

Summary Paper

***Autopsy of a Deceased Church* by Thom Rainer**

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Perspective:

Healthy Churches: 10%

Symptoms of Sickness: 40%

Very Sick: 40%

Dying: 10%

Early Symptoms of Sickness:

- Ministries and programs are shifting towards those inside the church rather than those outside the church.
- Some people may be added each year, but no sense of true disciple making taking place.
- No clear plan for making disciples and disciple makers.
- Lots of programs and ministry clutter but many contribute little or nothing to making of disciples.
- Lots of busyness and activities but much of it has no sense of a real purpose.

Ten Factors Leading to Death

1. **Slow Erosion.** Some in facilities, some in ministries that once had impact, but mostly in the prayer life of those in the church.

2. **The Past is the Hero.** There are several points in decline where the church can turn around, but the key influencers refuse to listen. They are blind to the reality of the declining church. Areas we cling to: worship styles, facilities, pastors of the past, our own needs rather than the needs of those without Christ, the way we have always done things so we are comfortable.

3. **Refusing to Look Like the Community.** Losing the children and grandchildren of those in the church, when the church does reach out, they ask the community to come to them rather than the church going to the community, the church becomes a fortress, keeping people and possessions on the inside safe while keeping people on the other side out. Church stops reaching and caring for the community.

4. **The Budget Moves Inwardly.** Pastor and staff are expected to mostly care for those already in the church. In dying churches, the last expenditures to be cut are those that keep the church people comfortable. First cuts are to ministries and programs with an outward focus. The basic pattern is funding to keep the machinery of the church moving and members happy rather than funding for the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

5. **The Great Commission Becomes the Great Omission.** The methods we use for reaching out become the focus rather than the Great Commission itself. The church decides not to act on the Great Commission commandment to make disciples by their actions. The church stops going, stops making disciples, stops baptizing, stops teaching people to obey. Chilling quote from book:

“Members had a convenient omission in their recollections. They wanted the same results as yesteryear, but they weren’t willing to expend the efforts...members of the dying church weren’t willing to go into the community to reach and minister to people...they just wanted it to happen. Without prayer. Without sacrifice. Without hard work. Members of the dying churches really didn’t want growth unless that growth met their preferences and allowed them to remain comfortable.”

6. Preference-Driven Church. Attitude is self-serving, self-giving, self-entitled. A church by definition is a body of believers who function for the greater good of the congregation. When church members increasingly demand their own preferences, the church is steadily not becoming the church. The church dies because its members refuse to be the church.

7. Pastoral Tenure Decreases. The pastor comes to the church and leads in a few changes. The members don’t like the changes and resist. The pastor becomes discouraged and leaves. The cycle repeats.

8. The Church Rarely Prays Together. Prayer becomes routine and ritual. “Prayer meetings” are not really times of prayer. Prayer and the health of the church go hand in hand. Failure to pray is tantamount to a failure to breathe. Prayer is the lifeblood of the church. Chilling quote from book:

“We stopped praying with the passion we once had. That’s it. That was the beginning of the decline that led to our death.”

9. Church Has No Clear Purpose. Routines, traditions and rituals replaced the original purpose of being a gospel-driven, disciple-making people. Quotes from past members of dead churches:

- “We were going through the motions.
- Everything we did seemed to be like we were in a rut or bad routine.
- *We became more attached to our ways of doing church than we did asking the Lord what He wanted us to do.*
- *We were playing a game called church. We had no idea what we were really supposed to be doing.*
- *We stopped asking what we should be doing for fear that it would require too much effort or change.”*

10. Church Obsesses Over Facilities. Memorials, pulpits, rooms, etc become more important than the Great Commission. Severe battles emerge over windows, pews, paint color, carpet, etc. Business meetings bring back those who have left the church to deal with the threat of change, then these people leave again.