

"9Marks, as a ministry, has taken basic biblical teaching about the church and put it into the hands of pastors. Bobby, by way of these study guides, has taken this teaching and delivered it to the person in the pew. I am unaware of any other tool that so thoroughly and practically helps Christians understand God's plan for the local church. I can't wait to use these studies in my own congregation."

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"Bobby Jamieson has done local church pastors an incredible service by writing these study guides. Clear, biblical, and practical, they introduce the biblical basis for a healthy church. But more importantly, they challenge and equip church members to be part of the process of improving their own church's health. The studies work for individual, small group, and larger group settings. I have used them for the last year at my own church and appreciate how easy they are to adapt to my own setting. I don't know of anything else like them. Highly recommended!"

Michael Lawrence, Senior Pastor, Hinson Baptist Church, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*

"This is a Bible study that is actually rooted in the Bible and involves actual study. In the 9Marks Healthy Church Study Guides series a new standard has been set for personal theological discovery and corresponding personal application. Rich exposition, compelling questions, and clear syntheses combine to give a guided tour of ecclesiology—the theology of the church. I know of no better curriculum for generating understanding of and involvement in the church than this. It will be a welcome resource in our church for years to come."

Rick Holland, Senior Pastor, Mission Road Bible Church, Prairie Village, Kansas

"In America today we have the largest churches in the history of our nation, but the least amount of impact for Christ's kingdom. Slick marketing and finely polished vision statements are a foundation of sand. The 9Marks Healthy Church Study Guides series is a refreshing departure from church-growth materials, towards an in-depth study of God's Word that will equip God's people with his vision for his Church. These study guides will lead local congregations to abandon secular methodologies for church growth and instead rely on Christ's principles for developing healthy, God-honoring assemblies."

Carl J. Broggi, Senior Pastor, Community Bible Church, Beaufort, South Carolina; President, Search the Scriptures Radio Ministry

"Anyone who loves Jesus will love what Jesus loves. The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus loves the church. He knows about and cares for individual churches and wants them to be spiritually healthy and vibrant. Not only has Jesus laid down his life for the church but he has also given many instructions in his Word regarding how churches are to live and function in the world. This series of Bible studies by 9Marks shows how Scripture teaches these things. Any Christian who works through this curriculum, preferably with other believers, will be helped to see in fresh ways the wisdom, love, and power of God in establishing the church on earth. These studies are biblical, practical, and accessible. I highly recommend this curriculum as a useful tool that will help any church embrace its calling to display the glory of God to a watching world."

Thomas Ascol, Senior Pastor, Grace Baptist Church of Cape Coral, Florida; Executive Director, Founders Ministries

9MARKS HEALTHY CHURCH STUDY GUIDES

Built upon the Rock: The Church

Hearing God's Word: Expository Preaching

The Whole Truth about God: Biblical Theology

God's Good News: The Gospel

Real Change: Conversion

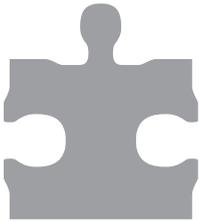
Reaching the Lost: Evangelism

Committing to One Another: Church Membership

Guarding One Another: Church Discipline

Growing One Another: Discipleship in the Church

Leading One Another: Church Leadership



GOD'S GOOD NEWS: THE GOSPEL

Bobby Jamieson

Mark Dever, General Editor

Jonathan Leeman, Managing Editor

HEALTHY CHURCH STUDY GUIDES



CROSSWAY
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

God's Good News: The Gospel

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INTRODUCTION

What does the local church mean to you?

Maybe you love your church. You love the people. You love the preaching and the singing. You can't wait to show up on Sunday, and you cherish fellowship with other church members throughout the week.

Then again, maybe your church is just a place you show up to a couple times a month. You sneak in late, duck out early.

We at 9Marks are convinced that the local church is where God means to display his glory to the nations. And we want to help you catch this vision, together with your whole church.

The 9Marks Healthy Church Study Guides are a series of six- or seven-week studies on each of the “nine marks of a healthy church” plus one introductory study. These nine marks are the core convictions of our ministry. To provide a quick introduction to them, we've included a chapter from Mark Dever's book *What Is a Healthy Church?* with each study. We don't claim that these nine marks are the most important things about the church or the only important things about the church. But we do believe that they are biblical and therefore helpful for churches.

So, in these studies, we're going to work through the biblical foundations and practical applications of each mark. The ten studies are:

- *Built upon the Rock: The Church* (the introductory study)
- *Hearing God's Word: Expository Preaching*
- *The Whole Truth about God: Biblical Theology*
- *God's Good News: The Gospel*
- *Real Change: Conversion*
- *Reaching the Lost: Evangelism*
- *Committing to One Another: Church Membership*

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- *Guarding One Another: Church Discipline*
- *Growing One Another: Discipleship in the Church*
- *Leading One Another: Church Leadership*

Each session of these studies takes a close look at one or more passages of Scripture and considers how to apply it to the life of your congregation. We hope they are equally appropriate for Sunday school, small groups, and other contexts where a group of two to two-hundred people can come together and discuss God's Word.

These studies are mainly driven by observation, interpretation, and application questions, so get ready to speak up! We also hope that these studies provide opportunities for people to reflect together on their experiences in the church, whatever those experiences may be.

What's the last piece of good news you heard? What made it so good? What difference did it make in your life?

As Christians, we are people of good news. We believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the best news in the world. And the gospel is just that: news. It's the announcement of what God has done in Christ to reconcile sinners to himself.

But how well do we know the gospel? Could you share the gospel with someone else off the top of your head?

The gospel is the most important message any of us have ever heard. So it's more than worth our while to spend a few weeks digging into its depth and riches. In this study we're going to explore the message of the gospel through the simple outline: God-Man-Christ-Response. And we're going to consider what it means to live a gospel-driven life, and to live together as a gospel-driven church. Let's find out what makes the good news so good!

AN ESSENTIAL MARK OF A HEALTHY CHURCH: A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOOD NEWS

BY MARK DEVER

(Originally published as chapter 7 of What Is a Healthy Church?)

It is particularly important for our churches to have sound biblical theology in one special area—in our understanding of the good news of Jesus Christ, the gospel. The gospel is the heart of Christianity, and so it should be at the heart of our churches.

A healthy church is a church in which every member, young and old, mature and immature, unites around the wonderful good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. Every text in the Bible points to it or some aspect of it. So the church gathers week after week to hear the gospel rehearsed once again. A biblical understanding of the good news should inform every sermon, every act of baptism and communion, every song, every prayer, every conversation. More than anything else in the church's life, the members of a healthy church pray and long to know this gospel more deeply.

Why? Because the hope of the gospel is the hope of knowing the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). It's the hope of seeing him clearly and knowing him fully, even as we are fully known (1 Cor. 13:12). It's the hope of becoming like him as we see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

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GOSPEL BASICS

The gospel is not the news that we're okay. It's not the news that God is love. It's not the news that Jesus wants to be our friend. It's not the news that he has a wonderful plan or purpose for our life. The gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ died on the cross as a sacrificial substitute for sinners and rose again, making a way for us to be reconciled to God. It's the news that the Judge will become the Father, if only we repent and believe.

Here are four points I try to remember whenever sharing the gospel, whether in private or in public—(1) God, (2) man, (3) Christ, and (4) response. In other words:

- Have I explained that God is our holy and sovereign Creator?
- Have I made it clear that we humans are a strange mixture, wonderfully made in God's image yet horribly fallen, sinful, and separated from him?
- Have I explained who Jesus is and what he has done—that he is the God-man who uniquely and exclusively stands in between God and man as a substitute and resurrected Lord?
- And finally, even if I've shared all this, have I clearly stated that a person must respond to the gospel and must believe this message and so turn from his life of self-centeredness and sin?

Sometimes, it's tempting to present some of the very real benefits of the gospel as the gospel itself. And these benefits tend to be things that non-Christians naturally want, such as joy, peace, happiness, fulfillment, self-esteem, or love. Yet presenting them as the gospel is presenting a partial truth. And, as J. I. Packer says, "A half truth masquerading as the whole truth becomes a complete untruth."¹

Fundamentally, we don't need just joy or peace or purpose. We need God himself. Since we are condemned sinners, then, we need his forgiveness above all else. We need spiritual life. When we present the gospel less radically, we simply ask for false conversions and increasingly meaningless church membership lists, both of which make the evangelization of the world around us more difficult.

¹Quoted in J. I. Packer, "Saved by His Precious Blood: An Introduction to John Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*" in J. I. Packer and Mark Dever, *In My Place Condemned He Stood: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 113.

GOSPEL OVERFLOW

When a church is healthy and its members know and cherish the gospel above everything else, they will increasingly want to share it with the world. George W. Truett, a great Christian leader of the past generation and pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, said:

The supreme indictment that you can bring against a church . . . is that such a church lacks in passion and compassion for human souls. A church is nothing better than an ethical club if its sympathies for lost souls do not overflow, and if it does not go out to seek to point lost souls to the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Today, the members of our churches will spend far more time with non-Christians in their homes, offices, and neighborhoods for far longer than they will spend with other Christians—let alone non-Christians—on Sundays. Evangelism is not something we mainly do by inviting someone to church. Each of us has tremendous news of salvation in Christ. Let's not barter it for something else. Let's share it today!

A healthy church knows the gospel, and a healthy church shares it.



WEEK 1

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

GETTING STARTED

What is the gospel of Jesus Christ? You'd think that would be an easy question for Christians to answer. But if you ask fifty professing evangelical Christians that question, you're likely to get almost as many answers!

1. *What are some ways you've heard evangelical Christians define the gospel?*

MAIN IDEA

The gospel is the good news about what God has done to save sinners through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Christ.

DIGGING IN

The most detailed, systematic discussion of the gospel in the whole Bible is found in Paul's letter to the Romans, especially in the first four chapters.

After announcing that he is not ashamed of the gospel because the righteousness of God is revealed in it (Rom. 1:16–17), Paul begins his proclamation of the good news by delivering some sobering *bad news* in 1:18 through 3:20:

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. (1:18)

²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images

GOD'S GOOD NEWS

resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.
(1:21–23)

¹ Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. ² We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things.
(2:1–2)

⁹ What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written:

“None is righteous, no, not one;

¹¹ no one understands;

no one seeks for God.

¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;

no one does good,

not even one.” (3:9–12)

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. (3:19–20)

1. *To whom are human beings accountable? What passage(s) do you see this in?*

2. *What does God require of people? (Hint: See Rom. 1:21–23.)*

3. *Has any human being done what God requires of us? (Hint: See Rom. 3:9–12, 19–20.)*

4. *What are the results of humanity's universal rebellion against God? What is God's attitude toward humanity because of our sin? (Hint: See Rom. 1:18; 2:2; 3:19–20.)*

5. *Have you ever heard evangelistic presentations that minimized or ignored the bad news Paul explains in these chapters? If so,*

- How would you evaluate them in light of these passages?
- What do you think the results of “gospel” messages that ignore sin and God’s wrath will be?

6. *What are some problems that people tend to present as our main problem when they share the gospel?*

7. *What, according to Paul, is the most fundamental problem people face?*

To sum up, there are two main points that Paul is communicating in this three-chapter-long explanation of the bad news of humanity’s rebellion against God:

1. All people are accountable to God, who is our holy Creator and Lord, and who is worthy of our worship and obedience.
2. All people have rebelled against God, continually sin against God, and are therefore objects of God’s wrath.

Now, on to the *good news*:

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Rom. 3:21–26)

⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. (Rom. 4:4–5)

8. *What is God’s solution to the problem Paul has been expounding for three chapters?*

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9. According to Paul, how do people receive the salvation God offers in Christ?

10. The word “propitiation” (3:25) means “a sacrifice that satisfies and turns away God’s wrath.”

- a) Who needs to be propitiated? Why?
- b) Who does the propitiating? How?
- c) What is the result of Jesus’s propitiating death *for God*? (Hint: See Rom. 3:26.)
- d) What is the result of Jesus’s propitiating death *for those who believe in him*?

11. The word “justify” means “to declare someone to be righteous” (Rom. 3:24; 4:5; see also 3:20).

- According to Paul, on what basis can people be justified by God?
- Can we be justified by doing good works?

We could summarize Paul’s explanation of the good news in these passages in two main points:

1. Through putting Christ forward as a propitiation, God has made a way for guilty sinners to have their sins wiped out, to have God’s wrath turned away from them, and to be declared righteous in God’s sight.
2. The way we receive this salvation is through faith in Jesus, by trusting him alone to save us, not any good works that we do.

Putting it all together, we could summarize the gospel in four words: God, Man, Christ, Response.

God. God is the creator of all things. He is perfectly holy, worthy of all worship, and will punish sin.

Man. All people, though created good, have become sinful by nature. From birth, all people are alienated from God, hostile to God, and subject to the wrath of God.

Christ. Jesus Christ, who is fully God and fully man, lived a sinless life, died on the cross to bear God’s wrath in the place of all who would believe in him, and rose from the grave in order to give his people eternal life.

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Response. God calls everyone everywhere to turn from their sins and trust in Christ in order to be saved.

12. Here are some common misunderstandings of the gospel. How would you respond to them in light of the passages we've just studied?

- a) The gospel is that God wants us to live better lives.
- b) The gospel is that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.
- c) The gospel is that God's kingdom has come in Jesus and now he calls us to work with him to transform every aspect of human society.
- d) Can you think of others?

13. What do you think are some of the practical consequences of having a fuzzy definition of the gospel or a wrong definition of the gospel? What are some of the good results that should follow when we rightly define the gospel?

TEACHER'S NOTES FOR WEEK 1

DIGGING IN

1. Human beings are accountable to God, our Creator and Ruler. Romans 3:19 says that the law condemns our sin so that the whole world may be accountable to God. Romans 1:18 says that God's wrath is revealed against us, which indicates our moral accountability to him. Romans 2:2 says that God's judgment falls on those who practice evil, which again indicates our ultimate accountability to God.

2. God requires that people give him the honor, thanks, and worship that he is due.

3. In Romans 2:1–2; 3:9–12; and 3:19–20 Paul argues that all people without exception have rebelled against God, sinned against him, and failed to do what he requires of us.

4. The results of humanity's rebellion against God include:

- Our thinking has become futile (1:21).
- Our hearts have become darkened (1:21).
- We've claimed to be wise but have become fools (1:22).
- We've degraded ourselves by worshipping idols (1:23).

And, most fundamentally, because of our sin, God's attitude toward us is wrath. God is angry with us because of our sin and will punish us for our sin, unless we repent of sin and trust in Christ.

5. Answers will vary.

6. Many professing Christians' evangelism communicates that our main problem is:

- Disease, death, or poverty
- Broken relationships
- Low self-esteem
- Lack of purpose in life
- Political oppression

7. According to Paul, the most fundamental problem people face is the wrath of God. *God* is our problem because we have all sinned against him, he is perfectly holy and righteous, and he will punish all sin.

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8. God's solution to the problem Paul has expounded is the sacrificial death and resurrection of Christ.

9. People receive this salvation by faith, by trusting in Christ alone to save (vv. 23, 25). True faith involves recognizing that one is a sinner and turning from that sin, which the Bible calls "repentance."

10. Regarding the propitiation, the wrath-satisfying sacrifice of Jesus which verse 25 discusses:

- a) God is the one who needs to be propitiated, because his wrath is rightly against us because of our sin.
- b) Jesus (sent and commissioned by God the Father, and in obedience to God the Father) is the one who does the propitiating, by bearing the punishment we deserved for our sin on the cross.
- c) The result of Jesus's propitiating death *for God* is that he is now "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (v. 26). That is, God is both righteous, because he has punished sin exactly as it deserves, and he is able to *declare to be righteous* those who trust in Jesus, even though they are sinners.
- d) The result of Jesus's propitiating death *for those who believe in him* is that we are justified through faith in him alone. That is, when we trust in Jesus, God counts Jesus's righteousness to us, meaning that we are perfectly righteous in God's sight and all our sins are forgiven.

11. According to Paul, people can be justified on the basis of Christ's sacrifice, which atones for their sins (3:24–26), and his righteousness, which God counts to them (4:4–5). We receive this atoning sacrifice and righteousness through faith in Christ (3:22, 25, 26; 4:5).

12–13. There is a range of valid answers.

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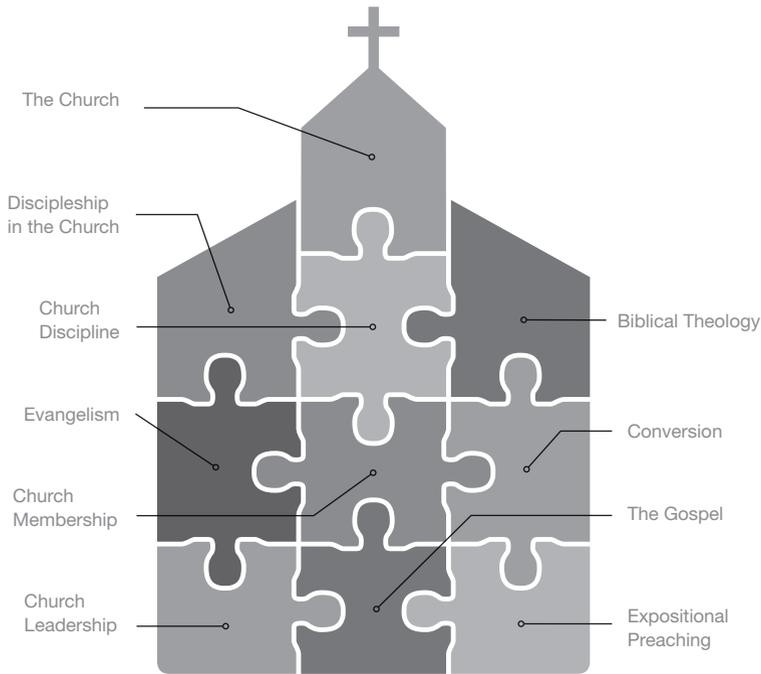
Building Healthy Churches

9Marks exists to equip church leaders with a biblical vision and practical resources for displaying God's glory to the nations through healthy churches.

To that end, we want to see churches characterized by these nine marks of health:

- 1 Expository Preaching**
- 2 Biblical Theology**
- 3 A Biblical Understanding of the Gospel**
- 4 A Biblical Understanding of Conversion**
- 5 A Biblical Understanding of Evangelism**
- 6 Biblical Church Membership**
- 7 Biblical Church Discipline**
- 8 Biblical Discipleship**
- 9 Biblical Church Leadership**

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Be sure to check out the rest of the
**9MARKS HEALTHY CHURCH
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This series covers the nine distinctives of a healthy church as originally laid out in *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* by Mark Dever. Each book explores the biblical foundations of key aspects of the church, helping Christians to live out those realities as members of a local body. A perfect resource for use in Sunday school, church-wide studies, or small group contexts.

