



# EQUIPPER

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[www.gci.org/equipper](http://www.gci.org/equipper)

Dear leader in the body of Christ:

In Evangelical circles, discussion about church growth seem to be giving way to a focus on church health. I see that shift as largely positive, but how should church health be defined?

In answering that question we must avoid imposing on the church values that have more to do with a business model than the spiritual reality that the Holy Spirit constitutes the church to be the body of Jesus Christ in the world. From that perspective, the church is healthy as it *feels* what Jesus feels, *thinks* what Jesus thinks, and *does* what Jesus does.

In considering church health, we do well to remember Jesus' admonition: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it" (Matthew 16:25).

I think we can say that in Jesus' thinking, church health is not about growing large and prosperous, or even in maintaining. It's also not about all members having achieved spiritual maturity. In fact, a healthy church is one that embraces the immature and the broken, offering all who come in peace a welcoming place to become healthy by encountering Jesus, the "great physician" (Matthew 9:12).

In contrast, unhealthy churches tend to be inwardly focused with principal concerns being their own stability, longevity and reputation. Such churches are seeking to preserve their own lives. According to Jesus, doing so is a dead-end journey.

In GCI, we seek to approach the issue of church health in the same way we seek to approach all issues—thinking *with* Jesus in an incarnational Trinitarian way. That means beginning with Jesus himself. Doing so leads us to view the church as the Lord's body—his presence in the world, by the Spirit, through his followers—and not as something unrelated to that spiritual reality.

When I preach, I like to remind us that Jesus is the sole head of his body, the church. And that includes GCI. Jesus gives his church its life and direction and a congregation or denomination will grow in health only to the extent it participates in Jesus' love and life (including his mission to the world—see the article on page two). As a church matures in this way, it will tend to grow in numbers, though that result is not the goal, nor is it assured.

Concerning participating with Jesus in his mission, it's a common misconception to think that a church must first become healthy internally before it can reach out externally. When Jesus called his disciples to follow him, he did not say, "Guys, let's hunker down and get healthy, then we can move out to seek the lost." No, Jesus took the 12 and together they "hit the road." As they participated in gospel ministry with Jesus, their Lord "rubbed off on them." As that occurred, the disciples, by the power of the Spirit, began to *feel* what Jesus felt, *think* what Jesus thought, and *do* what Jesus did. As a result, they became spiritually healthy. And so it is with us.

Serving in Christ's ministry with you,  
Greg Williams, CAD director

Now you are  
the body of Christ  
and individually  
members of it.

(1 Cor. 12:27, NRSV)

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*Equipping all kinds of churches for all kinds of people in all kinds of places.*

## Joining Jesus in mission

Note: this article is adapted from an *Exchange* blog post written by Ed Stetzer. The original post, entitled *Loving the Lost*, is found at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/january/loving-lost.html>.

### The Christian life is not about safety and comfort

A common criticism Jesus faced was that he spent too much time with sinners. How many of us could be accused of spending too much time with the unwelcomed and unappreciated?

It wasn't that Jesus was waiting for Paul to write, "Bad company corrupts good morals" in 1 Corinthians. No one better understood the importance of spiritual maturity, scriptural knowledge, a robust prayer life and positive influences than Jesus. But he also knew these things were not for his personal benefit, but need to be shared with the lost.

The Christian life is not about safety and comfort, but rather about finding yourself in a dangerous place of vulnerable compassion.

The true test of our maturity is not measured in how much we leave behind, but how much we love. That's why I love to hear a pastor say, "We're going to be a church that cares about the hurting and serves those in need, showing the love of Christ to the lost."

### To serve and to save

I'm struck by the fact that Jesus talks about his ministry in two ways. In Luke 4:18, he says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me." He goes on to talk about preaching the good news to the poor and the captive. In fact, this type of ministry was a sign that he was the Messiah. Prophecy was being fulfilled as he showed kindness to those who were hurting. Throughout Scripture we see the work of Christ among the widows, the blind, the broken—whoever had a need.

In Luke 19:10 [Jesus] says he came to seek and save the lost. And the same Jesus who came to serve and to save then says to us in John 20:21, "As the Father has sent me, I also send you."

We have been sent by Jesus to join him in his mission. We are to serve others in his name, and we are to share the good news of salvation so that people might trust in Jesus' work on the cross—his death in our place, for our sin.

Serving and saving were marks of Christ's life on earth. They should be marks of his people as well. But to do that, we must engage the broken and hurting people around us. That's hard. But a church without the broken is a broken church.

How does your church engage the hurting? What have you done in your own life to avoid insulating yourself from brokenness around you?



Carl Heinrich Bloch's painting *Woman at the Well* from the Chapel at Frederiksborg Palace in Copenhagen.

Here are links to some GCI articles that are related to the topic of church health:

- <https://www.gci.org/church/center>
- <https://www.gci.org/church/ministry/goals>
- <https://www.gci.org/files/Equipper6.2.pdf>
- <https://www.gci.org/disc/23-functions>
- <https://www.gci.org/church/small>

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