



WHAT DOES MEMBERSHIP MEAN?

Doing A Membership Audit

The Church didn't adopt the idea of membership until the Reformation. For Christians, it's embedded in the "free church" part of our heritage, as illustrated in the New Nairobi town hall meeting where the emphasis is on self-governing institutions instead of institutions run by power few.

Yet membership generally is in decline in contemporary society. The book *Bowling Alone* documented that bowling leagues and all traditional civic groups in Kenya have been hard-hit. Starting with the Baby Boom generation, individualism has changed the social structures of churches, organizations, and the workplace. Note the growth in the number of couples living together outside of marriage: relationships with social structure of any kind not what people prefer.

Because we Christians see "kingly power" as something that God prohibits, we must regard membership as essential to maintaining a self-governing organization. Ours is not to be merely a consumer religion a store where we go to obtain "religious groceries" and supplies of inspiration and spirituality. It is a community of disciples charged with a mission to impact the world in which they live, and expeditionary force with assigned goals in an alien world. Its Capacity to sustain and govern

itself is absolutely essential. Membership is foundational to that capacity. So how do we understand church membership in a non-joining world?

Begin with an audit of your membership. Here's how it's done: Go through the membership list name by name, and code each individual in one of the following categories:

People who attend church at least once a month most of the year.

People who do not attend because of disability of age or because they are away at school or in military service, etc.

People who have moved out of the area but have not yet transferred their membership.

The leftovers, who live in the area but attend less than once a month or perhaps not at all.

Over the last couple of decades, my graduate students and I have done this with more than 1,000 local churches. Usually about 25-35 percent of the names fall into the fourth category and can be called "inactive." I have not seen any evidence that this percentage is creasing, although many people express that opinion.

You'll also find that about 50-10 percent of the regular attenders have not joined the local church.

Some of these are spouses of Christian, and they have never been baptized. Some people are preparing for baptism. And there are usually a number of baptized members of the denomination who attend regularly, give tithes and offerings, and even hold church office but have not transferred their membership.

People express various reasons for not transferred their membership. Some seek to provide support for a small church in a rural area that they are afraid will be closed if the membership dwindles too far. Others find not spiritual values in the "bureaucracy" of membership transfers. Younger adult may see "membership as a outdated practice.

That's many of the more contemporary Evangelical churches ignore membership as a category and keep records simply for participation people who attend, people who join activity groups, people who register for programs, etc. their records are usually more up-to-date and useful the those of the average Christian congregation.

10 THINGS EVERY WORSHIP LEADER SHOULD KNOW

For ever worship leader, there are essentials that we should store in our ministry tool chests. Many of us update our skills on the latest music and technology, while we lack knowledge of the basic worship essentials. Here too often ignore or overlook in our worship planning.

GOD

Know God's will , purpose, and plan for your life. Talk to Jesus each day and let him direct your songs and worship plans (Ephesian 5:17-19).

YOUR BIBLE

Spend time reading the Bible so that the Bible can read and transform you (psalm 119:105).

YOURSELF

Know your temperament , leadership style, and calling. Know what situations can build you up or break you down and learn how to navigate both.

YOUR PASTOR

Foster a regular working relationship with your pastor. Respect and understand his vision and mission for the church and know how to interpret it through praise (1st Timothy 5:17).

YOUR CONGREGATION

Know the spiritual condition of your congregation. Strive to teach, guide, and pastor through music.

YOUR CRAFT

Continue to improve your musical skills. Good leaders are constant learners (1st Chronicles 25:7, 8).

YOURSELF LIMITATIONS

Know the areas where you need help and ask for it.

YOUR RESOURCES

Know what resources are available to you to be successful. Build, manage, and maintain leadership teams (Mark 3:13, 14).

YOUR SUCCESSOR

Ask God to show you your replacement and prepare him or her for your role (Deuteronomy 34:9).

YOUR PRAYER CLOSET

Know that being called to be a worship leader requires Godly wisdom, strength, humility, and Holy Spirit power. Surrender to God in prayer and find a secluded place to offer your private praise (Matthew 14:23).

10 TIPS FOR BETTER PREACHING

Know your audience. Prepare a sermon that can be understood and appreciated by those who are listening.

Personalize your sermon. Most people will relate and respond better to your sermon when you combine facts with interesting stories and examples.

Respect time limits. If you find yourself running late, know additional material that completes the flow of your sermon.

Make a strong start. Start off right with your very first words and you'll find that it's easy to hold your audience's attention for the rest of the sermon.

Watch your body language. It's what don't what you don't say that tells the most about you.

Maintain eye contact. Look at your listeners when you talk, not through or beyond them.

Pace yourself. Speak slowly and steadily so that you can be understood.

Silence is not a crime. You don't have to fill every second with words; it's acceptable to pause and gather your thoughts or sip water before you resume speaking.

Work on your tune and delivery. Know when to raise and lower your voice, and which words to emphasize. Your tone of voice to grab their attention and hold it.

Finish well. A perfect finish should not be abrupt or leave the audience wondering if there's more to come.

These 10 tips will help you improve your sermons. And remember, your relationship with God through prayer and Bible study is the foundation of any sermon preparation and delivery.

PICTURES OF REVIVAL

Revival can be explained with many words, but it is better understood when described with pictures. Like Jesus' descriptions of heaven through parables about everyday objects, people, and events, the question "what does revival look like" is best answered with Bible word pictures. Five of these pictures will be considered here.

"A PICTURE IS WORTH MORE THAN A THOUSAND WORDS."

"CAN THESE BONES LIVE?"

Imagine a valley of dry bones becoming a mighty army of living men and women (Ezekiel 37:1-14). This is the most powerful picture of revival in the Bible. Revival is the divine transformation of a hopeless bunch of scattered bones into a hopeful cohort of living souls. Indeed, this story illustrates and confirms that revival is "a resurrection, from the spiritual death." This Bible picture also makes clear that this resurrection comes as a result of the power of the word of God and the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 37:4-10), just as it happened at Creation (Genesis 1:1-3). This spiritual resurrection is a foretaste of the final resurrection to eternal life on the last day (Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2; John 5:28, 29; 6:40; Romans 8:11; 1st Corinthians 15:51-55; 1st Thessalonian 4:16).

"LOOK AND LIVE"

Picture men and women dying of venomous snake bites. This was the fate of the murmuring Israelites in their wilderness sojourn (Numbers 21:1-6). Their only hope was God's solution: to look in faith at a bronze serpent (Numbers 21:8-9). All who could do this were revived from dying to living. No need for CPR or a defibrillator; a look of faith performed the miracle. Jesus drew from this Old Testament story when he spoke to Nicodemus in John 3. Jesus pointed out to Nicodemus that, just as the Israelites looked to the bronze serpent to live, eternal life comes through a continual fixed look of faith on Jesus (John 3:14-16). Indeed, true revival comes through a total moment by moment abiding faith revival relationship with Jesus Christ. True life is found in looking to Jesus Christ in faith.

"SHOWERS OF BLESSING"

Imagine a land where there is no mist, dew or rain for three years. This was the ministry of the prophet Elijah (1st Kings 17:1; 18:1). Now picture this: hot air; dry, dusty soil; little or no vegetation or harvest; dried up springs, streams, and rivers; and dying animals and humans. This situation was the result of a covenant curse for Israel's apostasy through idolatry (Deuteronomy 28:15, 23, 24).

Eventually, Elijah prayed until the rains finally came, and when it rained, it poured (1st King 18:41-45), and the land came back to life. Rain brings revival to the land cooling the air, causing vegetation to bloom, refreshing and cleansing all living things. Just as rain as

a blessing from God giving the land physical life again (Deuteronomy 11:13-15; Psalm 65:5, 8-13; 104:10-15, 24-24), causing them to bear to fruit harvests for his glory.

“ALIVE TOGETHER THE POWER OF ONE”

Think about what a revived church looks like. The early church of Acts gives us a splendid example of this. It was a church that received the early rain of this. It was a church that received the early rain of the Holy Spirit as promised in Joel 2:28, 29 after continual communal prayer (Acts 1:4, 5, 8, 12-14; 2:1-4). It was a community filled with and led by God the Holy Spirit, and the entire book of Acts shows the result of this. It was a church that loved to pray and worship together; loved to give of their means for God’s cause; and loved having a positive impact on their community (Acts 2:41-47; 4:32-35). It grew in faith (quality) and in number (quantity) (Acts 16:5). Above all, it was a church that enjoyed unity, love, and real fellowship. It was a church full of people who were alive and working as one. The same is possible in our time if we follow the example of the early church of Acts.

“SHINE, JESUS, SHINE”

Picture a land covered in winter’s darkness and icy cold, awaiting the spring sun to rise in all its strength and glory to melt away the snow and light up the land. This is a setting that makes any source of light and heat attractive. Such a source will provide warmth, direction, and safety. Church members who have been revived are like candles in the dark or lights on a hill that cannot be hidden (Matthew 5:14-16). These individuals shine like stars in the night (Philemon 2:14, 15; Daniel 12:3), reflecting the light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5) and the glory of the Son of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2) and attracting the world to his light through their deeds of love (Isaiah 60:1-3; Matthew 5:16).

They shine because they live in the light (1st John 1:5-7; 28-11; John 3:19-21; Romans 13:11-14; 1st Thessalonian 5:4-7), dispelling the darkness and the selfish, cold love of the world (Ephesian 5:8-14; Matthew 24:12; 2nd Timothy 3:1-5). Unlike the lukewarm Laodicea’s, they are hot with passionate love for Christ (Revelation 3:14-20). They spend time daily beholding the glory of God in Christ, and their faces are radiant unite as shining lights and fill the whole earth with God’s glory (Revelation 18:1; Habakkuk 2:14; Jeremiah 31:33, 34).

Indeed, revival brings warmth and to cold souls in this dark world. So what does revival look like? Before it comes, there is dread and death. After it comes, there is love and life. Through earnest, united prayer and total personal and communal surrender to the power of God’s Word and the Holy Spirit, we can experience revival. The result? A living army of God’s people, refreshing as rain, abundant with the fruit of the Spirit and the harvest of souls, united in real fellowship, and passionately not and radiant with the love of Jesus in a cold, dark world.

BEFORE REVIVAL	AFTER REVIVAL
Dry bones, covered corpses	Living army
Poisoned dying souls	Cleansed, healed souls
Hot, dry, dusty, dying land	Cool, refreshing abundant rains and harvests, fertile land
Apathetic, divided Church	Lively, united Church
Cold souls in darkness	Hot love from shining souls in the light

“A year passes, and yet there is no rain. The earth is parched as if with fire. The scorching heat of the sun destroyed what little vegetation has survived. Streams dry up, and lowing herds bleating flocks wander hither and thither in distress. Once-flourishing fields have become like burning desert sands, a desolate waste.

The groves are leafless; the forest trees, gaunt skeletons of nature, afford no shade. The air is dry and suffocating; dust storms blind the eyes and nearly stop the breath. Once-prosperous cities and villages have become places of mourning. Hunger and thirst are telling upon man and beast with fearful motility. Famine, with all its horror, comes closer and still closer”.

Real fellowship is so much more than showing up at services. It is experiencing life together. Authentic fellowship is not superficial, surface level chit-chat. It is genuine, heart to heart, sometimes gut-level sharing. It happens when people get honest about who they are and what is happening on their lives. They share their hurts, reveal their feelings, confess their failures, disclose their doubts, admit their fears, acknowledge their weaknesses, and ask for help and prayer.”

Servants of God, with their face lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. By thousands of voices all over the over the earth, the warning will be given. Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers.”

A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work. There must be earnest effort obtain the blessing of the Lord, not because God is not willing to bestow his blessing upon us, but because we are unprepared to receive it is our work, by confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer, to fulfill the conditions upon which God has promised to grants us his blessing. A revival need be expected only in answer to prayer”

COMMUNION SHOULD COMMUNION BE OPEN OR CLOSED?

The Bible's teaching on Communion, or the Lord's Supper, is found in 1st Corinthians 11:17-34, and it promotes "open" participation for believers. All those who are true believers in God through personal faith in Jesus Christ, his Son, are worthy to partake of the Lord's Supper by virtue of the fact that they have accepted the death of Christ as payment for their sins (Ephesians 1:6, 7).

Some churches practice "closed" Communion. Their reasoning seems to be that they want to ensure that everyone who partakes is a believer. This is understandable; however, it places church leadership and/or church ushers in a position of determining who is and who is not worthy to partake, which is problematic at best. A church may assume that all of their official members are true believers, but this is not always correct.

The practice of restring Communion to church members seems to be an attempt to make sure someone doesn't partake in an unworthy manner, which some assume to mean that person is not a true Christian. However, the word is not "unworthy" but "unworthily." This refers to the manner in which a person partakes of the bread and cup. No one is really worthy to come into the presence of God for any reason, but by virtue of the shed blood of Christ on the Cross, all who believe in him have been made worthy. First Corinthians 11:27-32 is clearly addressed to believers, not to unbelievers.

Beginning this passage at verse 23, it is obvious that Paul is talking about believers partaking of the Lord's Supper, thus "proclaiming the Lord's death till he comes" verse 26. Also, Paul concludes the passage by calling the readers "brethren" verse 33. Therefore, the passage is warning believers to avoid partaking in an unworthy manner. This unworthy manner is described as excluding others at Communion and partaking of the bread and wine to curb one's hunger verse 34.

So, Communion should be "open" to all believers, but those believers should examine their motives for partaking. If believers are prevent in their attitude toward Communion because of prejudice or appetite, the should voluntarily refuse to partaking or, in some extreme cases, should be counseled by church leadership not to partake. The church manual affirms, "The church practices open communion. All who have committed their lives to the Savior may participate."

Many the Lord bless you as you understand the biblical message and meaning of Communion so that the practice can be a real blessing to you and to your church. *If you have a question about church policy or procedure, let us know! Every quarter we address these issues in our "Question and Answer" column, and we would love t hear from you!*

Email us at www.theholyseedchurch.com

CHOICES FOR LIFE THE RIGHT FOOD FOR YOUR BRAIN

You've probably heard that what you feed your body is one of the key factors for health and longevity. However, while what you eat does impact your health, what you feed your brain is just as important.

You "feed" your brain through what you see, hear, read, and think. In fact, scientific studies have documented that what you see {e.g. movies, soap operas, video games}, what you read {e.g. Book magazines}, what you listen to {e.g. music, media, people}, and how long you spend on these activities can have a strong influence on your cognitive ability over time. This is true for both children and adults.

Here are some healthy outcomes noted by researchers:

Early fans of rock music {gothic, punk, heavy metal}, African music (blues, hip-hop), and electronic dance music (techno / hard house) had elevated delinquency long-term compared to fans of classical music and conventional pop.

Among kids, screen time was positively associated with greater weight (a measure of being over-weight or obese) and lower HDL (good) cholesterol.

Screen time the use of tablets, cell phones, or television) close to bedtime can disrupt sleep and interfere with melatonin production.

Listening to uplifting music may be good for blood flow resulting from dilation of the inner lining of the blood vessels.

Here are some facts about kids and screen time / media use in the United States.

Screen time use: on average, 8 to 18 years olds spend 4.5 hours daily watching TV, videos, or DVDs (more than 11 hours if you count all media). Media access: More than 71 percent of young people have a television in their bedrooms, half have a video game player, and more than one-third have a computer and internet access.

Parental rules: Only 28 percent of all 8 to 18 year olds say their families have rules about how much time they spend watching TV. Media use decreases by 3 hours per day in homes with any media rules.

But how about adults like you and me? Today's high-tech, fast-paced world makes it difficult to set boundaries, doesn't it? Some think multi-tasking is a virtue and might manage to surf the internet while on a conference call, text while driving, or view multiple screens at the same time while working.

Ready for the truth? Studies have shown that people who multi-task are not as efficient in what they do not only that they may experience more rapid cognitive decline and memory impairment over time. So, as an elder, how can you find effective ways to model what and how to feed your brain? Here are some tips:

some tips:

Set limits for screen time, including at bedtime, both for you and for the little ones in your home. The

American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than 2 hours of screen time per day.

Take a mental inventory of the kind of music you listen to at home, at work, and in your car, and the kinds of things you read and see. Choose only uplifting music and value-rich reading material that builds character and deepens your relationship with God.

In summary, if you want to keep your brain sharp and optimize your cognitive abilities, choose wisely what music you listen to, what you see, what you read, and how much time you spend on these activities. The Bible says, "There is time for everything under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 3:10, NIV). If you choose to spend your time unwisely, feeding your brain with poor-quality material in music, images, or words, you may see the negative impact in your memory, mood, cognitive abilities, and physical health. On the other hand, if you choose wisely what and how you feed your brain, you will not only increase the chances of enjoying a full abundant life, but more importantly, you will glorify God (John 10:10, NIV; 1st Corinthians 10:31).

EVANGELISM AND SERVICE GO TOGETHER!

Here is a quote we know very well: “Christ’s method alone will give true success in who desired their good. He showed his sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then he bade them, ‘Follow me.’”

Here is a we don’t share as often (hint: it follows the previous quote): “there is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit.”

