

Guest editorial: Is your church making you healthy or sick?

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When our grandson was 10 months old, he underwent a medical emergency. His immune system was compromised, and his body was under assault from an infection.



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He needed immediate treatment, and the diagnosis called for him to receive intravenous immunoglobulin. This is a concentrated dose of antibodies, extracted from blood plasma, which helped his body fight off the illness. Within 48 hours, his high fever and other symptoms responded to the treatment, and he came through that traumatic experience in good health.

In talking with the doctors and nurses during his hospital stay, I learned one dose of immunoglobulin is derived from the blood of more than 1,000 donors. This collection of antibodies from the donated blood provides what the patient's body cannot—defense against infection.

Hope and healing

As we marveled at the efficiency of the treatment, the knowledge of the

medical professionals and the healing touch of God's providential love, I came away struck by how congregations provide much of the same hope and healing for one another.

Despite our illusions, none of us is capable of living the life God has called us to alone. We all need someone, some group, some community to help us fulfill God's dream for our lives. We may be extraordinarily gifted, wealthy, wise, self-sufficient and independent, but in the end, that is not enough. There will be a day, if there has not been already, when you will come to a point where you cannot stand alone.

Our grandson benefited from hundreds of people donating their blood so others could be blessed by their healthy blood. The extraction of antibodies that fight infection enabled him to overcome serious illness and to be restored to health. Could it be that one of the most important things your congregation does for you is to enable you to fight off spiritual diseases and infections you could not defeat alone? A genuine and caring community will keep you healthier than you will be alone.

More than predicted

I have seen, on many occasions, individual believers overcome overwhelming odds and unlikely scenarios to become something more than anyone predicted. Much of the credit for their success is due to the community that infused them with hope, encouragement and accountability.

The Apostle Paul's letters describe a Spirit-filled culture in the early church that used teaching, imitation, encouragement, correction, inspiration and unity to turn a rag-tag collection of misfits into the most powerful organization our world has ever known. They were unified in their love for God and their love for one another.

You may not get an IV bag with antibodies attached, but you get something

very similar from being in a healthy congregation. Somehow, you get stronger and healthier and become more of the person God intended you to be when you are immersed in that community. Regular involvement in acts of worship, discipleship, mission, volunteering your time and energy, study and devotion all build up your spiritual, emotional, social and potentially physical well-being.

Spiritual immunity

Of course, the reverse is true, as well. As you live out your life as a Christ-follower in the midst of a community of faith, you share your own health and vitality with others. 1 Corinthians 12 describes a community that benefits from the gifts, talents and abilities of everyone, not just the most overtly talented. A kind of spiritual immunity builds within us as we all journey together into the future Christ has for us.

Together, we become healthier than we could ever be alone. We are able to fight off disabling infections, overcome spiritual diseases and achieve a level of spiritual health that is indicative of the work of the Holy Spirit among us.

Does this describe your congregation? If so, give thanks to God every day for the gift of a people who make you better just because you show up and soak up their community. Be grateful for a chance to inject spiritual health into the lives of others.

If this does not describe your congregation, what would it take to bring health to that situation?

Most likely, the same principles that produce health in our body will produce health in the Body of Christ—better nourishment, more exercise, regular check-ups, fewer toxins and more vitamins.

Remember, better health in your community of faith starts with you, not

those around you. As you devote yourself to a spiritual lifestyle that aligns with God's design for you, you will have an impact on others. The Bible's promise that the fruit of the Spirit grow and increase within us and impact others will become your story.

God bless you as your spiritual health benefits from the lives of those around you and as your life increasingly becomes a blessing to others.

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