

What Constitutes a Healthy Christian Community

The Rev. Dr. Paul T. P. Wong

Leadership Retreat

Grace Chinese Gospel Church North York

February 3, 2018

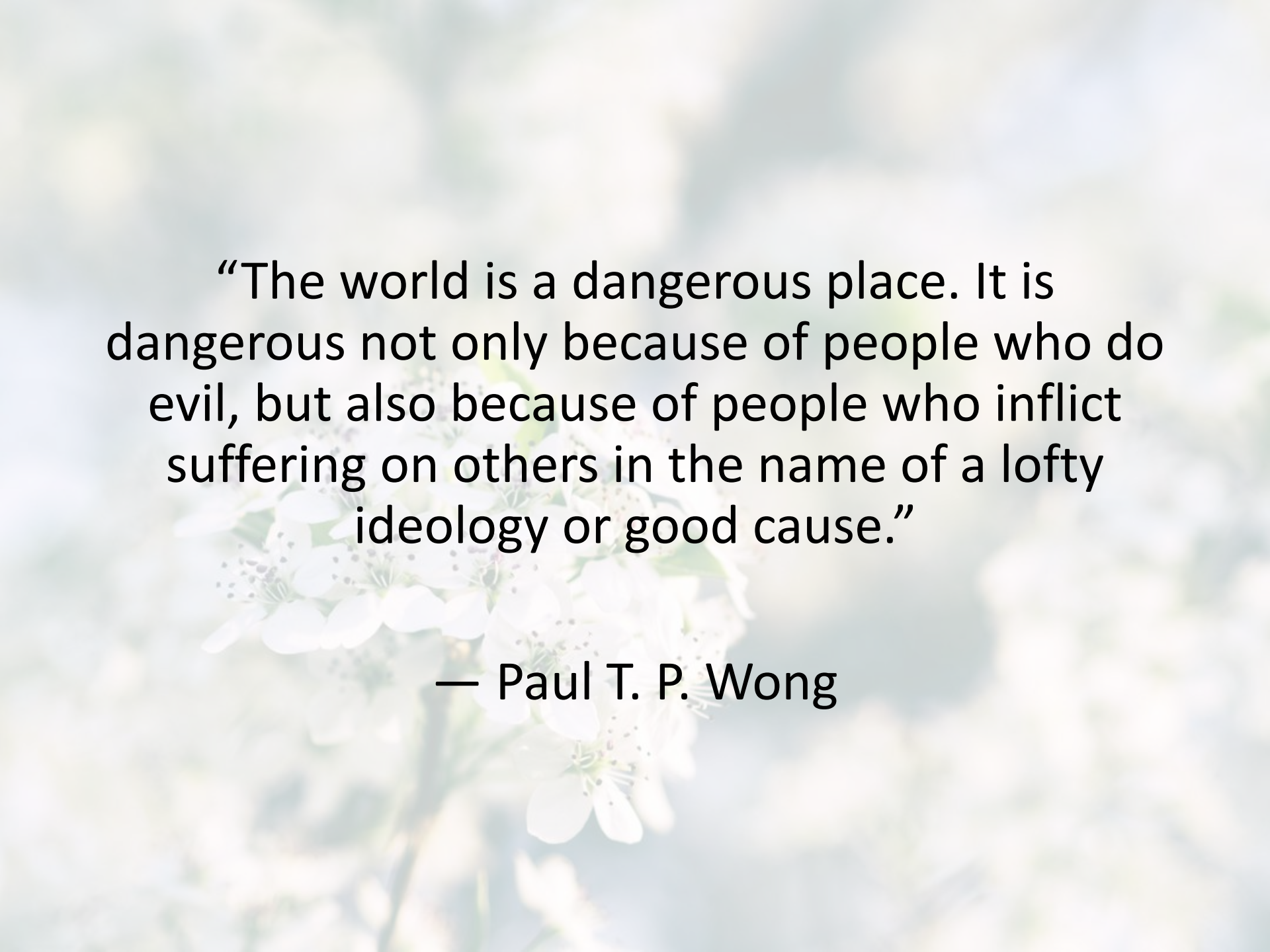
PPT by Evelyn Tam

Overview

1. Introduction: Healthy Church vs. Church Growth
2. Know our Church History
3. Church as a Loving Family
4. Church as a Caring Hospital
5. Church as a Rigorous School
6. Church as a Compassionate Mission



Healthy Church vs. Church Growth

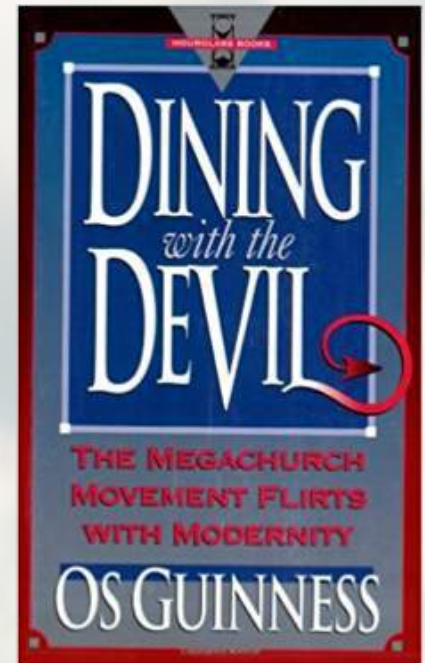


“The world is a dangerous place. It is dangerous not only because of people who do evil, but also because of people who inflict suffering on others in the name of a lofty ideology or good cause.”

— Paul T. P. Wong

Healthy Church vs. Church Growth

- Not a false dichotomy, but a strategic choice
- Healthy churches produce Christians like Eric Liddell
- Healthy churches always grow
- Growing churches are not always healthy
- *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity* (1993) by Os Guinness



Healthy Church

- *Life Together* (1978) by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- “Behold, how good & pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Ps. 133:1)
- Church should function as vibrant living organism
- “Community of love” where members openly share their lives & are willing to accept each other with unconditional positive regard
- People experience love through relationship with Christ & one another

Church Growth Movement

- Started with Donald A. McGavran & C. Peter Wagner
- Limits of social science methodology & market research
- Limits of visionary leaders & powerful preachers (top 5%)
- Success measured by participation in programs
- Megachurches (Willow Creek, Saddleback) cannot be the model for every church
- Constraining factors for numerical growth
- A mile wide, but an inch deep (seeker-friendly church)



“We made a mistake. What we should have done when people crossed the line of faith and become Christians, we should have started telling people and teaching people that they have to take responsibility to become self feeders. We should have gotten people, taught people, how to read their Bible between services, how to do the spiritual practices much more aggressively on their own.”

— Bill Hybels, Senior Pastor of Willow Creek Community Church

My Vision for a Healthy Church

- It is always growing: bearing fruit & multiplying
- Maybe small but complete & fully functioning
- Involves all members in the ministry
- Meets the basic human needs:
 - Love
 - Healing
 - Growth
 - Service (helping others)

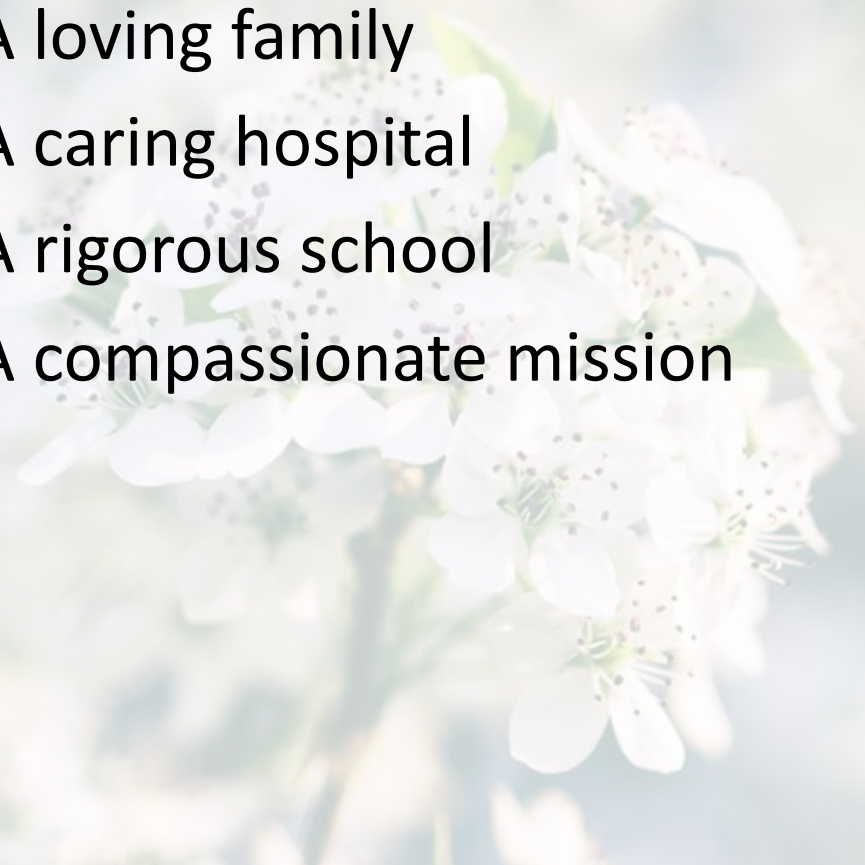


“Forget church growth. Church health is the key to church growth. All living things grow if they’re healthy. You don’t have to make them grow—it’s just natural for living organisms.”

— Rick Warren, Author of *Purpose-Driven Church*

Healthy Church

Four essential functions (DNA) of a healthy church:

1. A loving family
 2. A caring hospital
 3. A rigorous school
 4. A compassionate mission
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“A healthy church is not a church that’s perfect and without sin. It has not figured everything out.

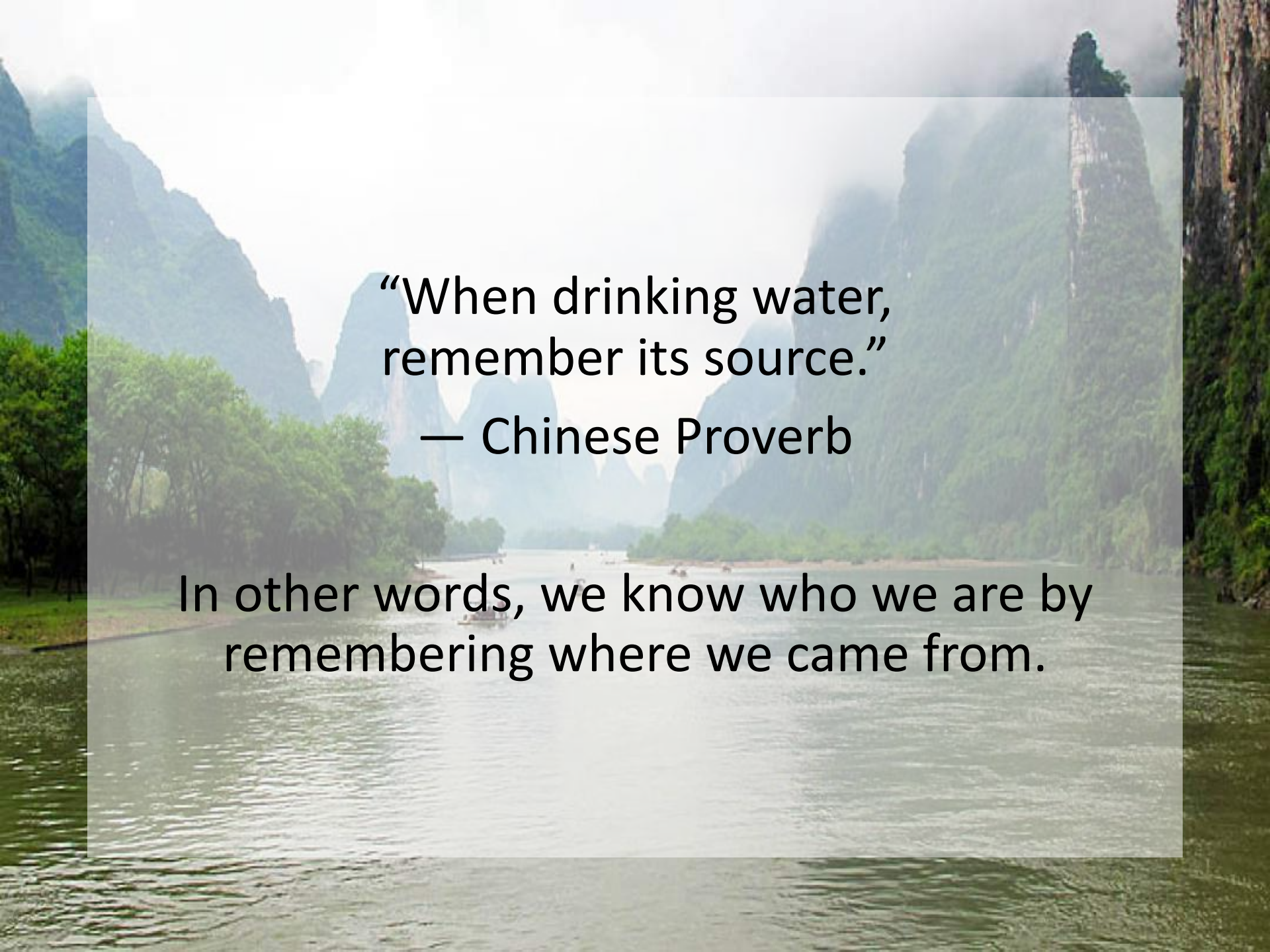
Rather, it’s a church that continually strives to take God’s side in the battle against the ungodly desires and deceits of the world, our flesh, and the devil. It’s a church that continually seeks to conform itself to God’s Word.”

— Mark Dever, Senior Pastor of
Capitol Hill Baptist Church





Know Our Church History



“When drinking water,
remember its source.”

— Chinese Proverb

In other words, we know who we are by
remembering where we came from.

Communion Helps Us Remember

1. Blood of Jesus redeems us
2. Blood of martyrs is the seed of church
3. Sacrifice of Reformers restores for us the centrality of the Bible
4. Sacrifice of those who founded the local church in which we worship
5. Sacrifice of all those instrumental in our salvation & growth

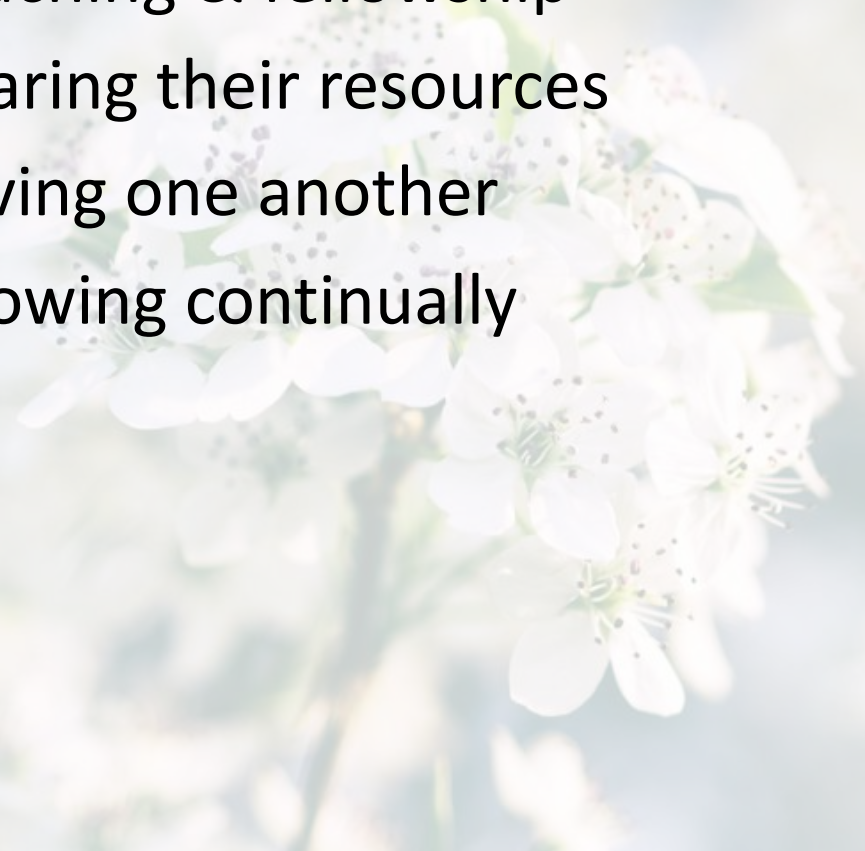


“The blood of
the martyrs is
the seed of
the church.”

— Tertullian

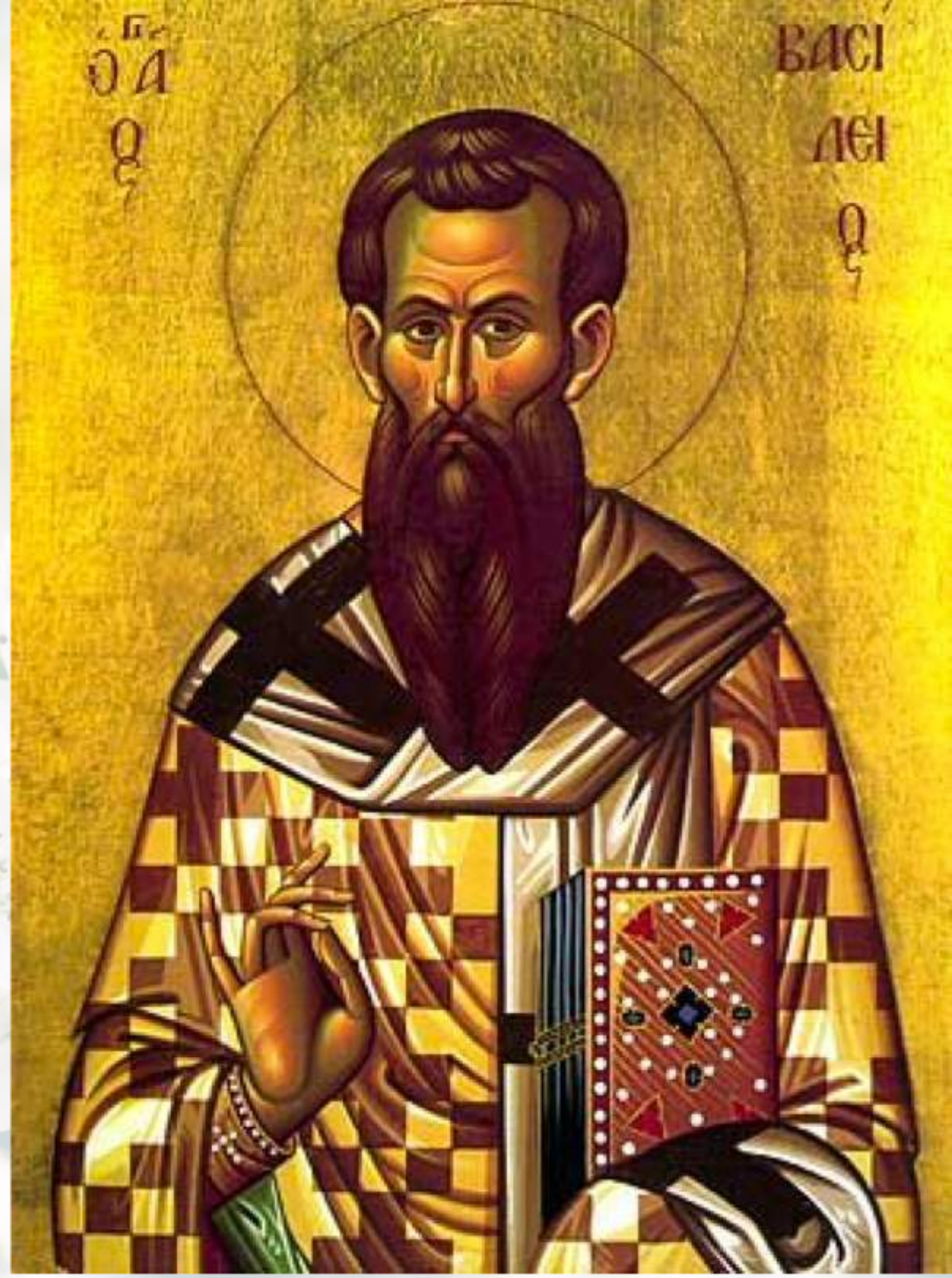
Early Church (Acts 2:41-47)

- Meeting in homes
- Teaching & fellowship
- Sharing their resources
- Loving one another
- Growing continually



“See how
these
Christians love
one another.”

— Tertullian



Martin Luther's Reformation

- 1st part of Reformation was doctrinal:
 - We are saved by grace through faith, not by good works, as taught by the Word
- 2nd part of Reformation was practical:
 - We are saved to do the good works of loving God and loving others, as demonstrated by Christ

History of Local Church

- How was it started
- Who was the founder
- What can be learned from its history
- Why is it important to know our roots

(See [Ch. 18 of my autobiography.](#))



Church as a Loving Family

Church as a Loving Family

- Regardless of the size of the church, visitors can sense warmth & friendliness
- Small churches more likely to create the atmosphere of a loving family
- Example:
 - Peterborough Chinese Christian Fellowship as an open and mixed group
 - Friday Fellowship had around 40 people from youths to seniors

SUCCESSFUL HOME CELL GROUPS

BEST
SELLER

From the Pastor
of the World's
Largest Church

Dr. David Yonggi Cho

with Harold Hostetler

“The cell group is the channel of power. It is the gateway to enter into the supernatural, the entrance to every believer discovering the power of God to heal, to deliver, and to provide growth.”

— Dr. David Cho, Author
of *Successful Home Cell
Groups*

Cell-Based Church According to Ralph Neighbour (2000)

- Part of church growth movement
- Modelled after David Cho's church in Korea
- Not just part of church life, but all of church life
- Performed all functions described in Acts 2:41-47
- "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching & to fellowship" (Acts 2:41)
- "...all other competing structures are neither needed nor valid" (p. 131)

Cell-Based Church According to Joel Comiskey (2012)

- Evangelism & leadership training in home setting
- All do the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11-13)
- “Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors & teachers” (Eph. 4:11)
- All have opportunity for training & utilizing spiritual gifts
- All in context of covenant relationships of love & mutual care
- Relational disciple-making

Cell-Based Church According to Charles A. Calahan (2015)

- Most basic unit by which community is built
- Presence of Christ manifested in relationships
- All are edified & equipped to minister
- Nurture a sense of belonging
- Spiritual gifts of members are confirmed & used
- **Seeks to develop all into the likeness of Christ**

Healthy Cell-Based Church

- Taking covenant relationships seriously
- Worship, edification, discipleship & evangelism through relationships
- Practicing acts of kindness to each other
- Constantly praising God & expressing gratitude
- All actively engaged in cell group meetings
- Ministering to each other spontaneously
- Developing deep interpersonal relationships

How Do You Respond When Another Member Has a Problem

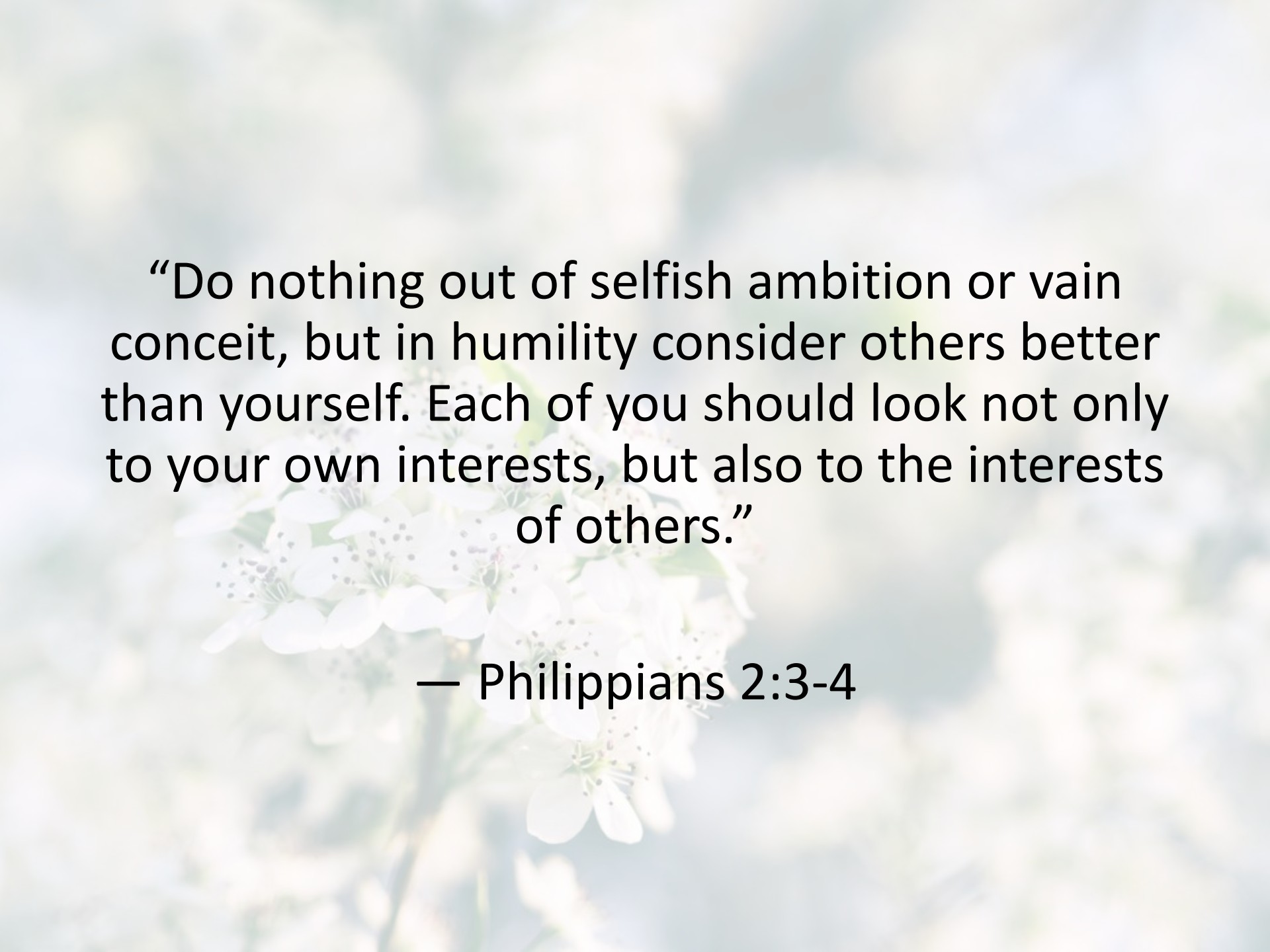
1. Do nothing — it does not concern me
2. I'm glad that it did not happen to me
3. It may be his fault to have this problem
4. Pray about it and then forget it
5. Support him with concern and empathy
6. Do whatever is within your power to help

Potential Problems of Cell-Based Church

- Homogenous Unit Principle
- Mechanical division
- An artificial structure without the substance
- Lack of seasoned & gifted leaders
- Dominated by one person
- Cell group becomes a social gathering

Relational Difficulties in Church

- Different people have different perspectives
- Hurting people hurt others
- Members' unmet emotional needs
- Individual differences in cultural backgrounds
- Individual differences in past experiences
- Personal agenda overriding group interests
- Cancer of the politics of divisions



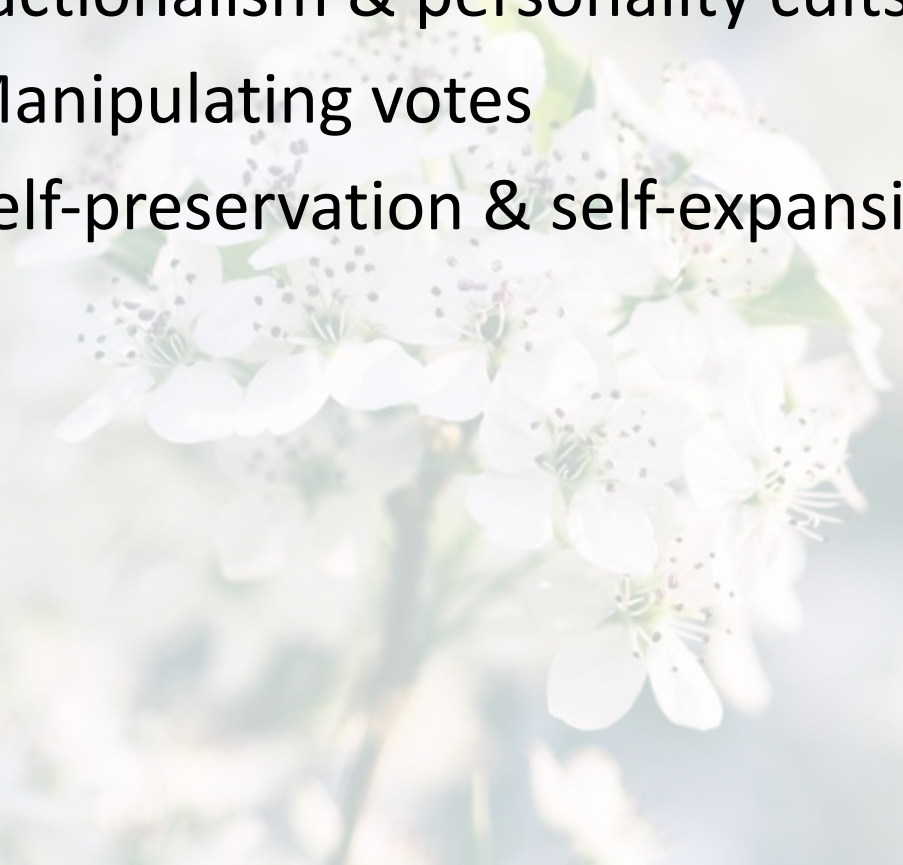
“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourself. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

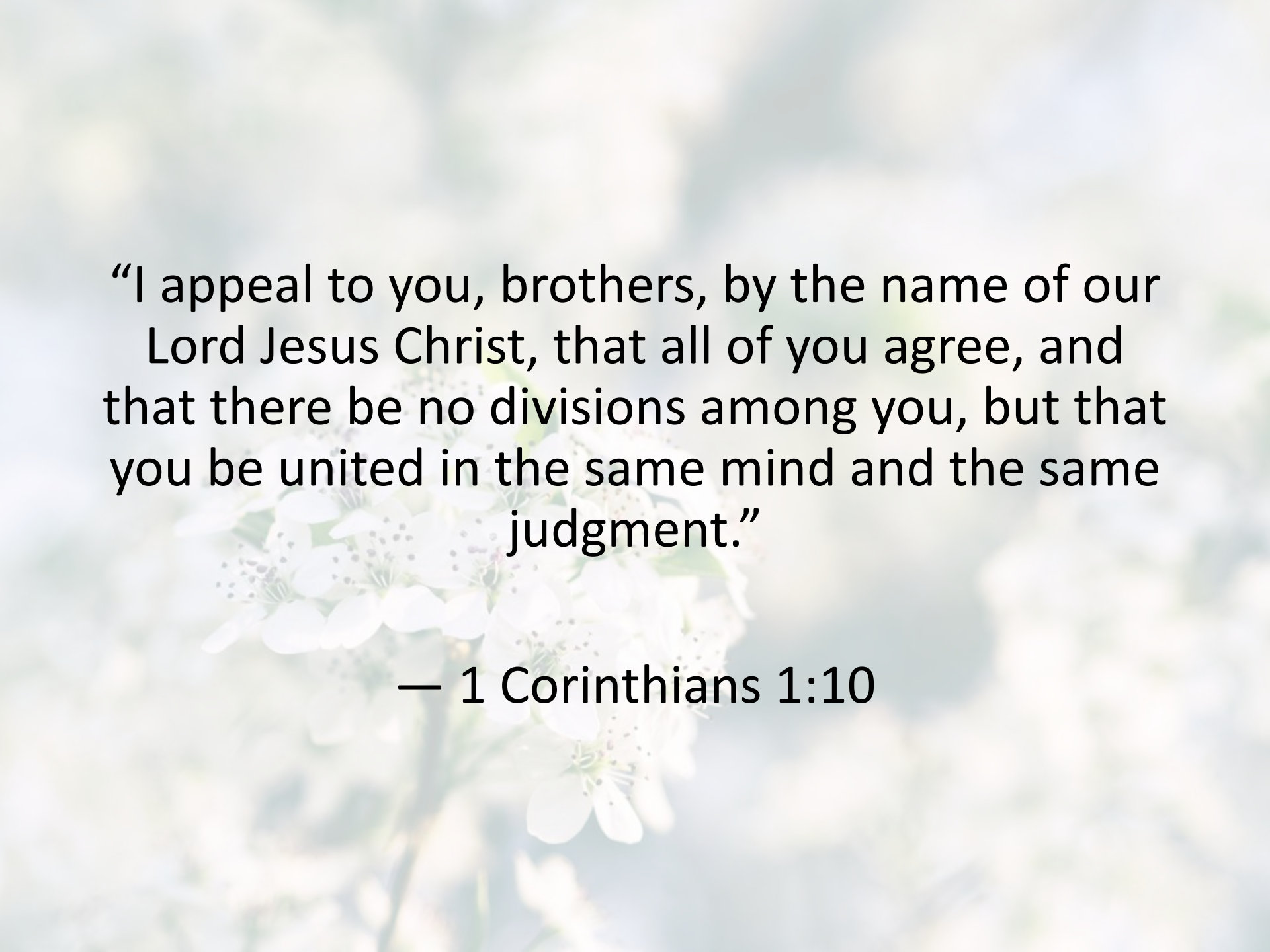
— Philippians 2:3-4

Good Church Politics

- Building through dialogue & prayer
- Recognizing legitimate authority
- Consistent with Bible Teaching
- Common-sense compromise
- Contributing to unity and growth

Toxic Church Politics

- Toxic division politics (e.g., Jews vs. Gentiles)
 - Factionalism & personality cults (1 Cor. 3:3-5)
 - Manipulating votes
 - Self-preservation & self-expansion
- 



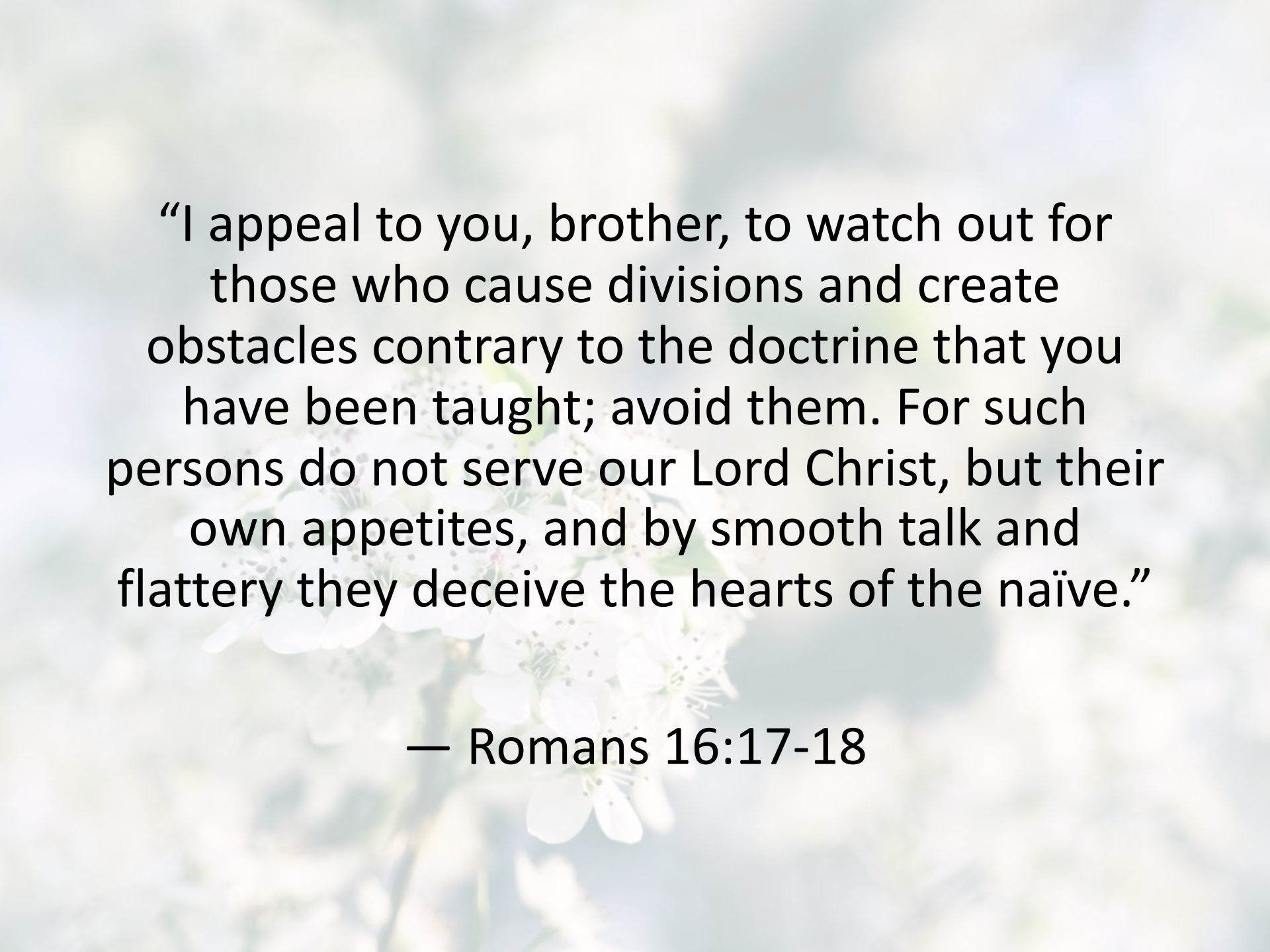
“I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.”

— 1 Corinthians 1:10

Examples of Toxic Church Politics

- Removing students from church membership
- Removing founding pastor from church history
- Banning English congregation from evangelism
- Banning Mandarin congregations

([See Ch. 19 of my autobiography.](#))



“I appeal to you, brother, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve.”

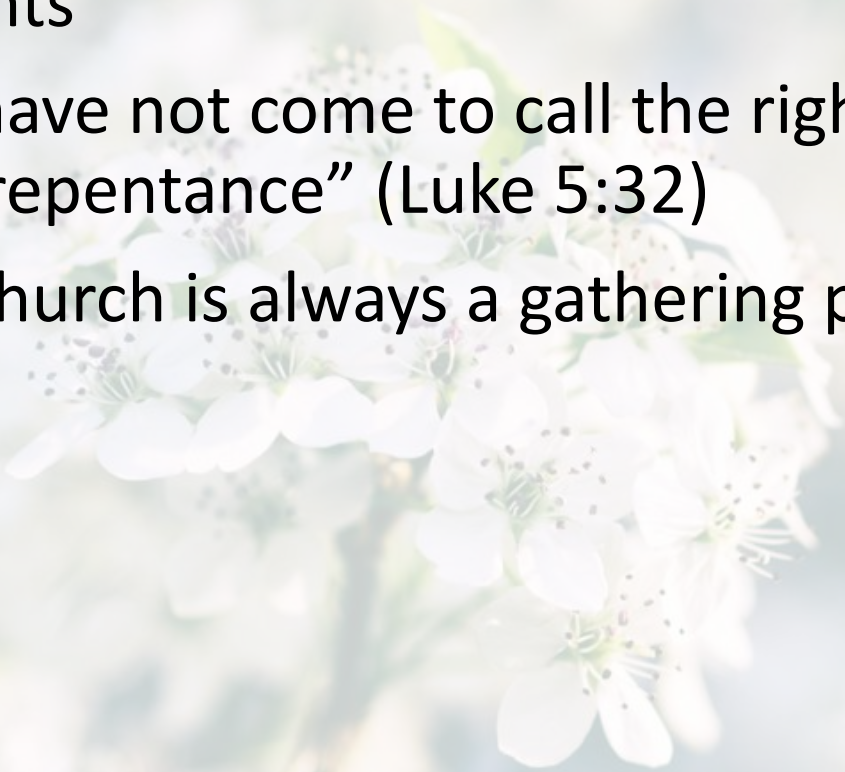
— Romans 16:17-18



Church as a Caring Hospital

A Place for Broken Lives

- A church is a hospital for sinners, not a club for saints
- “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32)
- A church is always a gathering place for broken lives

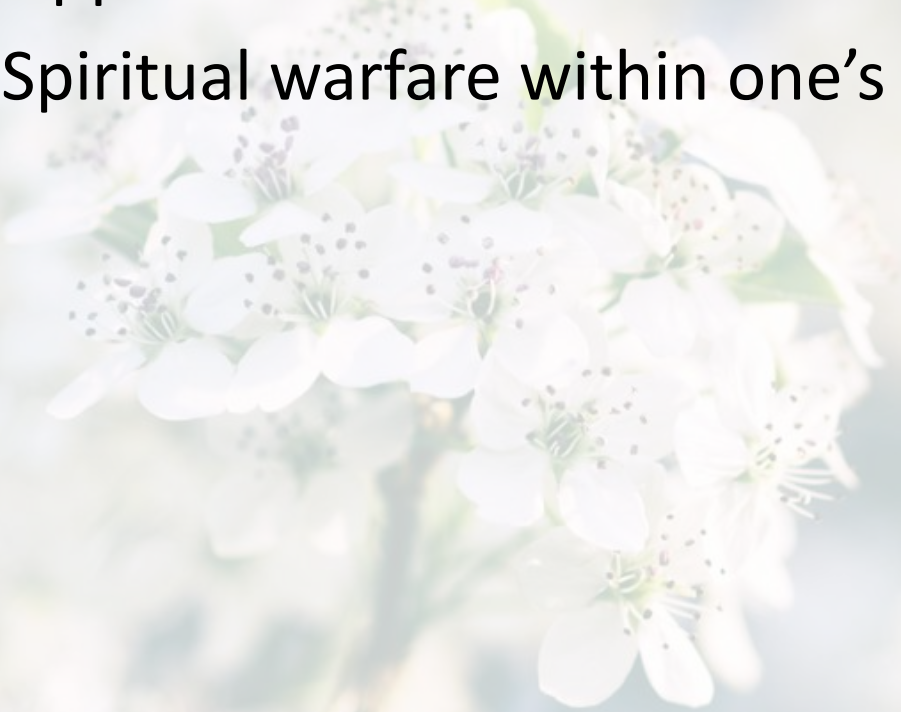


God Knows

- Mentality that “God knows” may contribute to Christians’ mental health problems
- Prevents them from seeking professional help
- Prevents them from taking personal responsibility for change
- Takes years for God to transform broken lives

3 Sources of Christian Suffering

1. Persecution from outside the church
2. Opposition from inside the church
3. Spiritual warfare within one's soul



3 Sources of Desirable Suffering

1. From doing what is right
2. From stretching oneself
3. From fighting the good fight of faith
4. There is joy in good suffering

[\(See Ch. 19 of my autobiography.\)](#)

Healing Community

- Many Christians worship wounded & praise in tears
- As Christ was wounded for our healing, so we too should be willing to be wounded for others
- Pastor as model of wounded healer made whole
- Share God's grace & redemptive love with all hurting people
- Counselling pastor & lay counsellor training

“The beginning
and the end of all
Christian
leadership is to
give your life for
others.”

— Henri Nouwen

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The
WOUNDED HEALER


Ministry in Contemporary Society

In our own woundedness, we can become a source of life for others

HENRI J. M. NOUWEN



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Church as a Rigorous School

Learn from Buddhists

Most Buddhists understand the Four Noble Truths

1. Life is full of suffering
2. The cause of suffering is ignorance
3. There is a way out of suffering
4. The way out of suffering is the Eightfold Noble Path

(Similar to Romans Road to Salvation)

Romans Road to Salvation

Romans 3:23

We are all sinners by nature and by choice.

Romans 6:23

We receive eternal life as a free gift!

Romans 5:8

God demonstrated His love for us, His enemies.

Romans 10:9-10

We must trust and surrender to Jesus as Lord.

Romans 10:13

Our assurance of salvation through Jesus.

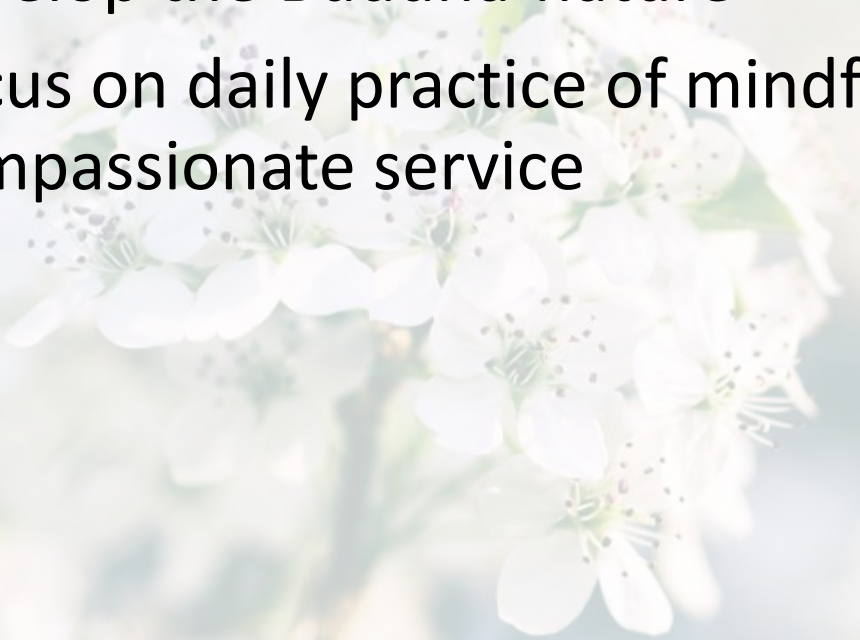
Learn from Buddhists

Most Buddhists practice the Eightfold Noble Path daily

1. The right view
2. The right determination
3. The right speech
4. The right conduct
5. The right livelihood
6. The right effort
7. The right mindfulness
8. The right meditation or concentration

Learn from Buddhists

- Focus on small group learning the Dharma
- Focus on daily practice of Dharma in order to develop the Buddha-nature
- Focus on daily practice of mindful meditation & compassionate service



What About Christians?

Can an average Christian answer these questions?

1. Why does one need to become a Christian?
2. How can one be sure that one is a born again Christian?
3. What are the essential Christian beliefs or doctrines?
4. What are the essential practices of a Christian disciple?

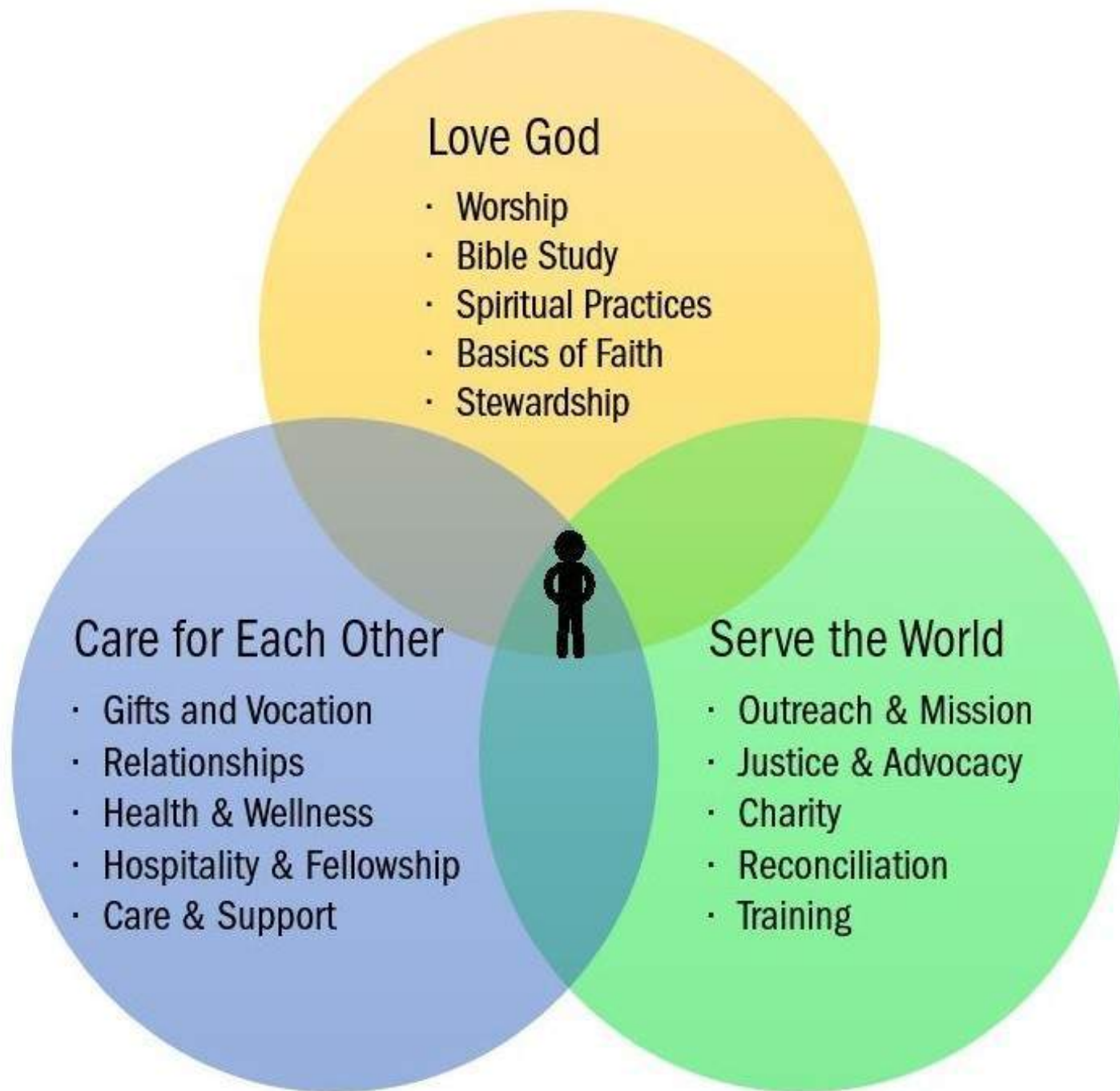
The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.



What About Christians?

Well-educated Christians should pass four tests

- 1. Biblical literacy:** General biblical knowledge & remembering key verses
- 2. Theological competence:** Understanding basic Christian doctrines
- 3. Historical knowledge:** Knowing our roots, such as the Reformation & denominations
- 4. Practical spirituality:** Practicing daily devotions, acts of kindness, leading a moral life & serving God

Basic Leadership Training

1. How to prepare & lead a Bible Study
2. How to listen actively
3. How to maintain fruitful group discussion
4. How to lead a person to Christ
5. How to disciple a young Christian through example & relationship
6. How to cultivate Christian character in self & others

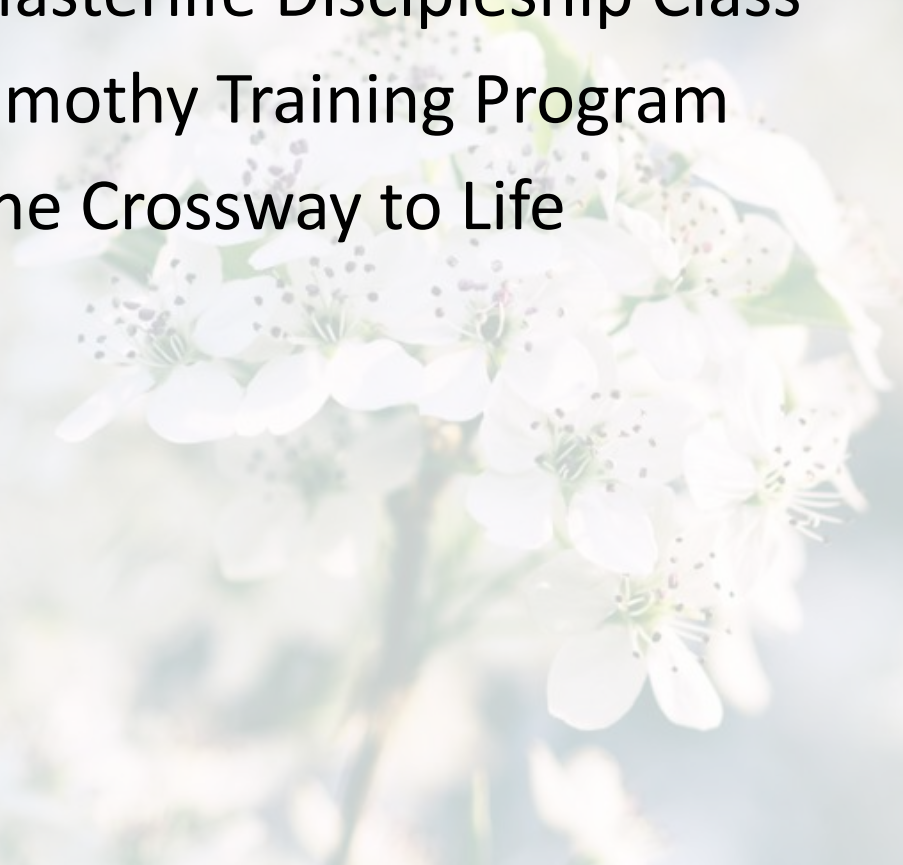


A Teaching Church

Dr. John MacArthur is Pastor-Teacher of Grace Community Church

- Gifted teacher
- Expository preaching
- Systematic teaching on Bible, Theology & Mission
- Has written 400 books
- Teaching resources (bookstore)

Discipleship Training Materials

- Navigators' Design for Discipleship Series
 - Masterlife Discipleship Class
 - Timothy Training Program
 - The Crossway to Life
- 

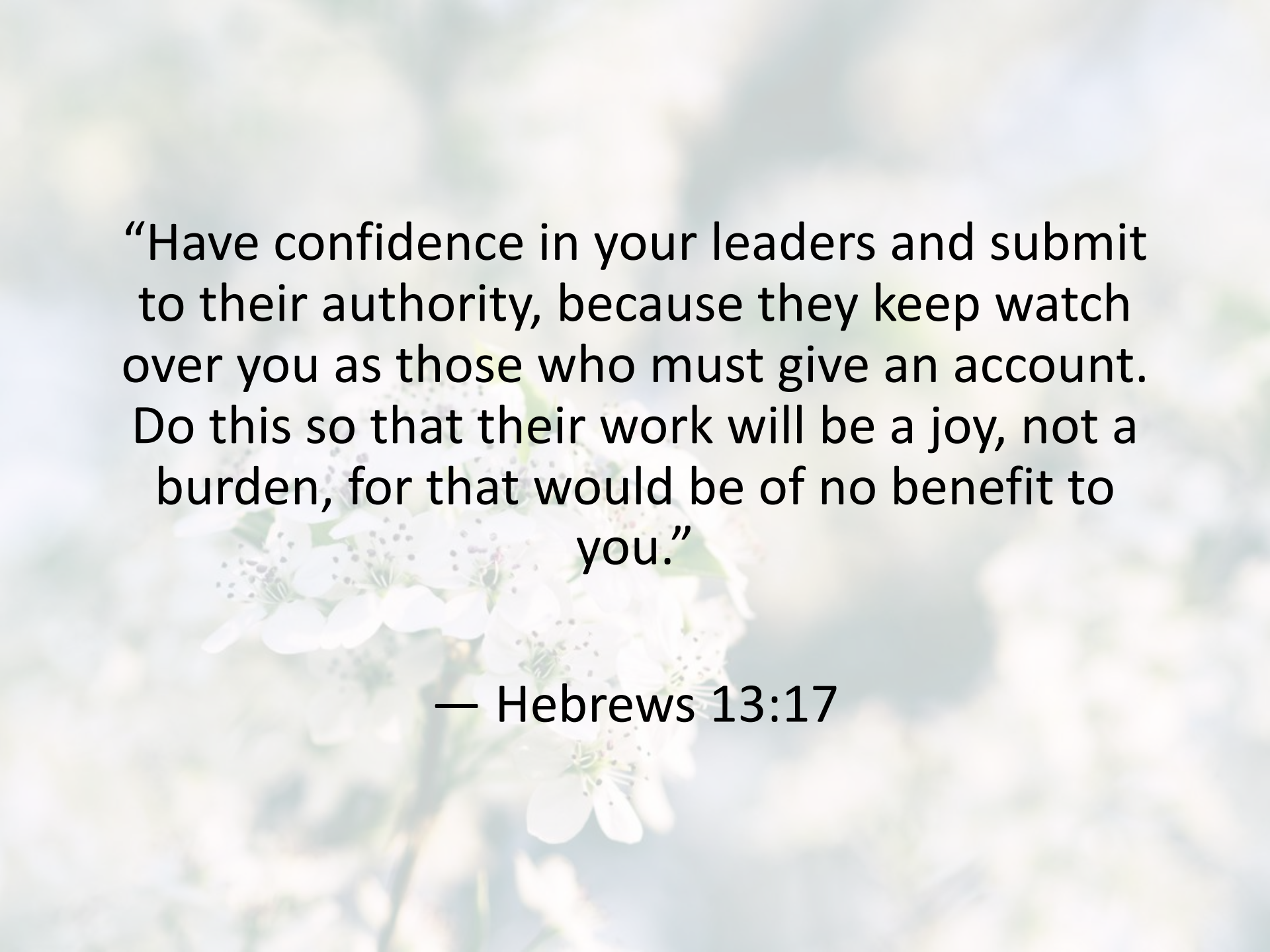
Materials Developed by Me

- Dare to Lead! – Effective Parenting (Outreach)
- Meaning-Centered Life (Broader than purpose-driven life)
- Servant Leadership Training
- Fivefold Path to Practical Spirituality
- Meaning-centered Counselling & Therapy

Benefits of Mentorship

- AKA spiritual direction
- Similar to shepherding program
- Based on one-on-one principle
- Paul & Timothy (2 Tim. 2:2)
- Personally, I've had privilege of mentoring young pastors





“Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.”

— Hebrews 13:17

Legitimate Spiritual Authority

1. Word of God
2. Divine calling: God works through individuals
3. Appointment by senior people
4. Consensus of committee
5. Election by believers
6. Earned & demonstrated expertise
7. Proven spiritual gifts

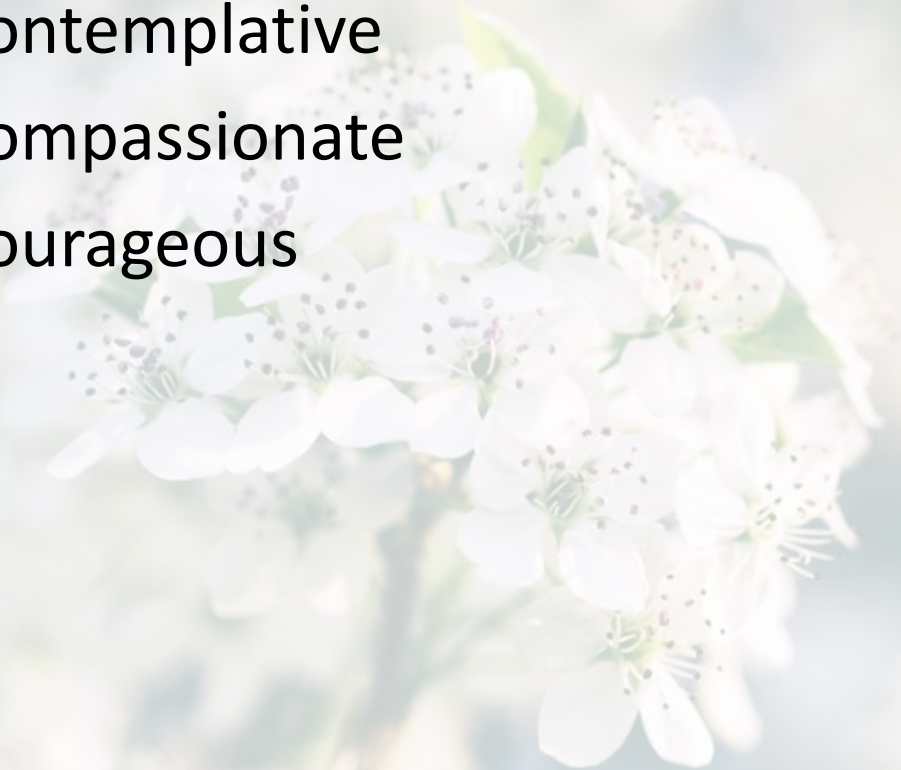


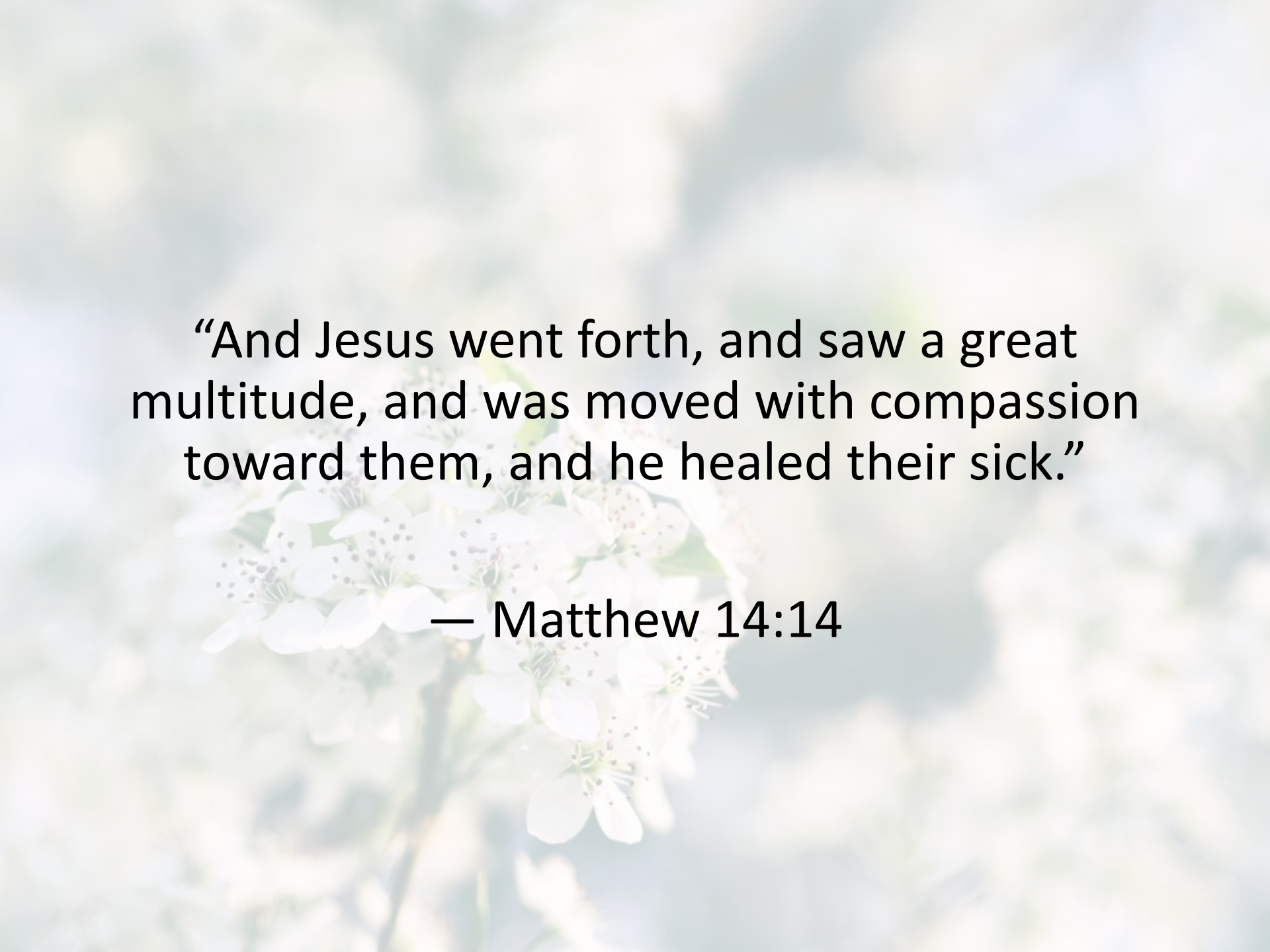
**Church as
Compassionate Mission**

Church as Compassionate Mission

Called to be Christ-like

- Contemplative
- Compassionate
- Courageous





“And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.”

— Matthew 14:14

Characteristics of Missional Christians

1. Spirit-led, not afraid to step out of comfort zone
2. Spend time cultivating fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)
3. Invest in other people's lives
4. See church as people called by God to worship, share & serve
5. See selves as normal Christians serving God rather than professional clergy

Characteristics of Missional Christians

6. Do something meaningful for God with community support
7. More concerned about *being* than *doing*
8. Always ready to respond to God's challenge anywhere
9. Heart-broken by things that break God's heart
10. Hate what God hates & love what God loves

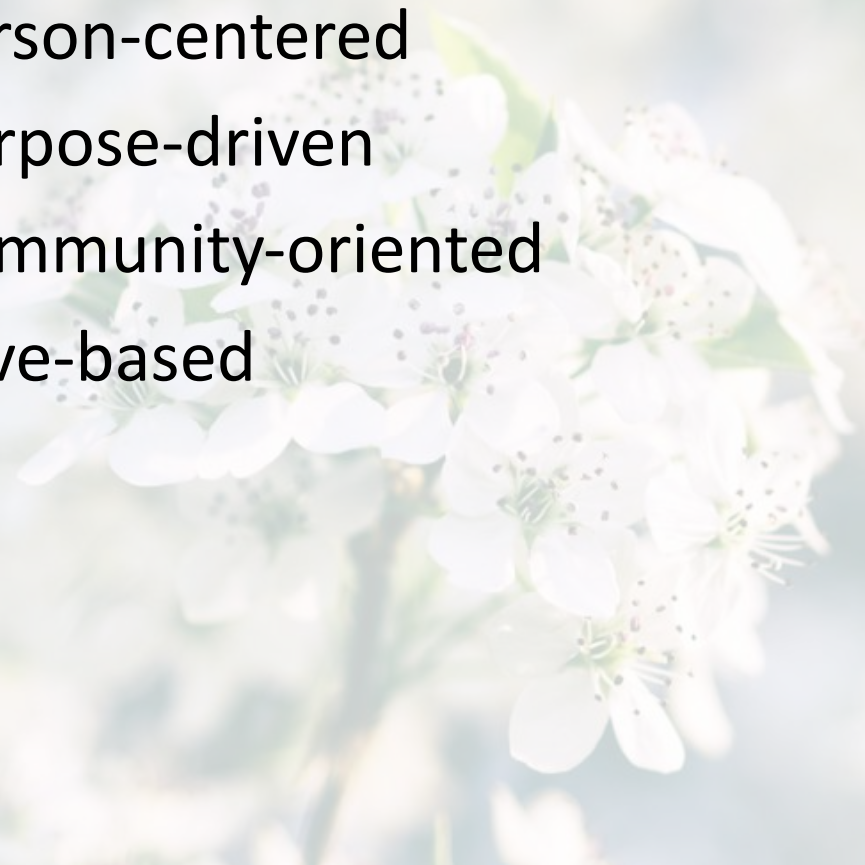
Native Evangelism

- When we have experienced God's love & healing in church family
- When we have been properly taught in Christian beliefs & practices
- When we are transformed to image of Christ
- It is inevitable we will bear fruits for God



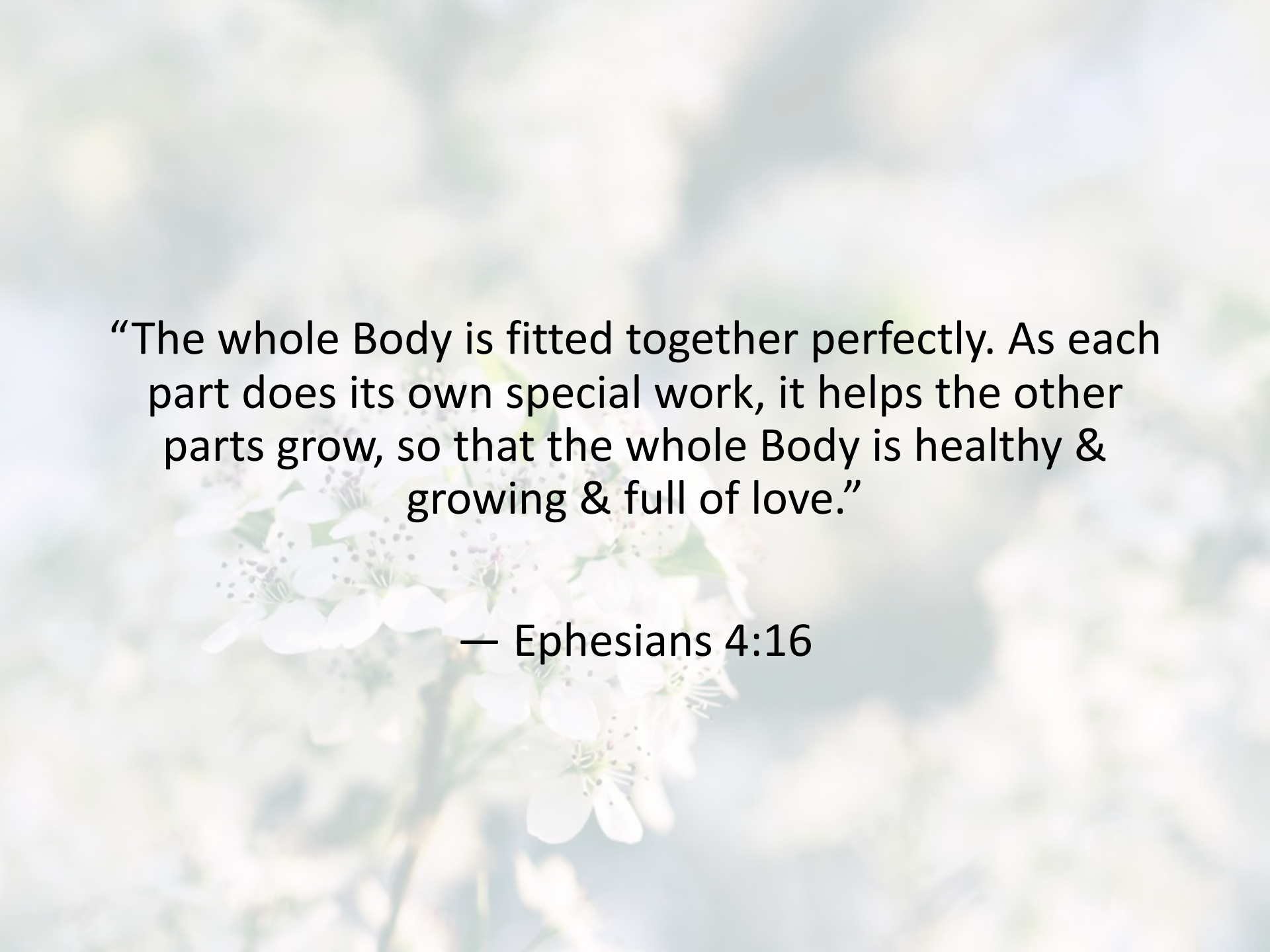
Conclusions

Healthy Church Has Positive Church Culture

- Christ-focused
 - Person-centered
 - Purpose-driven
 - Community-oriented
 - Love-based
- 

Healthy Church Produces True Disciples

- Who follow steps of Jesus
- Who practice spiritual disciplines
- Who practice greatest commandments
- Who are conformed to image of Christ
- Who produce spiritual fruits
- Who reproduce themselves



“The whole Body is fitted together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole Body is healthy & growing & full of love.”

— Ephesians 4:16

