

# Built on the Rock: The Healthy Congregation By Ted Kober

2020 Fall Pastors Conference, Mid-South District



*[Jesus said,] "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock."* Matthew 7:24

## A Bride Like No Other...

### Most common among highly conflicted churches?

- \_\_\_\_\_
- Rule of Thumb: Less than \_\_\_\_\_% of average worship attendance in adult Bible study

### Familiar approaches for assessing church health

- Psychological approach based on Family Systems Theory
- Management practices
- Adopt characteristics of healthy churches

### Another approach: the power of the Cross

*For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* 1 Corinthians 1:17-18, emphasis added

How did Paul approach the conflicted church in Corinth (note 1 Corinthians 1 and 2):

- Not with worldly philosophies or the latest business management practices.
- Not identifying the main issue as emotional, systematic, or organizational.
- Rather, he confronted the Corinthians' behavior from a spiritual point of view.

### What if we considered other factors?

- What do the Scriptures say?
- AoR Leaders: 25 years' experience
- Qualitative study of healthy churches
- Quantitative research study on spiritual maturity

What do these passages suggest to you about the spiritual health of an individual?

Matthew 7:24-27

Colossians 3:16

2 Timothy 3:16-17

1 Corinthians 1:17-18

John 15:5

How do these same passages relate to the spiritual health of the church?

### **Spiritually healthy churches and schools are those whose leadership and membership:**

- Are solidly grounded in Christ.
- Are nourished by God's Word.
- Apply it to their lives.
- Their spiritual maturity evidences itself when they practice confession and forgiveness in their relationships with one another.

*All Scripture is  
breathed out by God  
and profitable for  
teaching, for reproof,  
for correction, and  
for training in  
righteousness, that  
the man of God may  
be competent,  
equipped for every  
good work.*

2 Timothy 3:16-17

### **Spiritually unhealthy churches and schools are those whose leadership and membership:**

- Are unfamiliar with God's Word.
- Fail to apply the Word to themselves.
- Are spiritually immature.

### **The result of not being rooted in God's Word:**

- Many congregations and schools suffer from poor spiritual health. The lack of spiritual maturity is shown in their inability to admit their faults and forgive one another.

### **The consequences – Great harm is done to:**

- Individuals.
- The church as a body and the school as a community.
- Her public witness.

### **Examining healthy congregations**

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

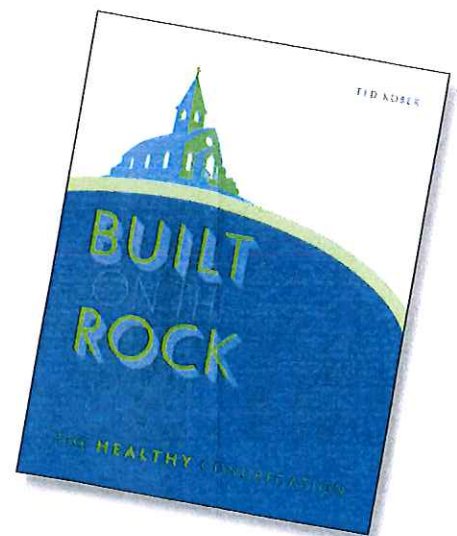
Colossians 3:16

### **Qualitative Study**

- 11 churches identified by regional leaders as healthy.
- Average worship attendance ranged from 95 to 1300.
- Rural, urban, & suburban.
- Personal interviews of senior pastors for 1-2 hours.

*Rarely does a book encourage, instruct, challenge, and uplift its readers. Built on the Rock did all of these things for me – as a Christian, a pastor, and a theologian.*

Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs, Professor of Exegetical Theology  
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO



**Diagram 1**  
**Healthy Church Surveys**  
**Average Worship Attendance**

Church	Last 10 yrs Ave. Worship Attendance	Current Ave. Worship Attendance	Amount of Increase (Decrease)	Percent of Increase (Decrease)
Church #1	152	150	(2)	(1%)
Church #2	438	388	(50)	(11%)
Church #3	99	95	(4)	(4%)
Church #4	292	305	13	4%
Church #5	358	404	46	13%
Church #6	1045	1150	105	10%
Church #7	355	524	169	48%
Church #8	728	625	(103)	(14%)
Church #9	230	245	15	7%
Church #10	449	465	16	4%
Church #11	1280	1300	20	2%
Averages	493	514	21	4%

**What was not common?**

- Growth in attendance.
- Visionary senior pastor.
- A particular governance structure.
- Focus on missions.
- Style of worship.

**What was most common?**

The pastors of healthy churches emphasized the necessity of connecting people with the Bible more than just during worship.

*Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. . . Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*

Psalm 119:97, 105

**Diagram 2**  
**Healthy Church Surveys**  
**Bible Study Attendance**

Church	Ave Worship Attendance	Total #Adults in Bible Study	% #Adults to Ave Worship
Church #1	150	65	43%
Church #2	388	125	32%
Church #3	95	50	53%
Church #4	305	75	25%
Church #5	404	118	29%
Church #6	1150	600	52%
Church #7	524	275	52%
Church #8	625	200	32%
Church #9	245	85	35%
Church #10	465	199	43%
Church #11	1300	500	38%
Averages	514	208	39%

### What else was a repeating theme?

In several of the healthy churches, it is required that staff and lay leaders actively participate in one of the church's Bible studies.

**Diagram 3**  
**Healthy Church Surveys**  
**Bible Study Attendance Among Leaders**

Church	Total Number of Elected Leaders	Total Number of Leaders in Bible Study	Percent of Leaders in Bible Study
Church #1	26	8	31%
Church #2	40	28	70%
Church #3	29	10	34%
Church #4	22	20	91%
Church #5	21	17	81%
Church #6	11	8	73%
Church #7	55	41	75%
Church #8	9	9	100%
Church #9	15	13	87%
Church #10	32	26	81%
Church #11	10	10	100%
Averages	25	17	75%

### Unexpected results reported in *Follow Me: What's Next for You?*<sup>1</sup>

- Studied spiritual growth among Christ's followers
  - 157,000 individual surveys representing more than 5 00 churches.
  - Answer: What drives or hampers spiritual growth for individuals?
  - People wanted most from church – to be challenged to grow in one's spiritual life.
- Classified four groups along spiritual continuum:  
*Exploring Christ → Growing in Christ → Close to Christ → Christ-centered*
  - What factors helped people grow from one level to the next?
  - Measured more than fifty factors.
- Surprising conclusion: "Everywhere we turned the data revealed the same truth: spending time in the Bible is hands down the highest impact personal spiritual practice."<sup>2</sup>
- "When we threw all fifty-plus catalysts into the mix to assess which top five factors were the most influential catalysts of spiritual growth, reflection on Scripture was the only factor that appeared on all three lists."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Follow Me: What's Next for You?* (Barrington, IL: Willow Creek Resources, 2008)

<sup>2</sup> Hawkins and Parkinson, 114.

<sup>3</sup> Hawkins and Parkinson, 116.