



Church Membership Guide

Introduction to Church Membership

1. The Meaning of “Church” in Scripture

a. *Ekklesia* — “The Called-Out Ones”

The primary New Testament word for “church” is *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία), meaning:

- *ek* — out of
- *kaleo* — to call
- **The universal church** — all believers everywhere
- **The local church** — a specific congregation in a specific place

The church is not a building.

The church is a people. **The people of God**

b. *Kyriakos* — “Belonging to the Lord”

The English word “church” comes from *kyriakos* (κυριακός), meaning:

“of the Lord” or “belonging to the Lord.”

The church does not belong to us.

It belongs to Christ, who purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28).

c. **The Church Is the Body of Christ *Soma* (σῶμα)**

Paul frequently calls the church the **body** (*soma*) of Christ (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4).

d. **Oikos** — “The Household of God”

The church is the *oikos* (οἶκος) — the household or family of God (Eph. 2:19). We are adopted sons and daughters, brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Church Is the Bride of Christ

Jesus purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28) and is sanctifying her for Himself (Eph. 5:25–27). To love Christ is to love His bride.

The Church Is the Temple of the Holy Spirit

God no longer dwells in buildings made with hands. He dwells among His people (Eph. 2:19–22; 1 Cor. 3:16–17). The gathered church is the Spirit’s dwelling place.

The Church Is a Kingdom Community

Believers are citizens of Christ’s kingdom (Col. 1:13), ambassadors of His reign (2 Cor. 5:20), and participants in His mission to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18–20).

In short: the church is God’s redeemed people, gathered under God’s Word, empowered by God’s Spirit, and sent for God’s mission.

2. The Importance of the Church in God’s Eternal Purpose

The church is not peripheral to God’s plan — it *is* God’s plan. Scripture teaches that:

The Church Displays God’s Wisdom

Through the church, the manifold wisdom of God is made known to the world and even to the heavenly realms (Eph. 3:10–11).

The Church Proclaims the Gospel

The church is the pillar and buttress of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). It is God’s chosen instrument for declaring the gospel to the nations.

The Church Forms Disciples

Jesus did not command us to make converts but disciples — and disciples are formed in the context of the local church (Acts 2:42–47; Heb. 10:24–25).

The Church Is God’s Family

Believers are adopted into God’s household (Eph. 2:19). The church is where spiritual mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters walk together in holiness and love.

The Church Is the Foretaste of the New Creation

Every gathering of believers is a preview of the coming kingdom — a small but real taste of the future glory when Christ reigns visibly over His people (Rev. 21–22).

The church is God’s chosen means to display His glory, advance His mission, and form His people into the likeness of Christ.

3. The Role of the Church in the Believer's Abiding in Christ

Jesus commands His followers:

“Abide in Me... apart from Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:4–5)

This abiding is not merely private or individual. God designed the church to be the primary environment where believers remain rooted in Christ.

We Abide in Christ Through the Word

The church is where the Word is preached, taught, read, sung, and obeyed (2 Tim. 4:1–2; Col. 3:16).

We Abide in Christ Through Worship

Corporate worship reorients our hearts toward God and strengthens our faith (Ps. 95; Heb. 10:25).

We Abide in Christ Through Fellowship

God uses the encouragement, correction, and love of other believers to keep us steadfast (Heb. 3:12–13; Acts 2:42).

We Abide in Christ Through the Ordinances

Baptism and the Lord's Supper visibly proclaim the gospel and nourish our faith (Rom. 6:3–4; 1 Cor. 11:23–26).

We Abide in Christ Through Service

Every believer is gifted by the Spirit to build up the body (1 Cor. 12:4–7; Eph. 4:11–16). Serving others deepens our dependence on Christ.

We Abide in Christ Through Accountability

The church protects us from sin, error, and spiritual drift (Gal. 6:1–2; Matt. 18:15–20).

A believer cannot abide in Christ apart from the means Christ Himself has given — and those means are found in the life of the local church.

4. Why This Manual Matters

This manual exists to help you understand the beauty, weight, and privilege of belonging to Christ's church. Church membership is not:

- a formality
- a tradition
- a club
- a consumer relationship

It is a **covenant commitment** to Christ and His people.

Each chapter will help you embrace biblical membership by calling you to:

- Unity
- Service
- Humility
- Prayer
- Family discipleship
- Gratitude

Our prayer is that you will see church membership not as an obligation, but as a **gift of grace**, a **means of abiding in Christ**, and a **joyful participation in God's eternal purpose**.

Chapter 1 — I Will Be a Functioning Church Member

Introduction: The Call to Belong

Church membership is not a casual association. It is a joyful calling. It is a commitment to Christ and to His people. Many treat church membership like a club—something to join, visit occasionally, and enjoy when convenient. But Scripture paints a very different picture.

A humorous story illustrates the point:

A pastor greeted a man after service and said, “You need to join the Army of the Lord!”

The man replied, “Pastor, I’m already in the Army of the Lord.”

The pastor asked, “Then why do I only see you at Christmas and Easter?”

The man whispered, “I’m in the secret service.”

It’s funny, but it reveals a real issue: many believers underestimate the importance of functioning membership. God never designed His church to be a place where a few serve and the rest observe. Every believer has a role. Every believer has a gift. Every believer is needed.

This chapter explores what Scripture teaches about church membership and how we live it out at Rise Fellowship.

1. Membership Means We Are All Necessary Parts of the Whole

Ephesians 4:1–16

Anchor Scripture:

Ephesians 4:16 (NKJV)

from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Paul teaches that:

- God gives leaders to equip the saints
- God gives every believer spiritual gifts
- The church grows when each part works properly

Membership is not about perks — it's about participation.

It's about recognizing that **you matter**, and the body cannot function as God intended without you.

Reflection:

- In what ways do you see yourself as a necessary part of the body
- Are there areas where you feel unsure about your role

Notes:

2. Membership Means We Are Different, But We Work Together

1 Corinthians 12:1–26

God intentionally designed His church with diversity:

- Different gifts
- Different strengths
- Different roles
- One Spirit
- One mission

No gift is unnecessary. No member is optional.

Every believer is needed for the body to grow and remain healthy.

Reflection:

- What spiritual gifts do you believe God has given you
- How have you used those gifts in the past
- What holds you back from using them more fully

Notes:

3. Membership Means Everything We Say and Do Is Based on Love

1 Corinthians 12:27–13:13

Paul places the “love chapter” in the middle of a conflict about spiritual gifts. His message is clear:

Without love, gifts lose their power.

Without love, service loses its meaning.

Without love, the church loses its witness.

Love is:

- Patient
- Kind
- Humble
- Selfless
- Truth-seeking
- Enduring

Love is the foundation of biblical membership.

Reflection:

- How does love shape the way you serve
- Are there people in the church you find difficult to love
- What would change if love became your first response

Notes:

4. Because Scripture Says We Are Necessary Parts, Membership Requires Availability

Once Scripture establishes that every believer is a vital part of the body, the next question is:

How can I function as a part of the body if I am not present with the body?

Availability is the first practical expression of biblical membership.

A body part cannot help the body if it is disconnected.

A believer cannot strengthen the church if they are rarely with the church.

Availability means:

- Showing up consistently
- Prioritizing worship and discipleship
- Being present in community
- Making space for God to use you

Your presence strengthens the church.

Your absence weakens it.

Reflection:

- What does availability look like in your current season
- What rhythms help you stay connected to your church family
- How does your presence encourage others

Notes:

5. Because Scripture Says We Are Connected, Membership Requires Accountability

If Scripture teaches that:

- We are one body
- We belong to one another
- We carry one another's burdens

Then accountability becomes the natural outworking of that truth.

A body part cannot thrive in isolation.

A believer cannot thrive without connection.

Accountability means:

- Staying reachable
- Communicating when you're struggling
- Letting leaders shepherd you
- Being open to encouragement and correction
- Refusing to disappear silently

When members drift without communication:

- The body cannot support them
- Leaders cannot shepherd them
- Relationships weaken
- Discipleship stalls
- The mission suffers

Reflection:

- How comfortable are you with being accountable to your church family
- Do you tend to withdraw when life gets difficult
- What would healthy accountability look like for you

Notes:

6. Church Membership Is Functioning Membership

Biblical membership is active, not passive.

It is joyful, not reluctant.

It is sacrificial, not self-focused.

Tom Rainer writes:

“The concept of an inactive church member is an oxymoron.”

A functioning member:

- Gives abundantly
- Serves joyfully
- Prays consistently
- Encourages faithfully
- Loves unconditionally

Reflection:

- What does “**functioning membership**” look like in your life right now
- What would it look like to give God a “blank check” with your service
- What step can you take this month to serve more intentionally

Notes:**Membership Pledge — The First Pledge****I am a church member.**

I like the metaphor of membership. It's not membership as in a civic organization or a country club. It's the kind of membership given to us in 1 Corinthians 12: “Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it.” Because I am a member of the body of Christ, I must be a functioning member, whether I am an “eye,” an “ear,” or a “hand.” As a functioning member, I will give. I will serve. I will minister. I will evangelize. I will study. I will seek to be a blessing to others. I will remember that “if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.”

Signature: _____**Date:** _____

Chapter 2 — I Will Be a Unifying Church Member

Opening Illustration & Introduction

During World War II, Hitler ordered all religious groups to unite so he could control them. Among the Brethren assemblies, half complied and half refused. Those who resisted suffered greatly—many lost family members to concentration camps.

After the war, bitterness ran deep. The two groups were divided, wounded, and unable to reconcile. Eventually, leaders from both sides agreed to meet at a quiet retreat. For several days, each man prayed, examined his own heart, and submitted himself to Christ’s commands.

When they finally gathered, something remarkable happened.

Francis Schaeffer later asked one of the men, “What did you do then?”

The man replied, **“We were just one.”**

As they confessed their hostility and yielded to the Holy Spirit, unity was restored. Love dissolved hatred. The world saw a testimony of Christ.

When love prevails among believers—especially in times of disagreement—it becomes one of the clearest marks of true discipleship.

Reflection:

- Have you ever been part of a church that lacked unity?
- Have you ever experienced a church that was beautifully unified?
- What made the difference?

Lesson Summary

In this session, we will see that Scripture emphasizes the responsibility of every church member to **create and maintain unity** within the church. We will explore:

- What unity is
- Why unity matters
- How unity is protected
- What threatens unity
- How unity impacts our witness

Tom Rainer writes:

“God desires for Christians to get along. Jesus said, ‘By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another’ (John 13:35). The world will know if we are Christians by the way we act toward one another.”

Unity is not optional. It is essential.

1. Unity Is Not Optional in the Church

Most believers have seen moments when unity was absent—church splits, tense business meetings, relational fractures. These moments grieve the heart of God because His church is meant to be marked by **love and unity**.

Paul praised the Ephesian church for this very reason:

Ephesians 1:15–16

“I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints...”

Their unity was so strong that people talked about it everywhere.

Reflection:

- What is Rise Fellowship known for in our community?
- What would it take for our community to say, “Those people truly love one another”?

But Paul didn’t stop with praise. He urged them to **keep pursuing unity**:

Ephesians 4:1–3

“...walk in a manner worthy of the calling... with humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Unity requires:

- Humility
- Gentleness
- Patience
- Love
- Intentional effort

Rainer writes:

“You have a responsibility as a church member. You are to be a source of unity. You are never to be a divisive force.”

Reflection:

- What can *you* do to pursue unity in this church?
- What happens if we fail to pursue unity?

Paul gives us the key:

Colossians 3:14

“And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

Love is the glue of unity.

Reflection:

- Why is love so essential to unity?
- How can you demonstrate love in ways that strengthen unity?

Fill-In-The-Blanks

- Paul praised the Ephesian church for their _____ in the Lord Jesus and their _____ toward all the saints.
- Unity requires: humility, gentleness, patience, _____ with one another in love, and being _____ to maintain unity.
- Rainer writes: “You have a responsibility as a church member. You are to be a source of _____.”
- According to Colossians 3:14, love _____ everything together in perfect harmony.

2. Gossip & Negative Talk Will Destroy Unity in the Church

Unity is precious—and fragile.

Few things destroy it faster than **gossip** and **negative talk**.

Paul lists gossip alongside some of the most destructive sins:

Romans 1:29–31

“...envy, murder, strife, deceit... gossips, slanderers...”

Gossip is not a small sin.

It is a **church-destroying sin**.

Rainer writes:

“Few things can destroy the unity of a church like gossip. A unified church is powerful. Gossip tears apart that unity and renders a church powerless.”

Two Responses to Gossip

1. Don't be a source of gossip.

If you're unsure whether something is gossip, don't say it.

2. Gently stop gossip when you hear it.

You don't need to be harsh.

You can simply say:

“I'd rather not talk about that. Let's not spread this further.”

James warns us:

James 3:6

“The tongue is a fire... setting on fire the entire course of life.”

Peter adds:

1 Peter 3:10–11

“Keep your tongue from evil... seek peace and pursue it.”

Reflection:

- What is a healthy definition of gossip?
- Why is gossip so damaging to unity?
- What should you do if someone brings gossip to you?

Fill-In-The-Blanks

- Gossip is listed in Scripture alongside sins such as envy, murder, strife, and _____.
- Gossip is not a small sin; it is a _____-destroying sin.
- A unified church is _____. Gossip tears apart that unity and renders a church _____.
- James says, “The tongue is a _____.”
- Peter instructs us to keep our tongue from _____ and to seek _____ and pursue it.

3. Forgiveness Will Foster Unity in the Church

If gossip destroys unity, **forgiveness restores it.**

Every believer has been hurt at some point—sometimes even by other Christians. Unity cannot survive without forgiveness.

Paul writes:

Colossians 3:12–13

“...bearing with one another and... forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”

Forgiveness is not optional.

It is a command.

It is a reflection of the gospel.

Jesus said:

Matthew 6:14–15

“If you forgive others... your heavenly Father will also forgive you.”

Forgiveness:

- Heals relationships
- Restores unity
- Reflects Christ
- Protects the church
- Demonstrates spiritual maturity

Reflection:

- Why is forgiveness essential for unity?
- Is there someone you need to forgive?
- How does remembering your own forgiveness help you forgive others?

Fill-In-The-Blanks

- Unity cannot survive without _____.
- Paul commands believers to forgive each other as the _____ has forgiven us.
- Forgiveness is not optional; it is a _____.

The Second Pledge

- I am a church member.

I will seek to be a source of unity in my church. I know there are no perfect pastors, staff, or other church members. But neither am I. I will not be a source of gossip or dissension. One of the greatest contributions I can make is to do all I can in God's power to help keep the church in unity for the sake of the gospel. Sign and Date

Chapter 3 — I Will Not Let My Church Be About My Preferences & Desires

Opening Illustration & Introduction

Imagine you're sitting in the stands at a high school football game. The team breaks the huddle, but instead of lining up against the opponent, they split into little groups arguing with each other.

Two players start shoving.

Another storms off the field shouting:

“Those idiots can't agree on anything!”

He points around:

- “Those two are arguing about the color of the uniforms.”
- “Those guys are fighting about how to kneel in the huddle.”
- “Those two are debating ‘personal football’ versus ‘social football.’”
- “Some think the less talented players should go play somewhere else.”
- “A few don't like the band's music.”
- “Others are arguing about how many players the other team has.”
- “And I'm quitting because I can pass better than the quarterback, but they won't let me play his position.”

It sounds ridiculous — because it is.

But this is exactly what happens in the local church when people care more about **their preferences** than **God's mission**.

We forget we're on the same team.

We forget we're fighting the same enemy.

We forget the church is not about *me* — it's about *Him*.

Reflection:

- Can you think of a time when someone (maybe even you) was more focused on personal preferences than the good of the group
- How did it affect unity and mission

Lesson Summary

Scripture teaches that church members must be willing to **lay down personal preferences** in order to serve others. Jesus challenged His disciples to seek to serve rather than be served. Church membership is not about getting our way — it is about giving ourselves away.

Tom Rainer writes:

“The strange thing about church membership is that you actually give up your preferences when you join... You are there to meet the needs of others. You are there to serve. You are there to give. You are there to sacrifice.”

This chapter helps us embrace that calling.

- When we focus on our preferences instead of God’s mission, we forget we are on the same _____.
- The church is not about _____ — it is about _____.
- Personal preferences become dangerous when they distract us from the church’s _____.

1. The Call to Serve Others

Serving others is not natural for most of us — but it was at the very heart of Jesus’ ministry.

Jesus said:

“The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

(Mark 10:45)

One of the clearest pictures of His servant heart is found in **John 13:1–17**, when Jesus washed His disciples’ feet.

Their feet were filthy — sweaty, dusty, smelly.

This was the job of the lowest servant in the house.

Yet Jesus — the One who created the universe — knelt down and washed them.

Peter was shocked.

He couldn’t imagine his Teacher doing something so low.

But Jesus wasn’t just washing feet.

He was redefining greatness.

He said:

“I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.”

Serving is not optional for followers of Jesus.

It is the lifestyle of the kingdom.

Reflection:

- Why is serving others so difficult for us
- How does Jesus’ example reshape your understanding of service

Paul’s Example of Service

Paul also saw himself as a servant. He wrote:

“Of this gospel I was made a servant according to the gift of God’s grace...”

(Ephesians 3:7)

Paul didn’t see service as beneath him — he saw it as an honor.

He understood that serving others is how the gospel moves forward.

Reflection:

- Why do you think Paul embraced the identity of a servant
- Do you see yourself as a servant of the gospel

When the Desire for Position Creeps In

Even Jesus’ disciples struggled with the desire for status.

In **Matthew 20:20–28**, the mother of James and John asked Jesus to give her sons the top positions in His kingdom.

The other disciples were furious — not because the request was wrong, but because they wanted those positions too.

Jesus used the moment to teach them:

“Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant...”

For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.”

Greatness in the kingdom is not measured by:

- position
- title

- recognition
- influence

Greatness is measured by **service**.

Tom Rainer writes:

“We will never find joy in church membership when we are constantly seeking things our way. True joy comes when we choose to be last.”

Reflection:

- Why does our culture view serving as something “beneath” us
- How can the church model a different way

Fill-In-the-Blanks

- Jesus said He came “not to be _____ but to _____.”
- When Jesus washed His disciples’ feet, He showed that true greatness is found in _____.
- Serving is not optional for followers of Jesus; it is the _____ of the kingdom.
- Jesus told His disciples, “I have given you an _____, that you also should do _____ as I have done to you.”
- Paul saw service not as a burden but as a _____ of God’s grace.

2. Serving Others Should Push Us Outside the Walls of the Church

Jesus said:

Matthew 28:19–20

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

Disciple-making does not primarily happen inside the church building.

The early church didn’t have a building.

They met in homes, courtyards, and the temple.

Most of their disciple-making happened:

- at work
- in the marketplace
- in their neighborhoods

- in their daily routines

The same is true for us.

But many churches drift inward — and when they do, they lose their mission.

Tom Rainer identified **ten warning signs** of inward-focused churches:

1. Worship wars
2. Endless meetings about trivial things
3. Facility fixation
4. Program addiction
5. Inward-focused budget
6. Excessive demands for pastoral care
7. Entitlement attitudes
8. More passion about change than the gospel
9. Anger and hostility
10. Evangelistic apathy

These are symptoms of a church that has forgotten its mission.

Reflection:

- Do you see any of these tendencies in our church
- What steps can we take to focus more on people outside our walls
- How can you personally help shift our culture outward

Notes:

3. Cultivating the Mind of Christ (“He Came to Serve”)

Serving others is difficult.

It goes against our instincts.

That’s why Paul urged the Philippian church to adopt the mindset of Christ.

Philippians 2:1–11

Paul calls believers to:

- be of the same mind
- walk in the same love
- reject selfish ambition
- consider others more important
- look to the interests of others

And then he gives us the ultimate example:

Jesus.

Paul describes Jesus’ mindset:

- 1. He did not cling to His rights as God.**
- 2. He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant.**
- 3. He humbled Himself.**
- 4. He obeyed to the point of death — even death on a cross.**

This is not just theology.

This is a blueprint for how we are called to live.

Rainer writes:

“Philippians 2 is not only a description of Christ’s obedience; it is an example for us to follow... You always ask first what you can do for your church.”

If we approach church membership with entitlement —

“I want my way... I deserve this... I prefer that...” —

we have missed the heart of Christ.

The question is not:

“What can my church do for me?”

The question is:

“What can I do for my church?”

Reflection:

- Who in our church best reflects the mind of Christ through humble service
- What specific attitudes or habits do you need to surrender to cultivate the mind of Christ
- How can you practice putting others first this week

Notes:

Fill-In-the-Blanks

- Paul calls believers to reject _____ ambition and consider others more _____ than themselves.
- Jesus did not cling to His _____ as God but took the form of a _____.
- Jesus humbled Himself and obeyed to the point of _____.
- Philippians 2 teaches us that the mindset of Christ is one of _____ and _____.
- The question is not “What can my church do for me?” but “What can _____ do for _____?”

The Third Pledge — Authentic Version

I am a church member.

I will not let my church be about my preferences and desires. That is self-serving. I am a member of this church to serve others and to serve Christ. My Savior went to the cross for me. I can deal with any inconveniences, discomforts, or preferences that are not my own. I choose to put others first for the sake of the gospel.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 4 — I Will Pray for My Church Leaders

Opening Illustration & Introduction

For more than three decades, the Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development has studied the lives of pastors. Their findings are sobering — and honestly, heartbreaking. Behind the sermons, the smiles, and the Sunday routines, many pastors and ministry leaders are carrying burdens few people ever see.

Here's a glimpse of what their research uncovered:

Hours and Pay

- 90% of pastors report working **55–75 hours per week**
- 50% feel **unable to meet the demands** of the job
- 70% feel **grossly underpaid**

Training and Preparedness

- 90% feel **inadequately trained** for the demands of ministry
- 90% say ministry is **nothing like what they expected**

Health and Well-Being

- 90% feel **fatigued or worn out** weekly
- 80% feel **unqualified or discouraged**
- 71% are **beyond normal burnout**
- 70% battle **ongoing depression**
- Only 23% feel **content** in their calling, church, and home

Spiritual Life

- 72% only study Scripture to prepare sermons
- Only 38% read the Bible for personal devotion

- Only 26% feel spiritually nourished

Marriage and Family

- 80% say ministry has **hurt their family**
- 80% of spouses feel the pastor is **overworked**
- 80% of spouses feel **under-appreciated**
- Many pastor's kids feel they live under a microscope

Church Relationships

- 70% have **no close friends**
- 40% face **serious conflict** with a church member monthly

Longevity

- 80% of ministry graduates leave within **five years**
- Only 10% retire as pastors
- 1,500 pastors leave ministry **every month**
- 1,300 are fired **every month**
- 50% would quit today if they had another way to provide for their family

These numbers aren't just statistics — they represent real people, real families, and real spiritual battles. And this isn't just about senior pastors. **Every pastor and every leader in the church carries weight, pressure, and spiritual warfare.**

Reflection:

- Do these statistics surprise you
- Do they concern you
- How might they change the way you view your pastors and leaders

Lesson Summary

Scripture calls church members to pray — consistently, intentionally, and sacrificially — for **all pastors and all church leaders**. Shepherding souls is a sacred calling, but it is also a spiritual battleground. The enemy knows that if he can wound the shepherds, the sheep will scatter.

Your pastors and leaders need your prayers more than you may ever realize.

Reflection:

- Why do you think pastors and leaders need prayer so consistently

Church Members Are Called to Pray for Their Pastors and Church Leaders

The Bible's commands to pray for spiritual leaders are subtle but unmistakable. Paul — who carried the weight of planting churches, discipling believers, and facing persecution — repeatedly begged the church to pray for him and his ministry team.

Here are a few examples:

Romans 15:30–31

Prayer for **deliverance, protection, and fruitfulness**.

Colossians 4:2–4

Prayer for **open doors, clarity, and boldness**.

Ephesians 6:18–20

Prayer for **courage** in spiritual warfare.

1 Thessalonians 5:25

“**Brothers, pray for us.**”

2 Thessalonians 3:1–2

Prayer for the **spread of the gospel** and **protection from evil people**.

Hebrews 13:18

Prayer for **integrity** and **honorable conduct**.

What Did Paul Ask For?

Paul consistently asks for:

- **Boldness** to preach the gospel
- **Opportunities** to share Christ

- **Protection** from spiritual and physical danger
- **Integrity** in ministry
- **Strength** to endure hardship

These are the same needs your pastors and leaders carry today.

Three Areas Where Your Pastors and Leaders Need Prayer

Tom Rainer highlights three practical areas where church members should pray faithfully. Here they are, expanded to include **all pastors and all leaders**.

1. Pray for the Pastors and Their Families

Pastors and their families often feel like they live in a **glass bowl** — constantly watched, evaluated, and judged. Scripture does call pastors to lead their homes well (1 Timothy 3:5), but the pressure can be overwhelming.

Rainer writes:

“Few families face the pressures and expectations as the families of pastors.”

This includes:

- Senior pastors
- Associate pastors
- Youth pastors
- Worship pastors
- Children’s ministry leaders
- Elders
- Deacons
- Ministry directors

Every leader’s family feels the weight.

A Word of Honor for Every Pastor’s Spouse

Thom Rainer’s letter to pastor’s wives captures the heart of what many ministry spouses experience:

- They carry a **thankless role**
- They absorb criticism

- They live with constant expectations
- They often feel lonely
- They rarely receive appreciation
- They support their spouse in ways no one sees

This applies not only to senior pastors' wives, but to **every spouse of every pastor and leader**.

Reflection:

- What expectations do you place on your pastors and leaders
- Are those expectations biblical
- Do you pray for their families regularly

2. Pray for the Pastors' and Leaders' Protection

Pastors and leaders are prime targets for spiritual attack. When a leader falls, the damage is widespread.

Paul writes:

1 Timothy 3:2–4

Pastors must be **above reproach** — not perfect, but trustworthy.

Rainer explains:

“To be ‘above reproach’ means to be above finding fault. The pastor is to have a reputation above most everyone else.”

Paul continues:

1 Timothy 3:7

“...so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.”

The enemy sets traps — intentionally, strategically, aggressively.

Rainer writes:

“The devil has devised a plan to bring the pastor down. He has set a trap.”

This applies to:

- Senior pastors
- Associate pastors
- Youth pastors
- Worship pastors

- Elders
- Deacons
- Ministry leaders

Reflection:

- Why does the enemy target pastors and leaders so aggressively
- How does this increase your urgency to pray for them

Your prayers matter.

Your prayers protect.

Your prayers push back darkness.

3. Pray for Your Pastors' and Leaders' Physical and Mental Health

Pastors and leaders carry the weight of:

- teaching
- counseling
- leading
- decision-making
- conflict resolution
- spiritual warfare
- emotional burdens
- constant expectations

James warns:

James 3:1

“Not many of you should become teachers...”

The responsibility is heavy.

The emotional load is real.

The spiritual pressure is constant.

Rainer writes:

“Serving and leading a church well expends all of a pastor’s energy... The pastor often neglects his own health and well-being.”

This is true for **every leader** in the church.

Reflection:

- Why do pastors and leaders often neglect their own health
- How can you pray for and encourage them in these areas

Notes:

The Fourth Pledge — Authentic Version

I am a church member.

I will pray for my pastors and church leaders every day. I understand that their work is never ending. Their days are filled with demands that bring emotional highs and lows. They must deal with critics. They must shepherd their families. They must carry spiritual burdens that few people ever see. Because they cannot do this in their own strength, I will pray for their protection, wisdom, health, and endurance daily.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 5 — I Will Lead My Family to Be Healthy Church Members

Opening Illustration & Introduction

Three pastors met for coffee one day and discovered they all had the same problem: bats had infested their church buildings.

The first pastor said,

“I got so mad I fired a shotgun at them. Put holes in the ceiling — didn’t touch a single bat.”

The second pastor said,

“I trapped them alive, drove them fifty miles away, and released them. They still beat me back to the church.”

The third pastor said,

“I solved the problem completely.”

The others leaned in.

“How?”

He replied,

“I baptized them and let them join the church. Haven’t seen them since.”

It’s funny — but it’s also painfully true.

Tom Rainer notes a common, unhealthy pattern among church members:

Get excited → Get involved → Discover imperfections → Get discouraged → Leave the church

Many families repeat this cycle over and over.

Reflection:

- Have you seen this pattern in others
- Has it ever shown up in your own life

Lesson Summary

This session focuses on the biblical responsibility to **lead our families** toward healthy, joyful, committed church membership. We’ve already explored:

- Serving within the church
- Laying down personal preferences
- Praying for church leaders

Now we turn to the home — the first-place discipleship is formed.

Healthy church membership begins in the living room long before it shows up in the sanctuary.

Reflection:

- What are some hindrances that keep families from being more committed to the church

Church and Family

Paul draws a powerful connection between the family and the church in **Ephesians 5–6**. He uses the family as a living illustration of how the church should function — and uses the church as a model for how families should love one another.

Ephesians 5:22–6:4

Paul describes:

- Wives relating to husbands as the church relates to Christ
- Husbands loving their wives as Christ loves the church
- Children obeying parents as we obey our heavenly Father
- Parents disciplining their children as God disciplines us

The family is a picture of the church.

The church is a picture of the family.

Rainer writes:

“Just as we are to sacrifice and love our families unconditionally, so are we to love the churches where God has placed us.”

He continues:

“Our family members are not perfect, and neither are the members of the church. We are to find joy in serving both.”

Healthy families strengthen the church.

Healthy churches strengthen families.

Reflection:

- How does this passage shape your understanding of the relationship between your home and your church family

Fill-In-the-Blanks

- Paul teaches that the _____ is a picture of the church, and the _____ is a picture of the family.
- We are called to love our families and our churches with the same kind of _____ love.
- Healthy families strengthen the _____, and healthy churches strengthen _____.

Three Ways to Lead Your Family Toward Healthy Church Membership

Paul's teaching leads naturally into three practical commitments:

- **Pray together as a family for the church**
- **Worship together as a family**
- **Love the church and encourage your family to do the same**

Let's walk through each one.

1. Pray Together as a Family for the Church

Last week we explored the urgent need to pray for pastors and leaders. But have you ever considered praying for your church **as a family**?

Rainer suggests praying for leaders in these areas:

1. Spiritual protection
2. Protection from moral failure
3. Faithfulness in preaching
4. Their families
5. Encouragement
6. Physical strength
7. Courage
8. Discernment
9. Wisdom

And praying for the church in these areas:

- Lives transformed by the gospel
- Unity in the body

- Impact in the community
- A heart for the lost
- Sound doctrine
- Specific ministries
- Worship gatherings

Few practices will cultivate love for the church in your home like praying for it together.

Rainer writes:

“Teaching our family to love the church often begins by praying together for the church where God placed us.”

Reflection:

- Do you pray regularly with your family for the church
- If not, what simple steps could help you begin

Notes:

2. Worship Together as a Family

Another essential way to lead your family toward healthy church membership is to **worship together**.

Rainer writes:

“As a church member, I am responsible for encouraging and leading my entire family to worship together in the church.”

This includes:

- Spouses worshiping together
- Parents bringing their children
- Singles modeling faithful worship for others

The writer of Hebrews emphasizes the importance of gathering:

Hebrews 10:19–25

“Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together... but encouraging one another...”

Some believers had stopped gathering — and it weakened the church.

Families should strive to worship together:

- **Corporately** — on Sundays
- **Privately** — in the home

Reflection:

- What hinders your family from worshiping together
- What steps can you take to emphasize the importance of weekly worship

When Your Family Isn't United Spiritually

Some church members attend without their spouse or children. This is not new. Paul addressed this in **1 Corinthians 7:10–14**, encouraging believing spouses to be a witness to their unbelieving partner.

Rainer writes:

“God has given such people a mission field: their families.”

If you worship alone, you are not alone.

Your church family stands with you.

Your home is your mission field.

Reflection:

- What is the role of a believing spouse toward an unbelieving spouse
- How does this shape their church membership

Worshiping Together: A Heart Check

To help us reflect on the importance of faithful worship, consider this anonymous poem. It paints a painfully honest picture of what happens when people approach church with apathy, criticism, and self-centeredness:

If You Want to Kill the Church

(Anonymous)

If you want to kill the church,

Never go to your church or meetings held there.

If you do go, be late — it's no one's affair.

If the weather is bad, either too hot or snowing,

Just stay home and rest, for there'll be others going.
But should you attend, be sure and remember
To find fault with the work, each official and member.
Be sure to hold back on your offerings and tithes,
The bills will be paid by the rest of the guys.
And never take office if offered the post,
But eagerly criticize work of the host.
If not on a committee you're placed, be sore!
If you find that you are, don't attend anymore.
When asked your opinion on this thing or that,
Have nothing to say — just turn 'em down flat.
Then after the meeting, shine out like the sun
By telling the folks how it should have been done.
Don't do any more than you possibly can,
Leave the work for some other woman or man.
And when you see faithful ones work themselves sick,
Then stand up and holler, "It's run by a clique!"

This poem is humorous — but it's also convicting.

It reminds us that **healthy church membership begins with healthy attitudes in the home.**

Reflection:

- What attitudes in this poem do you see in the modern church
- How can your family model a healthier, more faithful approach to worship

3. Love the Church and Encourage Your Family to Do the Same

You've probably heard someone say,

"I love Jesus, but I don't like the church."

But that's like someone telling you,

"I love you, but I can't stand your spouse."

You can't separate Christ from His church.

If we love Jesus, we will love what He loves — and He loves His bride.

Rainer writes:

“I am not merely to like my church or serve my church well. I am to fall deeply in love with my church... with an unwavering and unconditional love.”

Unconditional love is hard because:

- the church is full of imperfect people
- we get hurt
- we get disappointed
- we don't always get our way
- we encounter personalities that challenge us

But unconditional love is the only kind of love that reflects Christ.

Paul writes:

Romans 5:8

“But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Jesus didn't wait for us to be lovable.

He didn't wait for us to get it together.

He loved us at our worst — and gave His life for us.

That is the model for how we love the church.

Reflection:

- Do you truly love your church
- Why is unconditional love so difficult in church relationships
- How does Christ's sacrificial love shape the way we treat one another

Notes:

The Fifth Pledge — Authentic Version

I am a church member.

I will lead my family to be good members of this church as well. We will pray together for our church. We will worship together in our church. We will serve together in our church. And we will ask Christ to help us fall deeper in love with this church because He gave His life for her.

Signature: _____

Date: _____