

Multiplying Hope through Healthy Churches

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Purpose: To connect with those who have an active relationship with Church Doctor Ministries as peers in ministry, clients, and partners in prayer and support.

The Church Doctor® Report provides a quick read of strategic and influential information.

(To sign up: email johnwargowsky@churchdoctor.org)

Church Health and Spiritual Vitamins

The New Testament uses several metaphors that describe the Christian Church. It is called the people of God, the vine and the branches, the household of God, a royal priesthood—even the very body of Christ. One thing is clear: Your church is a living organism! As such, it can be healthy, get sick, or even die, like all living creatures. The Head—Jesus—is perfect. He died, but rose again and lives forever. He is the Head of every church. He is perfect. Yet, from the neck on down? That is a different issue!

My dad died when I was a junior in college. He was in his middle forties. My mom was a young widow. Dad suffered from chronic asthma. It was the result of a childhood bout with pneumonia. Health is a big deal. Good health allows you to be productive and vibrant. Poor health cripples what you can achieve. This applies to you.

Spiritual health can be rich and vibrant, or it can be nominal. The productivity of God's Kingdom is determined by your spiritual health—and mine. Christians are like cells in the body of Christ. They impact every church. That affects a whole nation. At some point, what you see on the news or read online is connected to the aggregate spiritual health of millions of individuals. Nations rise and fall on the spiritual health of people who make billions of decisions every day: for good or for evil.

Kent R. Hunter is the founder of Church Doctor Ministries, now led by Tracee J. Swank. Our team



helps churches that want to effectively reach unchurched people: training Christians in mission principles that work. God wants lost people to be found and brought into your church.

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How Healthy Is Your Church?

When you see your physician, you likely start with a nurse who checks your vitals. During my early years of ministry, my worst part of the doctor's visit was being weighed. Why? At that time, I was overweight—and I knew, when the doctor saw me, I'd hear it again. I told myself, "Hey, I'm a busy pastor. I don't have time to exercise. Besides, with all those church dinners, people bring their favorite dish. Who could blame me for overeating, right?" What a lie!

The local body of Christ—your church—can also become overweight. Too much fellowship and not much mission: God's people behave "so heavenly minded, they're no earthly good." So, what shape is your church in—and what are you going to do about it?

When you visit your doctor's office, they take your blood pressure, listen to your heart rate, and—of course—record your weight. Jesus is often referred to as "The Great Physician." There is no debate about whether Jesus wants your church to be productive—and reproductive. After all, isn't that what His mission for you and me is all about? Isn't that what our world desperately needs—to be more *spiritually healthy*? Eternally fit? Energetically reproductive—on the spiritual scale?

The Role of Vitamins

The Great Physician has a powerful prescription: "Seek first the Kingdom of God...and His righteousness"—the *right* way to be healthy—the best contribution you can make. Healthy Christ-followers are used by God to influence others for eternity. *Unhealthy* believers are "saved" by God's grace, but often they are so heavenly minded they are no earthly good. Jesus sends followers on a mission, but many are overweight from too many potlucks. Technically, it's called *koinonitis*: inflammation of the fellowship.

What might the Holy Spirit do to bring greater spiritual vitality to you, me, your church, our world? If only there was a spiritual pill—a prescription we could take on a daily basis. What could it be? How could you and I get spiritually healthier?

Some would prescribe: "Go to worship and hear a good message from God's powerful Word." Good idea! Yet, who takes in nourishment only once a week, for just an hour? Doesn't it seem like we need a daily dose for everyday faith?

Feeding on Scripture

In almost every church there is a minority group of people that seem to be "spiritually healthy." They just seem to know more about God. They somehow got the discipline to read the Scripture on a regular basis. And they've done it for so long they seem to know—what does the Bible call it? "The mind of Christ." Sometimes we call it "the will of God." We might call them "wise men—and women."

So, what happens? Preachers and those who are "regulars" in Bible study enthusiastically encourage others to join a Bible class or a home group. A great idea! And the result? Some actually do it! How many? A small percentage of church members—in most congregations—participate in some form of Bible study. Yet, most often, it's still just once a week. When you think about Scripture as "food for the soul," hearing a sermon on Sunday and participating in a class or home group only once a week isn't much. You may be spiritually starving.

Some denominations and other Christian publishers print booklets of daily devotions. They usually start with a Bible passage and then unpack it, applying it to life. A great start!

So, where is the average Christian on Bible knowledge? That is a great question. At Church Doctor Ministries, we did some research. It's not scientifically profound, but you'll get the idea.

The Research

We asked church members if they knew much about the first great story of the Bible: Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Anyone who has been around a church for a while knows the story—or do they?

We asked people, “Do you know that God told Adam and Eve they could eat the fruit of any tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?” Most everybody gets that. They know the devil had a part in that scenario.

Then we asked them, “What was the fruit on that tree?” Many of the respondents said, “Apples.” In truth, the Bible says nothing about what fruit was on that tree. So, why would so many people think it was an apple tree?

What is that protrusion in the front of your throat? What do most people call that? “Adam’s apple.” It’s a myth, not a fact. The *legend* is that it was an apple, it was a sin, and it’s stuck in Adam’s throat.

Actually, there is a biblical reference to an apple. In several places, the Bible says, “You are the apple of God’s eye.” It refers to the retina, the most precious part. It reflects that you are very precious to God. Of course, that’s why Jesus died for you. And it’s a great motive to spend more time learning about the wisdom of God’s one and only Book!

Research on Bible Reading

For decades, our Church Doctors have worked with congregations, helping them become stronger in faith and more effective for outreach. Our Church Doctors have worked with over 1,700 congregations in the United States alone—from 78 different denominations and from nondenominational and independent churches. In each church, everyone in worship completed an anonymous survey. Our data comes from well over 10,000 surveys. One of the many questions in the survey is about Bible reading. The question is, “How often do you read the Bible?” Here are the results:

Daily:	17%
5-6 times a week:	8%
3-4 times a week:	11%
1-2 times a week:	26%
Occasionally:	13%
Not at all:	26%

Notice that 65% of those in worship said they read the Bible “1-2 times a week,” “occasionally,” or “not at all.” How would you like to fly in an airplane where 65% of the pilots said they read the flight manual with those responses?

In our one-on-one interviews with a cross section of the members of these churches, we shared some of this information. We asked, “Why do you think so few people rarely or never read the Bible?”

Here is a summary of what we heard:

1. Most people respond, “I don’t have time”—then they pause and say, “I don’t take the time.”
2. Then they say, “Most devotions are more academic and don’t relate to the real challenges in my life.”

Here is a summary of what we learned:

1. Scripture-based devotions should be like a short, spiritual “shot in the arm”—three to five minutes.
2. They should relate to real challenges ordinary people encounter in everyday life.
3. The weekly theme of spiritual issues should be spread over seven days. Each entry should be different, but related to a similar area of life.
4. The Scripture should not be at the beginning of the devotion, but at the end. It provides the profound impact of God's Word applied to real life.
5. Each short Scripture verse should speak directly to the topic, but use different reputable translations to provide the best content available.
6. The one year of daily readings can be offered to everyone in your church.
7. As an outreach, members should be encouraged to give a copy to unchurched friends, relatives, neighbors, those at work or school—as well as those who attend other churches. (This approach plants an “outreach worldview” in the hearts and minds of church members. It can become a way to introduce new people to God.)

The Book of Daily Devotions

After years of field-testing and revising, this book is called *An Apple a Day: A Daily Dose for Everyday Faith*. It is available from Church Doctor Ministries or from Amazon. It provides a short, daily reading each day for one year. Each reading includes a “prescription” from a Church Doctor and the “punchline” from Scripture.

In reality, five minutes a day for 365 days equals 1,825 minutes, which is a little longer than 30 hours.

Invite everyone you know to join you in the one-year Apple a Day Challenge. Announce it in church. Email or text your friends. Post it on your website. Share it on social media. Put the solution to growing faith in the hands of everyone you know. Give the book to family, friends, and coworkers. Move the movement. When you do, God gives you the power to change the nation and the world, one person at a time.