

Healthy WORSHIP: A Church Working in Unison to Make and Grow Disciples

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Preacher: Josh Johnston

[0 : 00] But Josh is going to be preaching to us this evening on healthy worship, on how a church, if it's healthy, is working in unison to make and grow disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's our aim, that's what we're seeking to do. And so we're going to turn to the Bible now and to read in two places where we'll be looking at later and which will be helpful to us. First of all, in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians chapter 12, a well-known passage where Paul's speaking about the body of Christ and the members of the body.

We're going to read there and then we're going to read just a few verses from 1 Peter chapter 2. So 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and beginning at verse 12.

Paul says, If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing?

If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be?

[1 : 53] As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, I've no need for you. Nor again the head, to the feet, I've no need for you.

On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. And those parts of the body that we think less honorable, we bestow the greater honor.

And our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts don't require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it.

That there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together.

One member is honored. All rejoice together. And if you just flip over to 1 Peter, chapter 2, just a few verses there at the beginning of chapter 2, verse 4, where Peter speaks in a different metaphor, but saying the same things about how all the different parts, the different members of the church of Jesus Christ are one, and are his house, his dwelling place.

[3 : 14] He says in verse 4, As you come to him, to Christ, a living stone, rejected by men, but in the sight of God, chosen and precious or honored, then you yourselves, like living stones, are being built as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood.

To offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Amen.

May God bless to us his word and help us indeed to understand all that he has to say to us in it this evening. Good evening.

Do open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 12, and we'll get there a bit later. There was a film made some years ago about a footballer, Zinedine Zidane.

It had a simple premise. Film everything that one of the greatest footballers does in any one match. Follow his every move. And so instead of watching the full game and all that was happening from a normal perspective, 17 cameras were focused on this one great player.

[4 : 32] What does he do with the ball? What does he do without it? It wasn't a final. It wasn't a particularly significant game. It was just a look at what one key player does throughout any game of football.

They couldn't predict if he'd be the star. They couldn't predict that he'd score or anything. In fact, he ends up being sent off. All that was guaranteed was that those watching would get to see one of the greats in focus.

His teammates only appear as they interact with him. Well, what on earth has that got to do with a series on membership in the church?

You can blame Paul for another football analogy. He introduced them last week. But the link is we've spent the last number of weeks doing something very similar.

We've been narrowing in on individual ministries or individual elements of our entire ministry that fit under the acronym worship. So we focused for one week on our witness, considering particularly the call upon the church to be heralds of the gospel of Christ, to make disciples.

[5 : 47] Another week, we've looked at living in obedience to Christ's rule. With Jesus as our Lord, we are made holy and being made holy. And so we must be growing in grace.

We've considered our corporate gatherings as we're renewed together through the word and prayer by the spirit of Christ. And we've seen how central that is to our shared life of worship as it's Jesus preaching to us week after week.

And we've spent time reflecting on our sharing together as the body of Christ, brought together in God's grand plan to gather all things to himself so that we're one body, a family who love one another.

And then last week, we were encouraged to be involved together in building up the body of the church, each of us gifted in unique ways to serve our brothers and sisters.

And each of these weeks has been like that Zidane film, zooming in on one player, zooming in on one aspect of our shared life together, one letter a week.

[6 : 51] But if that's all that football was, if it was just watching one player, I don't think there'd be many Sky Sports subscriptions flying around.

It'd be a very boring experience. You know, people watch, people are entertained by seeing the whole team play. And people watch in the hope and the anticipation of their team achieving glory at the end of the season, despite being disappointed year after year.

And so having spent time looking at the individual areas of our church's ministry, this week we're turning to the trophy, as it were, and to the team.

We've looked at the individuals, but this week is the trophy and the team. It's important that we're clear on what our goal is, our vision, what we're working to achieve.

What is our trophy? And then secondly, how do the various parts of our church's ministry fit to, together, and help each other so that we are working to achieve that goal? And so in a sense, how does the team fit together?

[7 : 56] So firstly this evening, number one, we want to be a disciple-making church. We want to be a disciple-making church.

As a church family, we have a purpose. We don't meet together in all the various forms that we do simply because it suits us to do so. As a church family, we want to see our friends and our family and our colleagues and our neighbors, those from our city and beyond, brought to Christ, matured in Christ, and involved in seeing more people brought to you and matured in Christ.

And we have this purpose because we're part of God's grand plan for the universe. Our purpose is fueled by the future, by the vision that the Bible casts for us.

We don't pursue these things from our own initiative and driven by our own personal sense of right and wrong. The Bible tells us where history is heading. God's plan for the fullness of time is to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven, and things on earth.

And at the heart of that plan is the church. The church is the crowning glory of all that God has planned and purposed in this world. It's the spiritual house that God is building, as we read in 1 Peter.

[9 : 19] And he's building it with living stones, with people, all kinds of people brought together into a grand building. And we can see throughout the Bible various visions of what the future will look like.

So listen to one that we can read in Revelation, a grand vision of the future. John writes, After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

That's a vision of vast multitudes gathered around Jesus at the last day, gathering to the Lamb, the one who washes clean all who trust in him, so that whoever trusts Jesus will be clothed in white, made perfect, and gathered to Jesus as he prepares to reign over his perfect kingdom for eternity.

And we go on to read later in Revelation that not only is Jesus preparing to reign, but that his people are going to reign with him.

And so as a church, we've put this together into a vision statement. It says that, we see the risen Lord Jesus crowded by people from our city and every nation, ransomed by his blood and raised by his spirit through the gospel, reigning for eternity with him to the glory of God the Father.

[11 : 02] That's the glorious end that all Christians will enjoy. We will reign with Jesus for eternity in the presence of our Savior who's lavished grace upon grace upon us, finally enjoying by sight all that it means to know him.

We will reign over this world made new so that all the staining effects of sin are no more, so that all that is wrong and evil and frustrating and painful and heartbreaking will be no more.

A world that won't face the threat of lockdown, that won't need doctors, that won't need elections, that won't need undertakers, that won't need psychiatrists, where the only tears that will be shed will be tears of joy.

We won't need insurance to protect us against anything and we'll have new enemies wanting to squeeze the life and the faith out of us. What a picture it is.

Jesus' kingdom with him as king, perfection everywhere and us reigning with our perfect leader. And so what drives us towards our purpose as a church, our motivation, is that we are part of that story.

[12 : 23] This plan that God is working out in this world includes us. That is our future and it can be the future of anyone who trusts Jesus.

And so we know that in the present, God is drawing people to himself who will share this future. He's gathering people who will share that for eternity.

And he's doing it through his church. And so we've been commissioned to play our part in what God is doing in the world. And so we want more and more people from our city.

That's what we see from our city and beyond to be raised to reign with Jesus at the last day. And so because of our vision, we have a clear purpose.

Because of what we see, we worship together to make and grow mature disciples of Jesus Christ in ever greater numbers who with us will glorify God and enjoy him forever.

[13 : 29] That's our trophy. That's what we're aiming at. That's what we want to do. But let's look carefully at that purpose. The first thing to note is we're interested in numbers.

It can be so easy to say that numbers don't matter. But here's a simple question. At the last day, when we're gathered around Jesus to reign with him for eternity, do we want more people who we know and love there with us, or less?

There's only one answer to that question. For a church that has experienced the grace of God, we want as many as possible to experience the same.

Of course now, God is sovereign in salvation. Of course it's only he through his spirit that can raise people from death to life. I can't do that. You can't do that without God's spirit at work.

But at the same time, we're not fatalists. We can't step into thinking that what we do doesn't matter. God has commissioned us. He's given us a task.

[14 : 41] And so we want to do all that we can, as effectively as we can, to play our part in what God is doing in the world. And we do so knowing that as we seek to do this as faithfully and fruitfully as possible, that the sovereign God is able to open anyone's heart and bring anyone to maturity.

We've used the picture of the lifeboat a few times now. Let's return to it.

Let's think of our city, Glasgow. Glasgow alone has over half a million people. Most of them are drowning.

They're in the water, bodies seizing up, time running out. As a lifeboat, what point would you say that the job is done?

We've saved some. We've done well. The boat's 80% full. We can head off now. No way. And so just like crew on a lifeboat, we want to pull as many people as possible out of the water.

[15 : 55] There'll be people who are swimming around the boat, to our friends, our families, colleagues, neighbors, that we've been praying for and inviting to things. But beyond that, there's a city full of people we want to contact and engage and bring in, rescue.

We're interested in numbers. But we're interested in growing numbers of people who are rescued. More people beginning a life of following Jesus and enjoying all that he's promised.

Because we want to make disciples. So our goal isn't just to have lots of people come to our services. Our goal isn't that we want to make contact with lots of people.

We don't want to just have lots of people come to courses. These things are good, but only if they're producing conversions. Only if they're pulling people out of the water.

And so we don't stop there. We want conversions. We want to see many, many people come to faith. We're interested in numbers. We're interested in people being rescued. But we also are interested in people maturing.

[17 : 09] We want to make mature disciples of Jesus Christ. Faith is only the beginning of a new life. And so we want to grow mature disciples.

We want to help our brothers and sisters to be growing more and more. So that things like committing to membership, joining a growth group, committing to love our brothers and sisters, serving in ministry, will help them to continue to grow and persevere and play their part.

So think about how you pray even for things like the 311, three friends you're praying for. We don't want to just pray for them that they'll become Christians.

We want to pray that they'll become Christians and flourish. That they'll reach the last day, mature and prepared to reign with Jesus forever. So yes, we witness as a church, but coming to faith is a step on the path of the Christian life.

Don't we also long for those who are dear to us, our siblings, our old friends, the people we share the staff room with, don't we long for them to be rescued by Christ and then to be growing in obedience, to be renewed by the word and prayer week on week, to be committed to our church family and to be involved in ministry to others.

[18 : 30] We don't want people to come to faith and drift around on the periphery and fall away two years later. We want to purposefully see people who have never heard of church or Jesus, brought to faith and then to begin a diet of being fed God's word week after week, to be embraced into the family as a brother or sister, to be growing to maturity and to be involved in our ministries.

So to stay with a life boat, we want to pull people out of the water, but we want to help them join the crew so that they want to make it their mission to pull others out and to keep those who are in the boat safe for eternity and to rejoice that they're in the boat and that they're headed for safety forever and much more besides.

Our purpose is to see an increasing number of people driven by the same vision that we have and united in the purpose that we share. Now at this stage, we might think that sounds all rather daunting.

It's a grand purpose. How can we all be doing all of this? I'm sure that many of us have heard the phrase we are to be disciple-making disciples. I'm not sure that's the most helpful way of putting that, the most helpful thing to say.

I'd suggest that we want to talk about being a disciple-making church because we don't all do all of these things. So how do we together seek to fulfill our purpose?

[20 : 13] Well, secondly this evening, we seek to do this through healthy worship. Through healthy worship. Each area of ministry that encompasses our worship acronym is interconnected with and relies upon each of the other areas.

Some people might describe this as an ecosystem. So to be an effective disciple-making church means each of our ministries, each of the areas, each of the letters, each part of worship functioning well and in a way that serves the others.

So 1 Peter, in talking about the church being built, acknowledges that it is built with various living stones. And in any church, there is a myriad of differently gifted people.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 12 now. Paul's letter to Corinth tells of a strained relationship. The Corinthian church thought they'd moved on from Paul.

His ministry is characterized by the message of the cross and a manner of life that was cross-shaped. Whereas the church at Corinth wanted to be a triumphalist church.

[21 : 32] They want to speak about resurrection now instead of having to pick up their cross and follow Jesus. They're interested in glory and honor.

All that they can have now. And so they had a pecking order of gifts, the things that made them stand out that were more important than other things. The particularly impressive and spiritual-looking gifts.

And so Paul had a lot to deal with to unpick this toxic environment. And as he gets to chapter 12, his focus at this stage of the letter is particularly on the gifts that they've been given.

And so verse 12, he says, the church is one body with many members, but they are all still part of the body. Verse 15 and 16, different body parts can't start saying to each other that they don't belong because they're different.

Then verse 17, if the whole body were an ear, picture the hat, and an ear that's about my size on its own standing up here on a platform.

[22 : 42] Not the most attractive thing's ears, and they wouldn't really be able to do very much. What if the whole body was an ear? Where would the vision or the smell be or anything else?

Verse 18, but as it is, God has arranged the members in the body, each one as he chooses. Each part of the body functions as it's meant to.

It's there for a reason. And it's the same way in the church. And so, by the time he gets to verses 22 to 24, Paul turns the screw on the Corinthians.

They detest things that look weak. But Paul says that the parts that seem weaker are indispensable. Indeed, often they're the most important.

And so, verse 23, Paul uses the example of the private parts of our bodies, the unpresentable parts, the parts we're never going to reveal in public. He says, we actually bestow on them greater honor as they're treated with the most modesty.

[23 : 52] And he goes on, Paul goes on to say that that is what God has done with the church too. Beware of thinking a certain ministry or gift is unimportant.

No, Paul is clear. Every part of the body functions together so that the whole body works well. All interconnected, all needed, because the body is an ecosystem.

And so with the body, it's true with the church too. Various medical conditions produce symptoms that a lay person would think wouldn't be related to that affected area.

So, I've been told that softening or clubbing of fingernails can actually be a sign of serious heart disease or lung disease even. A few years ago when my back was bad, at its worst, it manifested in terrible pain in my calf.

I lost sensation in my calf. But it was the back that was the problem. These things happen because the body has many parts that are interlinked.

[25 : 03] And when they all work well, the body flourishes. But one part not working well can impact all kinds of other areas. And the same is true in the church.

So if we want to be flourishing towards our purpose, let's think about a few examples of all areas of our ministries working together. Take, for example, our witness, our evangelism and our mission.

How do we ensure that it's healthy and effective? Well, of course, we want to be creative in how we engage with the world around. We want to have an invite culture where we bring people to church.

We want to have courses that are clear in the gospel and engage those who don't believe. And we want to train and equip people to lead these effectively. So, of course, those who are involved in these witness things, that's going to be happening.

But our witness is strengthened if the other areas of the church are healthy too. So a church that is growing in obedience to God's words will be more effective in their witness because those who don't yet believe will see God's word at work in his people.

[26 : 12] And it's an attractive thing to see a godly Christian. A church that really loves one another and is truly welcoming and hospitable will be a church that testifies to the world that we belong to Jesus.

It's another attractive thing as we love each other and truly care for one another. That tells the world about Jesus. And so it strengthens our witness.

And on the flip side, if people arrive in and we're at odds and fighting with one another, they're going to run a mile. A church that Sunday by Sunday has their gears lifted above this world to the unseen realities of heaven and hell will be fueled to press on with witnessing to Christ.

Each area of our ministry serves the rest, but they can also hinder the rest. So maybe you run a team and you're struggling to get enough people for your ministry.

Well, you might think that there's a serious problem with the eye, with involvement. Whoever's meant to be organizing things there is not pulling their weight, you might think. But every one of our ministry area has impact on this.

[27 : 28] So if our witness is fruitful, if people are coming to faith, then we'll have more people eager to learn about the Christian life. And as they're eager to learn about the Christian life, they'll be keen to grow in their obedience, they'll be flourishing in understanding of the words, growing in godliness, and understanding more and more that service helps us to grow.

And as they meet week by week on a Sunday for renewal, and sharing, well, that encourages a sense of family.

That means we want to lovingly do what we can to serve our brothers and sisters. And so all of these things functioning together means that we have a church prepared to sacrifice all kinds of things to serve and be involved in what's best and most helpful for the church family.

So it might be that if we're short of people to serve in things that there are problems in some of the other areas. Each area of church life flourishes and encourages each other one.

But at the same time, if some of them are struggling, then it impacts on the others too. That's just two examples of how all our ministry areas connect and relate.

[28 : 58] We don't have time to cover all the permutations because the number and levels of connection and overlap is manifold. The implications of each ministry upon the others is endless because we are a body, an ecosystem.

If the heart struggles to pump blood or the lungs aren't getting enough air, it causes problems elsewhere. And so if we are to be fit for our purpose, then every one of the letters that make up worship is important.

None of them can be written off. None of them are the ear that's excluded. And the truth is that many of us will only be involved in maybe one or two of these areas.

And as we're doing that, it can be quite easy to get caught up in the area we're involved in. So if you're involved with the Welcome Ministry, you might be frustrated that your team could do with more people to help, have more resources, more training.

Or you're frustrated that your growth group has shrunk because there are some people off helping with Christianity Explored. And it's very easy in those circumstances to bang the drum for the area we're most invested in.

[30 : 08] But because all of our ministries exist as part of an ecosystem, because they're interrelated and connected and dependent upon each other, we have to care about the whole thing more than any one area.

So yes, we're to pour ourselves into our teams, into our ministries, we're to pray about them, live them, talk about them, be excited about them. But in the end, we're to care and pray and live much more or just slightly more about the whole thing more than our own individual area.

We will most effectively make and grow mature disciples of Jesus Christ in ever greater number who with us will glorify God and enjoy him forever when we do so as a whole church, all working in unison, each part doing what it can as well as it can.

So think of the Formula One team. If you ask anyone on the team what their job is, I think it's the McLaren team that would say this, anyone on that team, if they're asked what their job is, their answer is the same.

My job is to get that car around the track as fast as possible so that we win the world championship. Some do that by changing the tires and the pit stop and they do their job by thinking all the time about how to cut milliseconds off that pit stop.

[31 : 39] Others do it by designing and redesigning components in the car to help the fuel and acceleration boosts and all these things that I don't understand. But only one or two of them do it by driving around the track.

As a church, no matter what area of ministry we're involved in, we worship together to make and grow mature disciples in ever a greater number. Some of us do that by leading Bible studies so that we're growing to maturity.

Others do it by making sure that buildings are presentable on a Sunday so that visitors can be welcomed warmly by those who play their part by doing welcome ministry. I don't know about you, but when I hear that Christians are to take seriously a massive list of things, that they're to take seriously personal evangelism in all of life, that they're to be doing acts of service behind the scenes, that they're to be able to teach the Bible clearly and effectively, that they're to know and love everyone in their church, that they're to mentor people, that they're to make disciples that do all of these things, that they're to have people in their homes week after week.

When I hear all of these things, it leaves me feeling rather inadequate. and deflated. How on earth am I meant to do all of these things? Well, how liberating it is to know that that isn't my personal responsibility to do it all.

And it isn't yours either. Lewis Hamilton doesn't build the engine. He doesn't change the tires. He doesn't choose the provider of fuel for the car.

[33 : 24] It is our corporate responsibility to worship and make disciples. So whatever team you're on, whatever way you're involved, we have the same purpose.

the person who fuels the car knows that his job is to win the world championship. Well, for us, if you come in to make the building ready for a Sunday, that is you playing your part in making and growing disciples, mature disciples of Jesus Christ in every greater number.

Do you help it release the words? That's you making and growing disciples in every greater number. leading at Christianity explored this evening.

That is making and growing disciples of Jesus Christ in every greater number. Same goes for the welcome team, the sound team, any other ministry that we have in the church.

Each of us doing what we can do with what we're gifted with, with what we're able to do, no matter what letter we come under, that is the church striving to make and grow mature disciples together.

[34 : 38] The church is a great thing because Christians aren't solo artists. Committing to a church is one of the best things we can ever do because it is as we work together, as we work in unison with other believers in the church that we most effectively minister to the world.

Amen. But before we sing, I think it would be good to just have a reminder of our vows together. So as we finish, let's take some time to remember our vows of membership, the basis of our partnership together.

As we join the church, we make promises to God and to one another because membership in a church isn't like being a member of the gym. At a gym, you can take up your membership and just look for all the perks that you want that suit you.

But that's not the case in the church. When we speak about membership, we often talk about partnership because that's really what we are together, partners in the gospel, partners in our family business, the business of multifaceted worship.

And so it fits that our vows express the various parts of our worship together. So we can see, I think it's on the screens, that our witness is expressed both in vow one, in what we believe together, but also in how we promise to live our lives as we confess Christ before men.

[36 : 23] And our obedience, well, that's expressed in vow one as we confess that Christ is our Lord. But it's also in vow three as we promise to be faithful in reading the Bible and in prayer.

That's, of course, primarily as we meet corporately for preaching and prayer, but also personally. And vow five as we promise to serve him in our daily work, living for Jesus in our occupations.

And our renewal is expressed in vow two as we meet regularly with the Lord's people on the Lord's day. Sundays are vital to our worship in every sense of the word.

And we see again in vow three that what we're faithful in is the Bible and prayer. And we can see our sharing together in the body of Christ is expressed in vow two.

We meet together on the Lord's day. We join with brothers and sisters to worship. We greet and encourage each other as we gather. In vow four, we give of ourselves for the sake of our brothers and sisters.

[37 : 34] And involvement expressed in vow four too. We sacrificially give of our time, our talents, and our money for the family business. to support and encourage and facilitate an ongoing ministry.

And finally, our partnership again expressed in vow four where we're not just interested in our own ministries but God's work throughout the world.

These vows are the basis of our partnership together. So as we're reminded of them, let's keep on being a worshipping people. Let's pray.

Father, as we marvel at what you've promised, we ask that you would fix this grand vision of the future upon us.

That we would never lose sight of what awaits us. And Lord, we ask for your help as a church. Bless our ministries. and commit us again to the task set before us.

[38 : 45] That we would be rejoicing for years to come in more disciples made and grown to maturity here amongst us. For we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.