekly sermons and teachings.

Jesus emphasised the importance of feeding and tending to the sheep to the Apostle Peter who was commissioned to lead the early church.

Jesus said to Peter,

“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Feed My lambs.”

He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My sheep.”

He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep.” **(John 21:15-17)**

18) That we actively pray corporately as a church for those in our fellowship and community. We are all continually in an ongoing spiritual war.

Having corporate prayer meetings in our churches is a great key to seeing God’s presence and power in our meetings. Prayer is also a great key to seeing breakthroughs in the lives of those in our church and in our community. Every Monday we unbind our weekly meetings with a time of solid prayer as we pray for our city and church members. Prayer is also a big part of all of our church meetings.

Prayer is the key to seeing God moving in our meetings. Prayerless people are powerless people. We need to continually pray for those in our church that Christ would be formed in their lives. It is through consistent persevering prayer that we begin to see God transforming the lives of those in our community and in our church fellowships.

The Apostle Paul prayed,

“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Ephesians 3:14-19)

We need to continually pray for Christ to be formed in the lives of those in our church, so that we will see healthy Christian community developing as all believers continue to grow in spiritual maturity, as we remain committed to being persistent in our prayers for all believers.

AND

19) Seeking God for His tangible presence in all of our meetings.

It is in God's presence that people's lives are most changed as the Holy Spirit ministers into the lives of people. We need as leaders to continually seek God for His tangible presence in all of our meetings. It is in the presence of God that lives are touched and transformed. It is through lives being transformed in our churches that we see healthy Christian community being formed in our fellowships. How we need as leaders to desire more of God's presence in our meetings.

Like Moses we need to hunger for God's presence. Moses said to the LORD, “If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here.” (Exodus 33:15)

Creating an atmosphere of praise and worship helps to usher God's tangible presence into our church meetings. Like King David we need to thirst for God's presence. King David wrote,

“O GOD, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for you; My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory. Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips shall praise You.” (Psalm 63:1-3)

I WILL NOW CONCLUDE THIS TEACHING WITH ONE IMPORTANT THING TO CONSIDER;

As local churches we need to also be looking at bringing healthy Christian Community into our local communities. That people can see our love for one another as we reach out to minister to those in the highways and byways of our city and in other places such as our local schools and hospitals.

Some effective ways of building bridges into our community are;

- i) To have some of our church meetings in our local streets and parks,
- ii) To train up and send out street pastors to reach out to those in our local community, and
- iii) Doing outreaches in our local schools and hospitals.

We need to seek God for His strategies as to how best to reach out to those in our local communities to help bring healthy Christian Community into our cities and towns. Given God's heart to reach out to the lost and hurting, we can be assured that as we seek Him for His ways to reach the lost and to create healthy community, He will give us the wisdom and strategies that we need to best do so.

In the book of Proverbs we read,

“Commit your works to the Lord, and your thoughts will be established.”

(Proverbs 16:3)

More than ever before there is a world that is crying out for genuine love. Every local Church fellowship has the potential to help bring hope and encouragement to its community if it reaches out in love to those in the community with the good news of the gospel.

I will finish with the words of the Apostle Paul in the book of Romans,

As it is written:

"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" **(Romans 10:15)**



2016 Christmas Carols Outreach



Blacktown Community Street Church Meeting