

The 9 Marks is a ministry based in Louisville, Kentucky. Its director is Mark Dever. Here is the greeting from his web site.

Dear Friend,

Have you ever considered what it means for a church to be healthy? Have you ever thought about how that health is nurtured and sustained? If so, have you reflected on why you answer those questions the way you do?

These are the questions that have captured us at 9Marks. Perhaps you've been mulling over these same questions in the context of your own church for a while now; or maybe this is the first time you've ever encountered them. Either way, we'd like to personally invite you to think with us about the health of the local church and the methods God has designed to promote it.

Contrary to much popular wisdom, we think that God has spoken clearly in the Bible regarding the purpose, leadership, organization, and methods of the local church. So we want to challenge you to join us in reconsidering the clarity of God's Word when it comes to the healthy growth of local congregations. We believe God designed the church to be fundamentally a display of His own glory and wisdom (Eph 3:10). And we think He has deliberately structured that display in the shape of a loving community that illustrates for a watching world the close fellowship of the Trinity and the redemption that He has accomplished for us in Christ Jesus (John 13:34-35).

Our goal is not simply to point out all the problems with the church; nor do we intend to suggest a fresh approach to "doing church". In fact, there is nothing really new or innovative here at all. Rather, our goal is to point the way back to healthy church life by calling attention to the timeless Biblical priorities, principles, and methods that God has ordained for the maturity of the local church – God's work, God's way. Whether you read as a concerned member or as a vocational pastor, we hope that what you discover here is not just a plug-and-play method, but a God-centered

mindset. We're glad you're here. Welcome to the website of 9Marks the Word building the church.

Your brother in the Lord,

Mark E. Dever, Pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, D.C.

How does that contrast to the Purpose Driven Church model? Listed below are the 9 Marks of a Healthy Church.

Starting Over

New models are a dime a dozen. But is there really anything new under the sun? We actually think we need to return to an old, neglected model and recover it for today. If the church is to fulfill her mission, she must again become distinct from the world (John 13:34-35).

9Marks is committed to helping local churches pursue, develop, and maintain nine of the most important marks of any healthy church. In identifying and promoting these nine, we are not intending to lay down an exhaustive or authoritative list. There are other significant marks of healthy churches, like prayer and fellowship. We want to pursue those ourselves as well, and we want you to pursue them with us. But these nine are the ones we think are most neglected in most local churches today, with the most damaging ramifications. So we think it is wise for us to concentrate on these nine and let other parts of the Body universal promote other important marks of a healthy local church. Here's a brief summary of what we mean by each of the nine marks.

1. Mark 1

This is preaching which expounds what Scripture says in a particular passage, carefully explaining its meaning and applying it to the

congregation. It is a commitment to hearing God's Word and to recovering the centrality of it in our worship.

2. Mark 2

Paul charges Titus to "teach what is in accord with sound doctrine (Titus 2:1). Our concern should be not only with how we are taught, but with what we are taught. Biblical theology is a commitment to know the God of the Bible as He has revealed Himself in Scripture.

3. Mark 3

The gospel is the heart of Christianity. But the good news is not that God wants to meet people's felt needs or help them develop a healthier self-image. We have sinfully rebelled against our Creator and Judge. Yet He has graciously sent His Son to die the death we deserved for our sin, and He has credited Christ's acquittal to those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus' death and resurrection. That is the good news.

4. Mark 4

The spiritual change each person needs is so radical, so near the root of us, that only God can do it. We need God to convert us. Conversion need not be an emotionally heated experience, but it must evidence itself in godly fruit if it is to be what the Bible regards as a true conversion.

5. Mark 5

How someone shares the gospel is closely related to how he understands the gospel. To present it as an additive that gives non-Christians something they naturally want (i.e. joy or peace) is to present a half-truth, which elicits false conversions. The whole truth is that our deepest need is spiritual life, and that new life only comes by repenting of our sins and believing in Jesus. We present the gospel openly, and leave the converting to God.

6. Mark 6

Membership should reflect a living commitment to a local church in attendance, giving, prayer and service; otherwise it is meaningless, worthless, and even dangerous. We should not allow people to keep their membership in our churches for sentimental reasons or lack of attention. To be a member is knowingly to be traveling together as aliens and strangers in this world as we head to our heavenly home.

7. Mark 7

Church discipline gives parameters to church membership. The idea seems negative to people today didn't our Lord forbid judging? But if we cannot say how a Christian should not live, how can we say how he or she should live? Each local church actually has a biblical responsibility to judge the life and teaching of its leaders, and even of its members, particularly insofar as either could compromise the church's witness to the gospel.

8. Mark 8

A pervasive concern with church growth exists today not simply with growing numbers, but with growing members. Though many Christians measure other things, the only certain observable sign of growth is a life of increasing holiness, rooted in Christian self-denial. These concepts are nearly extinct in the modern church. Recovering true discipleship for today would build the church and promote a clearer witness to the world.

9. Mark 9

What eighteenth-century Baptists and Presbyterians often agreed upon was that there should be a plurality of elders in each local church. This plurality of elders is not only biblical, but practical it has the immense benefit of rounding out the pastor's gifts to ensure the proper shepherding of God's church.

Mark Dever and Paul Alexander have written a book called: *The Deliberate Church*.

Foreword by D.A. Carson. Mark Dever and Paul Alexander provide a model of a biblical church in this resource for pastors, elders, and others interested in the vitality of their church. This highly practical book proposes an attitude of complete reliance on and submission to the Gospel in building a healthy church.

Here is a review by Tim Challies:

As I closed the cover on this book, having read it over the course of several days, I felt a strange disappointment. This book has no 10-step path to success! It has no baseball diamond model for ministry and no acronym-

driven program planning guidebook. Nope. It's just old-fashioned Bible-driven, Spirit-led Christianity. And somehow I let myself feel disappointed by that. I guess I've just read too many market-driven, church growth books that make church into a program, defining it in sexy terms and slick marketing. I should have paid more attention to the final page where the authors summarize the book. "The message of this book isn't about flow charts and outlines. It's not about fresh metaphors or new growth graphs. It's about a vision of a whole church deliberately ordered and led so as to facilitate its own edification and ministry...The Deliberate Church is designed to help liberate both leaders and members from the tyranny of popular growth models and church fads" (page 202).

The authors, Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, are honest about what they are proposing through The Deliberate Church. "Before you start reading in earnest, let us clarify what The Deliberate Church is not, just for truth in advertising. First, it's not new. It's old ... really old. ... Second, it's not a program. It's not something you can just plug into your church and press PLAY. ... Third, it's not a quick fix. In other words, don't expect to read this book, implement its suggestions, and see immediate, observable results" (page 20). So what, then, is this book all about? "Simply put, it's the Word building the church" (page 20). This could be called a model of ministry, but in reality it's merely an attempt to be deliberate about putting the gospel at the very center of all the church is and does, allowing that Good News to feed the church's growth, progress and ministries.

Lying at the heart of the deliberate church are four key principles. First, theology drives method; second, God's methods determine ours; third, the gospel both enables and informs our participation in God's purposes; and fourth, faithfulness to the gospel must be our measure of success, not results. Already, only thirty pages in to this book, we see a clear contradiction between TDC and the methods advocated in the church growth movement.

This book has a clear focus on deriving all method from the Scriptures.

What builds upon that foundation is a host of short chapters, discussing one of four themes: "gathering the church," which discusses preaching, praying, discipleship and evangelism; "when the church gathers," which examines

the regulative principle and its practical application to the worship service; “gathering elders,” which discusses the importance and role of elders; and “when the elders gather,” which provides biblical wisdom on the priorities of elders.

*I can think of no better book than this to provide a biblical framework for a new church. A church planted on the principles laid out in *The Deliberate Church* would necessarily be planted on the foundation of the Bible. But it is not only new churches that can benefit from this book. A church looking to refine its worship or government will benefit as well. While I recommend reading it from cover-to-cover, the short chapters make it a useful reference volume as well, as in only a few minutes a person can receive practical, biblical guidance on almost any area of the church.*

*If I had the ability to put a copy of this book in the hands of every pastor I know, I would do just that. *The Deliberate Church* begins and ends with the gospel, and thus it begins and ends with the perfect, unchanging Word of God. It is challenging, practical and biblical. I highly recommend it to pastors and lay people alike.*

My suggestion for any church is that instead of obliterating the gospel and secularizing your Church with the likes of the Purpose Driven Church Model, at least look at the 9Marks and *The Deliberate Church* first. Moreover, of course, everyone involved needs to have some serious secret prayer time with our God about the health and direction of HIS local Church.

Addendum: Nearly all of the analysis in this “paper” came from an article by Paul Alexander, (of Capitol Hill Baptist Church) which I found after much research, on the 9Marks website.