



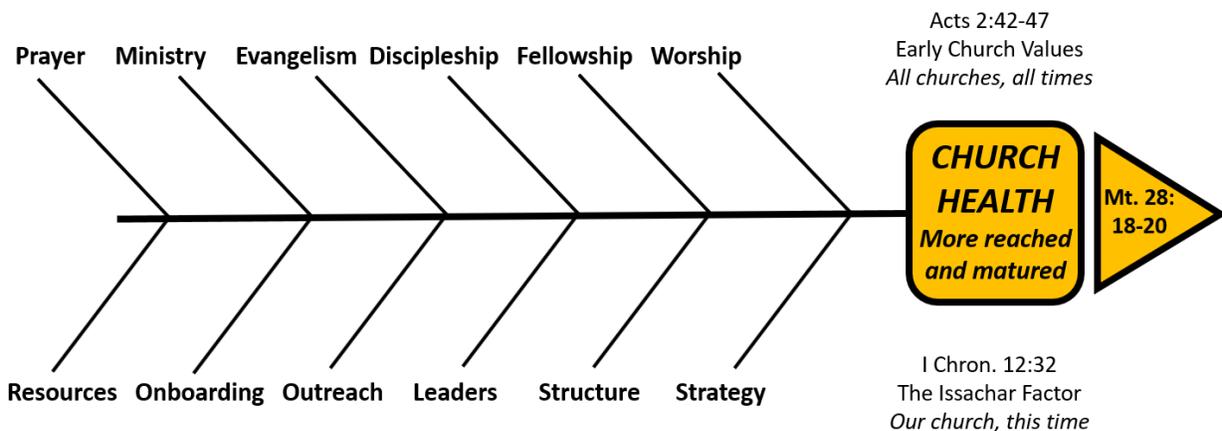
## Church Health Defined

What is a healthy church? By what standard can we measure the health of our local church? What is unhealthy, healthy, and very healthy?

As a consultant attempts to assist a church, he or she comes to this effort in a very similar spirit that Jethro did when he sought to help Moses in Exodus 18. He observes (vs. 14a), he asks (14b), he assesses (17-18) and he recommends (19-23). As helpful as that is, it begs the question of how he recommends. If we dig a little further, we note that Jethro had both ministry experience (as the priest of Midian 3:1 and 18:1) and marketplace experience (as a shepherd with undershepherds like Moses 3:1). Those experiences gave him a framework from which he could both assess and recommend. A church consultant similarly brings experience and training to each consultation.

From my experience and training, I have written a document called ***The Fishbone Diagram Church Health Assessment - A White Paper***. [This 47-page document is available upon request.](#) My intent in this *Church Health Defined* document is to provide a summary of that white paper as my definition of church health.

### The Fishbone Diagram



When you think fishbone and the church, you may first think of **Ikthus**, which is Greek for fish, and was an early church acrostic using the first Greek letter of the words Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior. But the actual reason for a fishbone in this white paper goes back to a guy named **Ishikawa**.

Karou Ishikawa was a Japanese professor and engineer who developed the fishbone diagram in the 1940s to analyze problems in manufacturing. It is a cause and effect diagram that is sometimes called the Ishikawa diagram, the fishbone diagram, or the Fishikawa (clever!). The diagram for manufacturing typically uses major categories of causes called the 5 Ms: Material, Mother Nature, Machine, Method, and Manpower. Each bone contains one of these labels and there are sub-parts for each of these five causes for manufacturing problems.

The Fishbone Diagram is meant to be a similar tool to the *Fishikawa*. It makes a statement about the ultimate priority of the church (The Great Commission), and the causal factors that allow us to either accomplish that or the possible reasons why we are not accomplishing it. In one sense, my definition of church health is accomplishing the Great Commission. But in another very important sense, it is the causal factors.

But where does the detail of the Fishbone Diagram for Church Health come from. My research for this can be summarized by the following pyramid. The definitional detail is built first on biblical and systematic theology.



But over the past 40 years or so, there have been many Christian leadership books written, some based on research, and some not. These books give us some important clues to how to further define church health. In addition, some of these writings are accompanied by survey tools that allow us to assess health.

Here is a partial listing of the important Christian books on church health that I reference in the white paper:

*12 Keys to an Effective Church*  
*How to Break Growth Barriers*  
*\*Purpose Driven Church*  
*Natural Church Development*

Kennon Callahan  
Carl George and Warren Bird  
Rick Warren  
Christian Schwartz

*One Size Doesn't Fit All*  
*Advanced Strategic Planning*  
*Ten Traits of a Vital Ministry*  
*The Habits of Highly Effective Churches*  
*Disciplined Warriors*  
*Reveal: Where Are You?*  
*Transformational Church*  
*The Other 80%*  
*Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*  
*Simple Church*

Gary McIntosh  
Aubrey Malphurs  
Stephen Macchia  
George Barna  
Chuck Lawless  
Willow Creek Association  
Thom Rainer and Ed Stetzer  
Warren Bird and Scott Thumma  
Mark Devers  
Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger

\*While Warren's book promotes five purposes, his website speaks of twelve characteristics of a purpose driven church. See: <https://pd.church/news/12-characteristics-purpose-driven-church/>

The "head" of the Fishbone Diagram and the twelve "bones" are based on the cumulative teaching from the above list of books and the other sources cited in the research pyramid on the previous page. In the fourteen books cited above, and others, the twelve bones in the diagram are frequently referenced as those things that will make a church healthy. Stated another way, when these elements are weak or missing, a church will likely be unhealthy, and it will not grow.

There are also some very important secular books on such matters as understanding change, leadership, culture, and organization design. While these are not as weighty as our theology and Christian leadership books, they have value in the vein of thinking that "all truth is God's truth".

Finally, God has given me some rich church experience in ministry and consulting. This experience has allowed me to develop some convictions about church practices that lead to health and those that lead away from health.

### **Biblical Church Values**



There are timeless definitions that our Bibles give us regarding the purpose and values that should be held by any church at any time in any location. Most would agree that a healthy evangelical church is based upon the **Great Commission** of Christ in Matthew 28:18-20 where He tells the disciples, and in effect He tells us, to go make disciples and to baptize and teach.

We know that when the early church set out to do this, they had some important values and practices. Acts 2:42-47 is one place where these values are summarized, and theologians commonly refer to these as the functions of the church.

Upon closer inspection, we see that these concepts recorded in the descriptive, historical genre of Acts are later reiterated and enhanced by the writers of the New Testament epistles. These writers, inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16) state them as prescriptive principles that the Church should practice.

In the Fishbone Diagram, these values from Acts 2 are the “Top Bones” of the diagram. They are the organic life found in the early church and prescriptively taught in the New Testament as components of health that should be found in all churches in all times. The following is a brief description of each. Your consultant can provide you with a more detailed description and facilitate your action-planning to achieve health in each of these areas:

Worship	<b>Worship</b> is... attributing the honor and giving the devotion to God that He alone deserves. It is a matter of the heart that may or may not be inspired in our worship services.
Fellowship	<b>Fellowship</b> is... communion with other believers in order to encourage one another’s walk with the Lord. It is characterized by unity and a lack of unresolved conflict.
Discipleship	<b>Discipleship</b> is... loving obedience. Jesus calls his disciples to follow his teachings through self-denial. It is not a program. It can be encouraged through mentoring relationships and training classes. New Christians should have the opportunity to learn and grow in various areas of the faith.
Evangelism	<b>Evangelism</b> is... “the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Savior and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God.
Ministry	<b>Ministry</b> is... a Christian using his or her spiritual gifts for the edification of the church and in service to a lost world. God uniquely gifts his people with abilities in order that his Church may advance.
Prayer	<b>Prayer</b> is... drawing near to God through faith in quiet contemplation and with bold requests. Jesus reminded his followers to pray through his example of often withdrawing to a quiet place to pray.

**Relevant to Culture**

In 1 Chronicles 12 we are given a description of David’s army when he was contending with Saul. Regarding the sons of Issachar, we are told that they were “men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do ...” (12:32).

This concept of understanding the times also characterized Paul and his ministry. His behavior and communication style in Acts 17 is a good example of why church health must include a discussion of cultural trends, our forms of ministry, and our relevance. While Paul was quite adept at speaking from the law to those whose cultural experience was the law, we see none of this in Acts 17. He is in a non-Jew environment and so he makes no appeal to the truth of the law. In fact, he commends them for being religious (17:22), he quotes from the words on an idolatrous altar (17:23), and he quotes from a Greek poet (17:28). The outcome was that, <sup>32</sup> *When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject."* <sup>33</sup> *At that, Paul left the Council.* <sup>34</sup> *A few men became followers*

of Paul and believed.” This life experience of Paul’s described in Acts, carried over into his prescriptive teaching in 1 Corinthians 9:19-21.

In the Fishbone Diagram, these values are the “Bottom Bones” of the diagram. They are the organizational life of the church. While the Top Bones are for all churches at all times, these values are the wisdom of the church to stay healthy in its specific time and place. The following is a brief description of each. Your consultant can provide you with a more detailed description and facilitate your action-planning to achieve health in each of these areas:

Strategy	<b>Strategy</b> is clarity about the biblical mission of the church, assessing the organic components of health (Acts 2:42-47), the other components of organizational health, and the cultural context of the church. It also requires the capacity to plan and execute steps toward greater health.
Structure	<b>Structure</b> should be driven and defined by mission and Strategy. It is the alignment and clear, written, definition of the organizational relationships of our staff, our board(s), our congregation, our ministries, and our ministry participants.
Leaders	<b>Leaders</b> concerns itself with ensuring that we have a fit between our Strategy, our Structure, and those that are leading the church. They must be recruited well, developed, and coached to perform their role.
Outreach	<b>Outreach</b> complements the truth of evangelism with the proof of changed lives through service. It is grounded in a biblical perspective and a contextual understanding of community needs. This may be spontaneous acts or organized gestures working collaboratively with social service and government agencies.
Onboarding	<b>Onboarding</b> ensures effective ministry to people that are new to the church (the front door), and to those that are becoming disengaged (the back door). Systems are developed to identify these people, and intentional ministries seek to help them be an active part of the church.
Resources	<b>Resources</b> supports the church through its facilities, financial practices, stewardship emphasis, office management, information technology, and other administrative systems. As the church grows, the base of Resources must grow simultaneously or in advance of numerical attendee growth.