Characteristics of a Healthy Bible Fellowship Church

PUTTING BIBLICAL CHURCH HEALTH INTO PRACTICE

BFC Board of Church Health

Churches Helping Churches

Purpose and Posture

The following framework is intended to help the Board of Church Health and local BFC leaders move beyond shallow sentiments and broad statements about what matters in terms of Church Health and toward prayerful, practical reflection on how a congregation is living out its biblical calling.

This revised and expanded edition builds upon the good work of those before us, particularly in the 2015 *"Distinctives of a Healthy Church"* booklet. The central question here is not simply, "Do we believe these things are important?" It is clear that we in the BFC do believe this to be true. Rather, it is: "How faithfully are we putting these convictions into practice, and what might the Lord be calling us to strengthen today?"

Our working posture can be described as follows: *Assess honestly. Advise biblically. Assist pastorally.* The aim is not to compare churches or impose uniformity, but to help each BFC congregation pursue faithfulness and spiritual maturity in its own ministry context.

The framework is designed for an elder board to prayerfully work through together or in consultation with the Board of Church Health. Use the Confidential Contact Form on BFC.org/Church-Health to schedule a consultation if needed.

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Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

- Ephesians 4:15-16

Six Guiding Convictions

The following convictions provide the Biblical foundation on which the Characteristics of a Healthy Bible Fellowship Church are built.



1. ***Christ is the Head of the church***. Church health begins with our relationship to Jesus Christ, who loves His church and gave Himself for her (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:25-27)

2. ***Scripture defines church health***. These characteristics are practical expressions of biblical purposes and responsibilities, not a substitute for biblical teaching (Acts 2:42; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).



3. ***Faithfulness matters more than appearances***. Attendance, finances, facilities, and programs may provide useful information, but none independently establishes spiritual health (John 15:1-8; 1 Cor. 3:5-9).



4. ***Health is both personal and corporate***. Spiritual maturity is expressed in individual lives and in the congregation's shared life, relationships, leadership, and mission (Eph. 4:11-16).

5. ***Healthy churches need not look identical***. Congregations serve different communities and face different opportunities and constraints; the goal is biblical faithfulness, not stylistic uniformity.



6. ***Churches help churches***. The Board of Church Health comes alongside local congregations while respecting the authority and responsibilities of local elders and members.

10 Characteristics of a Healthy BFC Church

1	Passionate, Persistent Prayer	Are we depending on God together?
2	Christ-like Relationships and Genuine Fellowship	Are we loving and caring for one another?
3	Clarity of Biblical Mission and Shared Vision	Do we know why we exist and where we are going?
4	Faithful Preaching and Teaching that Equips the Saints	Is God's Word forming and equipping us?
5	Intentional Disciple-Making and Spiritual Formation	Are people growing towards maturity and helping others to grow?
6	Meaningful Membership and Shared Ministry	Do members belong, participate, and serve?
7	Biblical Leadership and Ministry-Fueling Structures	Do leadership and structures help the church fulfill its calling?
8	Purposeful Local Outreach and Global Mission	Are we carrying the gospel beyond our walls?
9	Generous and Faithful Stewardship	Are we faithfully stewarding what God has entrusted to us?
10	Biblically Faithful, Christ-centered, and Hospitable Worship	Do we gather to glorify God, build up the church, and welcome people clearly?

How the 10 Characteristics Work Together

These characteristics are interconnected dimensions of a church's life, not ten independent boxes to check. The groups below are explanatory rather than a ranking. A congregation cannot compensate for persistent unfaithfulness in one area simply by being active in another, and churches may express these commitments differently in different contexts.

SPIRITUAL VITALITY

Prayerful dependence on God and Christlike relationships cultivate the spiritual life of the congregation. These are not merely calendar activities; they express dependence on the Lord and life together in Christ.

1. Passionate, Persistent Prayer
2. Christ-like Relationships and Genuine Fellowship

BIBLICAL FORMATION AND SHARED MINISTRY

Mission clarity, faithful teaching, intentional discipleship, meaningful membership, and biblical leadership work together to form a mature, serving congregation.

3. Clarity of Biblical Mission and Shared Vision
4. Faithful Preaching and Teaching that Equips the Saints
5. Intentional Disciple-Making and Spiritual Formation
6. Meaningful Membership and Shared Ministry
7. Biblical Leadership and Ministry-Fueling Structures

MISSION AND FAITHFUL STEWARDSHIP

The church gathers to worship and build up believers, then serves and witnesses to the world. Generosity supports that calling, while hospitable worship gatherings welcome people to hear God's Word and participate in congregational life.

8. Purposeful Local Outreach and Global Mission
9. Generous and Faithful Stewardship
10. Biblically Faithful, Christ-centered, and Hospitable Worship

Characteristic 1: Passionate, Persistent Prayer

A church that depends on God.

A healthy church cultivates personal and corporate prayer, seeking God's wisdom, power, provision, holiness, and blessing in every dimension of ministry. Prayer is not a decorative opening or closing to church activity; it is an expression of dependence on the Lord and participation in His work.

Biblical Foundation

Acts 2:42-47; 4:23-31; Colossians 4:2-4; Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 4:6-7

Why This Matters

The early church devoted itself to prayer, and prayer accompanied its witness, decisions, suffering, and shared life. A church's prayer practices can reveal what it believes about God's presence and its own dependence. The goal is not to manufacture a particular emotional tone or count prayer meetings, but to cultivate sincere, persevering, Scripture-shaped dependence on God.

What This Can Look Like in Practice

- Prayer is a regular part of gathered worship, leadership meetings, ministry teams, and congregational life—not merely a response to emergencies.
- Leaders and members pray specifically for spiritual growth, holiness, unity, evangelism, missions, leadership, and people in need.
- Prayer is integrated into discernment and decision-making, alongside careful listening, Scripture, wise counsel, and responsible action.
- Members are encouraged and equipped to develop personal prayer lives and to pray with and for one another.

Sample Reflection Scenarios

1. Pastor noticed that prayer meeting attendance had been dwindling for some time. He decided to highlight it more often in the bulletin and draw attention to it during the announcement time on Sunday mornings. For a few weeks one or two more people came, but it didn't last. The group that was coming was faithful, but he knew that the church as a whole needed to pray together more often. He talked to the Sunday School teachers and small group leaders to ask them about how prayer fits into their times together. It turns out that there was not much prayer in Sunday school, but the small group had a time for corporate prayer that was meaningful and prayed for needs of the people in attendance and the people of the church.

2. An elder came home from elder's meeting frustrated. Money was tight, but there were some sidewalk repairs that were desperately needed. The elders were having trouble agreeing on whether or not to wait until spring or do the repairs now. He reflected on the meeting and realized that although they spent a lot of time talking about the repairs, they had not stopped to pray about the decision.

Questions for Reflection

1. In what specific ways is prayer a meaningful and regular part of both personal discipleship and corporate church life?

2. In what instances in the life of the church do we pray specifically for people who do not yet know Christ, for missions, and for the spiritual health of our congregation?

3. How do our decisions and ministry plans reflect conscious dependence on God?

A Practical Next Step

Identify one concrete way to strengthen congregational prayer over the next 30 days—for example, a focused prayer gathering, a short prayer guide, or regular prayer in ministry team meetings.



Guardrail: Do not equate a church's health with the number of prayer meetings or a particular prayer style. Look for sincerity, perseverance, dependence, and a growing culture of prayer.

Characteristic 2: Christlike Relationships and Genuine Fellowship

A church that loves one another.

A healthy church cultivates relationships marked by love, unity, hospitality, mutual care, forgiveness, reconciliation, and shared life across generations and backgrounds. Fellowship is more than friendliness after a service; it is the costly, joyful practice of belonging to one another in Christ.

Biblical Foundation

John 13:34-35; Acts 2:42-47; Romans 12:9-16; Ephesians 4:1-3, 25-32; Colossians 3:12-15

Why This Matters

Jesus identifies love for one another as a visible mark of His disciples. The New Testament's "one another" commands describe a community where believers bear burdens, speak truth in love, forgive, welcome, encourage, and pursue peace. Healthy relationships do not mean conflict never occurs; they mean conflict is addressed with truth, humility, courage, and grace.

What This Can Look Like in Practice

- Members are known by name and there are meaningful pathways for newcomers and less-connected people to build relationships.
- Practical care is offered during illness, grief, financial hardship, family stress, and seasons of spiritual struggle.
- Leaders model humility, honest communication, appropriate confidentiality, repentance, and reconciliation.
- Different generations and life stages have opportunities to know and serve one another rather than remaining in isolated circles.

Sample Reflection Scenarios

1. During a church work day, a woman in her seventies was paired with a ten-year-old boy for a simple task. The woman said later, "The boy was so cute! He was a good worker and he talked with me the whole time. I never knew his name before although for years I've seen him sitting with his parents on the other side of the sanctuary."

2. The deacons and some other helpers were setting up for the Christmas hot chocolate and carols outreach that the community is invited to. One helper had a particular vision for how the space should be decorated and took a lot of time to find decorations for the theme she had in mind even though there was no particular theme decided by the deacon in charge. Another helper had a different vision and left the decorating time frustrated that what she had in mind was not being considered. She also didn't come to church the following day which was very unlike her.

Questions for Reflection

1. How do people experience meaningful Christian community beyond Sunday morning?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2. Give some specific examples of how we as church leaders respond to conflict, disappointment, differences, and broken relationships. What were the results of those approaches?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. Give examples of how each of the following types of people in your congregation are known and cared for:

newcomers:

struggling members:

younger believers:

older saints:

A Practical Next Step

Ask a representative group of members where they experience genuine belonging—and where people can unintentionally fall through the cracks. Identify one practical response.

_____
_____



Guardrail: A warm atmosphere is valuable, but it is not a substitute for truth, accountability, or biblical unity. Healthy fellowship combines grace and truth and results in spiritual growth.

Characteristic 3: Clarity of Biblical Mission and Shared Vision

A church that knows why it exists.

A healthy church understands its biblical calling, keeps Christ and the Great Commission central, and unites its people around a clear, shared direction for ministry in its particular community. Vision should clarify faithful priorities, not become a slogan that competes with Scripture.

Biblical Foundation

Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 4:11-16; Colossians 1:28-29; 1 Peter 2:9-12; Philippians 2:14-16

Why This Matters

The church belongs to Christ and is sent to make disciples. A clear sense of mission helps leaders and members align ministries, time, money, and attention around biblical priorities. A local vision is most useful when it translates the church's enduring biblical calling into a discernable direction suited to its people and community.

What This Can Look Like in Practice

- Leaders and members can describe the church's purpose in clear, understandable language rooted in Scripture.
- Ministry plans and budget priorities support the stated mission rather than simply preserving every inherited activity.
- The church understands its local context and prayerfully identifies people and needs it is called to serve.
- Leaders communicate direction consistently, invite meaningful participation, and revisit priorities as circumstances change.

Sample Reflection Scenarios

1. There had been some new people attending church over the past few years. The elders noticed that three of the men who started coming had alcohol and drug abuse in their past. The men freely shared about their past during different sharing times in Sunday School class. Their honest sharing encouraged a woman who had been coming to church for years to open up about her own struggles with alcohol. Although alcohol and drugs were not a struggle that the elders could personally identify with, it seemed that the Lord was bringing a number of people with this particular struggle to their church.

2. The elders worked together to put together a clear and concise mission statement for the church to define who they are and what their purpose was. The pastor presented it during a congregational meeting and people sounded excited about it. The elders wanted to make sure that everyone remembers the statement and it doesn't get lost in the meeting minutes never to be seen again.

Questions for Reflection

1. If you asked a church member to articulate why our church exists and whom we are seeking to serve, could they do it? Why or why not?

2. How do our ministry priorities and budget reflect our stated mission?

3. Do the leaders and members share a sufficiently clear understanding of the church's direction? If yes, how do you know?

A Practical Next Step

Invite elders and ministry leaders to complete this sentence separately: "By God's grace, our church exists to…". Compare answers, identify common ground, and clarify where needed.



Guardrail: Mission clarity is not the same as a polished mission statement. Look for shared understanding and actual alignment between stated purpose and ministry practice.

Characteristic 4: Faithful Preaching and Teaching That Equips the Saints

A church formed by God's Word.

A healthy church faithfully proclaims and teaches the whole counsel of God, centers its ministry on the gospel of Jesus Christ, and equips believers to grow in maturity, discernment, obedience, and service. Scripture is not merely a source of inspirational thoughts; it is the authoritative Word that forms the church's faith and life.

Biblical Foundation

Acts 20:27-32; 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5; Titus 2:1; Nehemiah 8:1-8; Ephesians 4:11-16

Why This Matters

God's Word teaches, corrects, trains, and equips His people for every good work. Preaching should explain and apply Scripture faithfully, proclaim Christ, and address the life of the congregation. Teaching across the church should reinforce biblical understanding and help believers use truth in daily life and ministry.

What This Can Look Like in Practice

- Preaching explains the meaning of Scripture in context and applies it clearly to belief, character, relationships, and mission.
- The gospel of Jesus Christ is central, and the church is taught the breadth of biblical truth rather than only preferred themes.
- Classes, groups, and ministry settings help people understand Scripture and apply it faithfully.
- Teachers are appropriately equipped, accountable, and attentive to the spiritual maturity of those they serve.

Sample Reflection Scenarios

1. "I just preached through Ephesians so I thought I would just move right on to Philippians next," the pastor said during elder's meeting. One of the elders flipped through the mass of past bulletins in his Bible and noticed that before Ephesians, the pastor had preached through Romans. He couldn't remember the last time he had heard a sermon from the Old Testament.

2. A woman in one of the pastor's Bible studies hesitantly shared with him that she was interested in starting a Ladies' Bible Study, but she wasn't sure exactly how to prepare a lesson or teach like he did. She didn't know how to create a Bible lesson or how to lead the actual Bible study time. She didn't feel like she knew the answers off the top of her head like he did.

Questions for Reflection

1. Is the Bible faithfully explained and applied with Christ and the gospel central? Give some examples from several different settings.

2. Does your teaching address the whole counsel of God rather than only familiar or preferred subjects? In what way?

3. Are people being equipped to understand Scripture, live obediently, and serve others? How so?

A Practical Next Step

Ask a few members from different age groups and stages of spiritual maturity what recent biblical teaching has helped them understand, change, or put into practice. Use what you learn to strengthen application and discipleship.



Guardrail: Faithful preaching cannot be reduced to style, length, or audience preference. Assess biblical fidelity, clarity, Christ-centeredness, and its role in equipping the church.

Characteristic 5: Intentional Disciple-Making and Spiritual Formation

A church that helps people grow in Christ.

A healthy church intentionally nurtures believers toward Christlikeness through discipleship, relationships, biblical instruction, spiritual practices, and opportunities to serve, while preparing faithful people to disciple others. The goal is not simply participation in church activities, but mature followers of Jesus who increasingly reflect His character and join His mission.

Biblical Foundation

Matthew 28:19-20; Colossians 1:28-29; 2 Timothy 2:2; Hebrews 10:24-25; Galatians 4:19

Why This Matters

Jesus commands His followers to make disciples, teaching them to obey all He commanded. Paul's ministry aimed at presenting people mature in Christ and entrusting truth to faithful people who would teach others. Intentional formation helps the church move beyond attendance toward growth in faith, obedience, service, and multiplication.

What This Can Look Like in Practice

- The church can describe practical next steps for new believers, growing Christians, emerging leaders, and those needing restoration or renewed care.
- Believers have opportunities for mentoring, small-group discipleship, biblical instruction, and spiritual friendship.
- Members are encouraged to practice Scripture reading, prayer, service, hospitality, generosity, and personal witnessing in everyday life.
- Leaders identify and equip others for ministry, making discipleship and leadership development shared responsibilities.

Sample Reflection Scenarios

1. A woman came to know the Lord a few years ago and had been growing so much through the preaching of the church. She was baptized last year but hadn't taken any steps towards serving in any way. One of the elders noticed and told her that it was time to start serving. She had experience with children, so she arranged to be on the kids' Sunday School rotation of teachers.

2. A young couple in their twenties had been coming to church for six months. They were friendly and encouraging. However, they stopped showing up. Pastor contacted them to find out how they are. They said that although they loved the worship service and the preaching and the size of the church, they decided to go to a different church that had a young adult small group so they could get to have close relationships with people their own age.

Questions for Reflection

1. Is there a recognizable pathway for people to grow from initial faith toward spiritual maturity? What is it?

2. Give some examples of believers intentionally investing in the spiritual growth of others.

3. In what way are we developing future servants, ministry leaders, and disciple-makers?

A Practical Next Step

Map the usual journey of someone who begins attending the church: welcome, relationships, membership, growth, service, and disciple-making. Identify one gap or unclear transition and address it.



Guardrail: A church can offer many programs without making disciples intentionally. Evaluate whether people are growing in Christlike maturity and helping others grow, not simply whether activities are available.

Characteristic 6: Meaningful Membership and Shared Ministry

A church where people belong, participate, and serve.

A healthy church treats membership as a meaningful commitment to Christ and His people, with members embracing mutual responsibility, using their gifts, caring for one another, and participating in the church's mission. Membership is more than a name on a roll; it expresses a covenantal commitment to worship, growth, service, and mutual care within a local congregation.

Biblical Foundation

1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 4:15-16; Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 Peter 4:10-11; Acts 2:42-47

Why This Matters

The New Testament portrays the church as a body whose members need one another and contribute to the good of the whole. Meaningful membership gives visible shape to belonging and responsibility. It should be taught positively as a privilege and commitment, with clear pathways into the life of the congregation and appropriate pastoral care when participation or faithfulness falters.

What This Can Look Like in Practice

- Members understand the church's beliefs, commitments, and expectations for participation and mutual care.
- New members are welcomed, oriented, and connected with relationships and opportunities for service.
- Members are encouraged to identify and use their gifts in ways that build up the body.
- Leaders pay attention to disengagement, absence, and spiritual need with pastoral concern rather than merely administrative interest.

Sample Reflection Scenarios

1. Although there had been some visitors to the church over the last year, very few were returning and joining. The church considered themselves a friendly church, but there were times when the visitors seemed to stand there awkwardly when no one was talking to them. One of the visitors that did stay mentioned that it took a while for them to figure out all the ins and outs of how the church worked.

2. Elders meetings typically went by quickly and were filled with discussions about property needs and upcoming events. Right before the last elder's meeting adjourned, one of the elders said, "I noticed that a particular couple hasn't been around in a while. Has anyone heard from them?"

Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways do your members demonstrate mutual commitment and responsibility?

2. Are members using their spiritual gifts and participating in the church's ministry? List some members (who are not elders) and how they are using their spiritual gifts.

3. What practices do we have for welcoming members, caring for them, and addressing persistent spiritual concerns?

A Practical Next Step

Review how the church welcomes and integrates new members. Identify who follows up, how relationships are formed, and how members are helped to find meaningful ways to serve.



Guardrail: Membership should not be reduced to attendance, volunteering, or a database. It involves belonging, biblical commitment, mutual care, and accountable participation.

Characteristic 7: Biblical Leadership and Ministry-Fueling Structures

A church organized to serve its calling.

A healthy church develops godly leaders, practices biblical shepherding and accountability, and maintains clear, appropriate structures that support wise decisions, healthy communication, shared responsibility, and effective ministry. Good structures serve people and mission; they should not become ends in themselves or unnecessarily burden the congregation.

Biblical Foundation

Acts 6:1-7; 14:21-23; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Ephesians 4:11-12; 1 Peter 5:1-5

Why This Matters

Scripture calls church leaders to character, service, teaching, oversight, and care for God's people. The church also needs clear processes for decisions, communication, finances, ministry coordination, and conflict. Appropriate structure can protect unity and integrity while freeing people to serve; unclear or cumbersome structure can create confusion, bottlenecks, and avoidable strain.

What This Can Look Like in Practice

- Elders and other leaders meet biblical qualifications, shepherd people intentionally, and model humility and accountability.
- Roles, decision-making authority, communication pathways, and responsibilities are understood well enough to support trust and coordinated action.
- Policies, committees, and ministry processes are reviewed periodically to determine whether they still serve the church's mission.
- Leadership development and succession are approached intentionally rather than only when a vacancy or crisis occurs.

Sample Reflection Scenarios

1. The Children's Church teacher has been asking for more teachers since he is teaching most of the Sundays. A new person has been coming for four weeks and mentioned that she loves to teach kids and would love to help.

2. During elder's meeting one of the elders shared that he would be retiring soon and moving to another state to be closer to his kids. That would leave only two elders left since they had not replaced the last one either. The elders prayed for God to provide another elder and then talked about the men at church who might be possible candidates. One man was mentioned who would was very faithful in church attendance and serving but was very quiet. They weren't sure if he would meet the qualification of being able to teach.

Questions for Reflection

1. Are elders and other leaders meeting biblical qualifications and shepherding people faithfully? How do you know?

2. Are responsibilities, decision-making authority, and communication reasonably clear?

3. Make a list of each of the following or view an organizational chart. How do they serve the mission or have they become obstacles to it?

Policies:

Committees:

Programs:

Ministry structures:

A Practical Next Step

Choose one recurring point of confusion, delay, or duplicated effort. Clarify the responsibility and decision pathway, then communicate the change to the people affected.



Guardrail: Efficient administration is not the same as biblical leadership. Structures must remain consistent with Scripture, the BFC's governing commitments, and the local church's legitimate responsibilities.

Characteristic 8: Purposeful Local Outreach and Global Mission

A church that carries the gospel beyond its walls.

A healthy church intentionally proclaims Christ, builds relationships with its neighbors, serves its community, makes disciples among the nations, and participates faithfully in the work of world missions. Mission is not an optional department for a few enthusiasts; it is part of the church's calling as God's people.

Biblical Foundation

Matthew 9:35-38; 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Romans 10:13-17; 3 John 5-8

Why This Matters

The risen Christ sends His people to make disciples of all nations. The church bears witness through gospel proclamation, lives of holiness and love, practical service, and partnership with those who carry the gospel across cultures. Local outreach and global mission belong together in a congregation's prayer, priorities, giving, and participation.

What This Can Look Like in Practice

- Members are equipped and encouraged to build relationships with neighbors, coworkers, and community networks and to speak about Christ naturally and clearly.
- The church listens to its community and engages in appropriate acts of service that express Christian love and create opportunities for gospel witness.
- Leaders and members pray for missionaries, understand their work, support them responsibly, and look for meaningful ways to participate.
- Outreach and mission efforts have purposeful aims and are reviewed for faithfulness, leaning, relationships, and gospel opportunity.

Sample Reflection Scenarios

1. During the annual congregational meeting, the Missions Budget was reviewed. A man raised his hand to ask about some of the missionaries who were listed and asked where they were serving. He said that he had never heard their names before. The Missions Chairperson mentioned that he thought there was a picture of them on the missions bulletin board but wasn't sure since it had been a while since it was updated.

2. There was a fire in an apartment building where one of the church members lived. The member asked the elders if the church could do something to help the people who were displaced because of the fire.

Questions for Reflection

1. Are we intentionally building relationships with people outside the church and sharing the gospel? If possible, list at least three people outside your church who have relationships with people in the church.

2. Do our ministries respond thoughtfully to opportunities and needs in our community? Give a specific example.

3. Are we praying for, supporting, and participating in gospel ministry among the nations? How so?

A Practical Next Step

Identify one local relationship-building or gospel-witness opportunity and one global mission partnership to pray for and engage more intentionally in the coming quarter.



Guardrail: Mission should not be measured only by event attendance, short-term trip counts, or immediate visible results. Faithful witness often requires patient presence, prayer, and perseverance.

Characteristic 9: Generous and Faithful Stewardship

A church that handles God's resources faithfully.

A healthy church cultivates cheerful, sacrificial, and responsible generosity, stewarding finances, spiritual gifts, time, facilities, and other resources to care for people and advance the gospel. Giving is a response to God's grace and an act of worship—not a technique for manipulating people or a simple measure of spiritual maturity.

Biblical Foundation

Mark 12:41-44; 2 Corinthians 8:1-9; 9:6-11; 1 Peter 4:10-11; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2

Why This Matters

The New Testament connects generosity with grace, love, trust in God, and care for others. Faithful stewardship includes transparent financial practices, thoughtful planning, appropriate safeguards, and willingness to direct resources toward the church's biblical priorities. A healthy church teaches generosity without coercion and manages what has been entrusted to it with integrity.

What This Can Look Like in Practice

- Giving is taught as a glad and responsible response to God's grace, with attention to generosity, sacrifice, and care for those in need.
- Financial reports, budgets, approvals, and controls support transparency, accountability, and responsible decision-making.
- Resources are aligned with mission and ministry priorities, while the church plans prudently for maintenance, emergencies, and future needs.
- Members are encouraged to steward time, spiritual gifts, facilities, and financial resources for the good of others and the advance of the gospel.

Sample Reflection Scenarios

1. There had been more than the usual number of benevolence requests lately for help with bills and other needs from people in the congregation. The benevolence fund had already been used up for the year, but a widow from the church needed help with some HVAC repairs that she couldn't afford.

2. Ever since COVID ended, there had been buckets in the back of the sanctuary for people to give their offerings instead of having ushers pass a plate around the sanctuary. However, giving dropped off during the last quarter even though attendance had stayed the same.

Questions for Reflection

1. Is giving taught as a response to God's grace and an expression of Christian worship? Give an example of a recent teaching on giving.

2. What procedures are in place to ensure the church finances are managed transparently, responsibly, and in keeping with the church's mission?

3. How are members encouraged to steward their time, gifts, and resources for the good of others and the advance of the gospel?

A Practical Next Step

Review the next budget or financial update alongside the church's stated mission. Identify one way to explain more clearly how resources support ministry and mission.



Guardrail: Giving levels alone do not establish spiritual health. Consider context, faithful teaching, transparency, financial integrity, generosity, and the alignment of resources with biblical priorities.

Characteristic 10: Biblically Faithful, Christ-Centered, and Hospitable Worship

A church that gathers to glorify God and build up His people.

A healthy church gathers around God's Word to exalt Christ, pray, sing, encourage one another, observe biblical ordinances, and respond in faith and obedience, while welcoming visitors with clarity, warmth, and genuine hospitality. This gathering is neither a performance for customers nor an insider meeting that leaves newcomers unable to understand what is happening.

Biblical Foundation

John 4:23-24; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; 14:12, 23-26, 40; Colossians 3:16-17; Hebrews 10:24-25

Why This Matters

Christian worship is directed toward God and shaped by His revealed truth. The gathered church is also built up through the Word, prayer, singing, the ordinances, mutual encouragement, and orderly participation. Scripture's concern for edification and intelligibility encourages congregations to consider both faithfulness to God and the ability of visitors to understand the gospel and the gathering.

What This Can Look Like in Practice

- Preaching, prayer, singing, and the ordinances are biblically grounded and contribute to worship, discipleship, and the building up of the church.
- Songs and other elements are theologically sound, Christ-centered, and appropriate for congregational participation.
- Visitors receive a warm welcome and enough explanation to understand the service without compromising biblical convictions.
- Practical details—signage, accessibility, communication, children's arrangements, and follow-up—help people participate and feel considered.

Sample Reflection Scenarios

1. A mom and dad had been taking turns walking around in the foyer with their toddler who is too young to sit still in the sanctuary during the sermon. On the fourth week of this happening, a greeter mentioned to the couple that there was a nursery with volunteers if they would like to let their toddler play there during the sermon. They said, "Thank you! We heard there was a nursery, but we weren't sure where it was or how it worked."

2. The worship leader has been wanting to add new songs to the rotation of songs that are sung during Sunday worship but wasn't sure how the new song would be received. The last time he tried a new song people did not like it which he could tell by the number of people who stared at him stone faced while he tried to be upbeat. Another time he had introduced a new song only to be told by an elder that it was from a particular song writer that they didn't want to sing songs from. The worship leader was unaware that songwriter was a problem.

Questions for Reflection

1. Does our gathering reflect the priorities of Scripture through preaching, prayer, singing, fellowship, and biblical ordinances?

2. Are our songs and other elements theologically sound and directed toward God's glory and the edification of His people? Give some specific examples.

3. What takes place during the gathering to ensure visitors understand what is happening, encounter a genuinely welcoming congregation, and hear the gospel clearly?

A Practical Next Step

Ask a few people who are relatively new to the church to describe what was clear, confusing, welcoming, or difficult during their first visits. Choose one improvement that supports both biblical faithfulness and hospitality.



Guardrail: Visitor-friendly does not mean visitor-driven. Hospitality serves people while keeping worship centered on God, governed by Scripture, and directed toward the edification of the church.

Additional Discussion and Discernment Questions

Use the following questions to continue meaningful discussion regarding church health.

What are two or three signs of God's grace and faithfulness in our church that we should celebrate?

Which characteristic, if strengthened, could make a meaningful difference in our church's faithfulness or ministry?

What do we need to understand better before deciding what action to take?

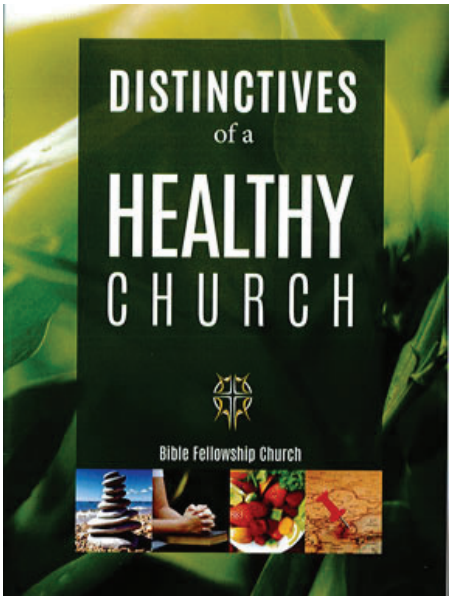
What is one next step that is both meaningful and realistic in the coming 30-90 days?

What kind of encouragement, expertise, or support would help us take that step?

The Big Picture: A Reflection Summary

This page can be used for an elder board discussion to bring together all the reflection points from all ten characteristics. It is deliberately not a scored instrument. The aim is to notice strengths, name opportunities honestly, and agree on a faithful next step—not to assign a grade or label to a church. Next to each Characteristic, check the box under Evidence of Strength or Opportunity for Growth. For those areas that are Opportunities for Growth, write ONE possible Next Step. As an elder board, prayerfully decide which Next Step to work on first.

Characteristic	Evidence of Strength	Opportunity for Growth	Possible Next Step
1 Passionate, Persistent Prayer			
2 Christ-like Relationships and Genuine Fellowship			
3 Clarity of Biblical Mission and Shared Vision			
4 Faithful Preaching and Teaching that Equips the Saints			
5 Intentional Disciple-Making and Spiritual Formation			
6 Meaningful Membership and Shared Ministry			
7 Biblical Leadership and Ministry-Fueling Structures			
8 Purposeful Local Outreach and Global Mission			
9 Generous and Faithful Stewardship			
10 Biblically Faithful, Christ-centered, and Hospitable Worship			



How This Framework Relates to the First Edition: *Distinctives of a Healthy Church*

The proposed framework retains the theological substance of the first edition of *Distinctives of a Healthy Church*—biblical theology, worship, evangelism and world missions, fellowship, God's presence, leadership and church government, disciple-making, membership and stewardship, prayer, and preaching and teaching. The revised titles are intended to make the characteristics more practical and to invite deeper reflection on observable ministry practices. A downloadable version of *Distinctives of a Healthy Church* is available on BFC.org/Church-Health.

A Pastoral Reminder

A health check should function like a careful medical examination: not to shame the patient for having a problem, but to identify what needs attention and what steps may promote healing. Honest assessment and hopeful encouragement belong together.

Our desire is not simply that BFC churches survive, but that they faithfully fulfill their God-given calling. May these characteristics help us pray more earnestly, serve more faithfully, love more deeply, and work together more intentionally for the glory of God and the advance of the gospel. Healthy churches help other churches—and together we seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ!

BFC Board of Church Health

Churches Helping Churches

Bible Fellowship Church Board of Church Health

Assess. Advise. Assist.

Churches helping churches pursue biblical health and gospel faithfulness.

Find out more at BFC.org