

HEALING THE HEART OF YOUR CHURCH

How Church Leaders Can Break the Pattern
of Historic Corporate Dysfunction

By Dr. Kenneth Quick

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Foreword: Healing the Heart of Your Church

by Robert E. Logan

As someone who loves the church and has spent my life working for its well-being and growth, I enthusiastically welcome Kenneth Quid's important contribution to the field of church health and growth. *Healing the Heart of Your Church* addresses a foundational concern: why some churches deal with chronic, seemingly unalterable dysfunction.

As church leaders, we are consistently tempted to look for quick fixes—the latest principle or model that will finally help our church take off and grow. Yet Ken offers us no such band-aids. Because he understands how deep congregational problems can run, he shifts our attention instead to the roots of the problem and encourages us to unearth the deeper issues—the ones we've been afraid to look at. No church growth principle or leadership development strategy will make a lasting difference in our churches if there's undiagnosed disease deep down in the roots.

Unafraid to squarely face the problems of the past, to name the unmentionables—those things that no one talks about but everyone knows—*Healing the Heart of Your Church* offers hope to Christian leaders who count themselves willing to look those painful problems in the eye. Like setting a broken bone, facing the problems of the past will be initially painful, yet brings the possibility of increased health for the future.

It isn't easy dealing with congregational histories that sometimes involve church splits, miscarriages of justice, gross immorality, lack of needed church discipline, or patterns of ignoring serious problems. Ken approaches the task from the perspective of someone who knows how hard it is—someone who's been there and who understands what it's like to live, work, and minister in the messy places where things don't always make sense.

Healing the Heart of Your Church provides empathy for Christian leaders who are worn down by difficulties... yet it doesn't stop there. The book goes on to give practical advice and principles for how to cope with the

painful, difficult situations encountered in so many churches. Ken recognizes the various shaping influences on leaders' lives and how that affects their ability or inability to lead in specific situations. He discusses the mediatorial leadership role of pastors and church leaders. Using the letters to the seven churches in Revelation as a pattern, he challenges today's church leaders to consider what type of letter Jesus would write to their congregations—a healthy exercise for any church to work through honestly.

Written not from the ivory tower of theory, but from the down-to-earth, everyday reality of churches, *Healing the Heart of Your Church* makes a valuable contribution to church health and growth by inspiring the courage to go deeper. Once the hidden, underlying problems have been addressed and finally put to rest, congregations are then freed to walk the path of healing and revitalization. If you are ministering in a situation that seems hopeless, if all the leadership and church growth principles you've tried seem to be failing, if your admonitions toward change fall on consistently deaf ears, open yourself up to the message of *Healing the Heart of Your Church*. You may yet find hope.

Introduction

THE STUPIDEST IDEA GOD EVER HAD?

Imagine this: you are part of a denomination that sets forth the following policy: At the end of forty years, every church must disband and sell its property. If the congregation stays together, it must move locations, change names, and develop a new church constitution and a new vision for its ministry. Although I might have trouble signing up churches for such a denomination, I have no doubt that I would have a boatload of frustrated pastors and church lay leaders ready to join.

The statistics documenting pastoral unhappiness and frustration are everywhere. Most surveys indicate that eight out of ten pastors (and eight and a half out of ten pastor's wives) consider themselves discouraged in the ministry, and most lay leaders on church boards find the experience of church leadership detrimental to their spiritual health.

Believe me, I am a full supporter of all the people and ministries whose calling is to help churches grow, but there are times when I have found their messages discouraging in the extreme. They certainly don't intend to discourage me, but the struggle to get my church untracked and moving in the direction these visionaries tell me I should has created times of deep frustration. My response at many pastors conferences I attended and/or books on church growth/vision/pastoral leadership I read was to scream out at the speaker or writer, "I have tried all this and it *did not work!* Not in *my church!*" As I have talked with many of you, my peers, I know I am not alone in my frustration.

Again let me say that vision-casting, church growth and purposeful principles are not wrong or even inappropriate to teach in their context. After twenty-three years in pastoral ministry, I am now a seminary professor and I do teach them. Moreover, I believe we should honor the people in ministry to whom God has given the ten talents when they make ten talents more.

The church DOES need these principles and it needs leaders who know how to live by them and who fulfill their calling to equip the rest of us in what they have learned.

However, there are many of us who have tried our very best to live and implement these things in our ministries. Instead of ever expanding, growing, vibrant churches, we found ourselves bloodied, hurting, discouraged, maybe even changing churches. To the best of our prayerful abilities we tried to apply these principles and they did not work. We ran into inexplicable road-blocks in our church. We end up feeling that we slept through the seminary class or skipped the seminar, the one that provides the key. To contemplate the alternative is worse: we are illustrations of the Peter Principle and have found the level of our incompetence.

The difference between success and us. Many of the super ministry success stories come from church plants where the founding pastors have been a part of the vision and growth from the beginning. However, in many small, medium and large churches, *there were problems rooted in the church's history and pattern of behaving before we ever got there.* This history and these behaviors derail any leadership attempt to lead the church to significant church growth. The frustrated pastor usually has no clue where that brick wall came from or how it got there, and certainly no idea how to remove it.

We enter these churches where bad things have happened with previous pastors, boards, influencers in the congregation over the course of one, two, three decades or more. It becomes like a sick inheritance whose repercussions the new pastor slowly begins to experience. Any number of traumatic things could have happened — splits, moral failures, power plays by board members, spiritual abuse — to wound the corporate heart of this church, and little has been done to heal its wounds or right its wrongs. The premise of this book is that *the Lord of the Church does not let much else happen corporately—dynamic spiritual growth, God's kind of love demonstrated in relationships, revival or renewal, to name a few—until these wrongs are righted and the wounds receive attention.*

This crucial work of assessing and healing the corporate heart of a church, when bypassed, can derail the chance to achieve any other purposes and goals in ministry that church leaders might have. Moreover, if we miss this step in the process, we may have to kiss our health or our joy in ministry goodbye.

I confess this to be my experience. Our church leadership worked several years to develop and carefully craft an elegant, exciting vision for our church. It was so very beautiful! Suffice it to say this elegant vision crashed and

burned on the rocks and my ministry lay beside it for several years. I do not have one of those happy "birth-death-fulfillment" stories either. It remained on the rocks and no phoenix rose from the ashes. I watched the godly lay people, who had committed themselves to volunteer long hours on the project, devastated as well. They, like I, were clueless as to why this happened.

We are not alone in our frustration even in our churches. The previous pastor(s), if they did not cause the problem, probably ran into the same road-blocks. *Some reason exists* for why the church is not larger. Something caused the previous pastor to leave. Seldom are these reasons happy ones. Key church leaders are burned, too. You know the statistics. Most people on church boards also find church ministry detrimental to their spiritual lives. Something is wrong with this picture!

The solution of the Siren's song. These good people have had their hearts, spirits and sometimes even their health broken on the rocks of discouragement. They either left the ministry altogether or heard the sweet Siren's song of a new church opportunity that looked better than the frustrating, painful place they were — the place you may now be ministering!

Pastors in pain regularly read the Siren-like ads like this one, slightly modified from an actual *Christianity Today* ad:

Senior Pastor Desired

Medium-size interdenominational church seeks experienced pastor to lead the church on the path God has set for her. We have warm and teachable people, vibrant lay-led children's and youth programs, an excellent, spiritually-sensitive worship team, a passionate group waiting to be trained in evangelism, and a large, stately, functional, paid-for building in an urban/suburban setting. Six-figure salary for the right man.

The experienced among us know that truth-in-advertising should require this ad to read:

Senior Pastor Barely Tolerated

Medium-size (read "75") Bapto-Metho-Presbo-First-Assembly-South-of-God-Bible church seeks experienced (read "breathing") pastor to lead the church on the path God has set for her (Ha Ha—too many jokes here). We have warm (read "neither hot nor cold") and teachable (add "when they are awake") people, vibrant (read "burned-out") lay-led (read "expect to have to take this over")

children's and youth programs, an excellent, spiritually-sensitive worship team (read "you better do it their way or else"), a passionate group waiting to be trained in evangelism (HaHaHaHa, heehee), and a large (read "ugly"), stately (read "old"), functional (read "empty"), paid-for (read "really really old") building in an urban/suburban (read "reclamation area") setting. Six-figure salary for the right man (read "\$8,257.34).

I had one pastor in pain tell me that, when things are bad, he reads the want ads with longing and the obituaries with envy. I had another pastor look me in the eye and say with all the force that his frustration could muster, "The church was the *stupidest idea* God ever had!" Broken hearts, broken spirits, broken dreams of seeing God's church grow and advance are behind such statements.

The objective of this book. So what can I contribute to help alleviate this pain? I want to encourage these normally positive people who have given up so much to do what they do. I will propose a process that holds hope for them as leaders, something that will strengthen them spiritually and possibly even set their church free to become all God intended it to be!

Let me state my belief plainly: Within many churches, especially those that have been in existence for a while, there are some *God-designed preconditions* that must be met before vision casting and church growth principles can become effective. This is universally true for churches that have *painful* histories. I also believe few churches escape painful crises just as few people do. Moreover, I believe God speaks to a corporate church body during such painful times and seeks to teach them *corporate lessons*. A pastor must help the church lay leaders determine what these corporate lessons have been. I believe local churches are usually stuck until they discern these divine instructions and make changes according to the will of God.

Learning how to do this is the essence of this book. *You must assess and address some historical spiritual roadblocks that are in the way before you can lead your church to healthy church growth.* It takes a good, solid, thoughtful kind of spiritual leadership to do these things. I believe God uniquely equips those in spiritual authority — pastors and lay leaders with them — to give this kind of leadership, to be proactive not reactive. A pastor can not address these historical issues without growing and developing both insight and understanding of the way the church works and the way God works in the church.

Guarantees I can not make. I wish I could guarantee the process would be painless or easy. It sure wasn't for me. It grieves me to think of adding one iota of pain to some of you. However, I can say unequivocally that this will be a *good kind of pain*, the pain of setting a bone, of removing an abscess — the kind of pain you endure to get stronger, not the kind pastors are often enduring. I am not talking about the pain of a growing ulcer, a deteriorating spine or a ministry going nowhere for inexplicable reasons.

I can not guarantee your church will change at the end of the process, that you will have a positive testimony of change like God in His mercy has given me. Ultimately, like the Israelites at Kadesh-Barneah, your people will make their choice whether to follow God against the obstacles from their history. They may want to go back to their equivalent of Egypt and slavery. God's desire will be clear. No one blames Moses' lack of leadership for the Israelites choice to be cowardly at that crucial moment. Congregations make choices that pastors and church leaders cannot control. God allows it. I hope that when the time comes and God makes clear what to do, your congregation senses God's clear call to act and everyone will have the courage to obey. You and your leaders are responsible to bring them to the border of that possibility.

Nor can I promise the process will be rapid, though it may surprise you how quickly things turn around. However, I can guarantee that 1) if you learn to discern what God has been trying to teach you and your church by some of the painful things it (and you) have been through, and 2) if you do what God wants you to do about it, then 3) you will personally experience divine confirmation and freedom. Your church will experience a release of God's Spirit as the healing takes place in its heart. No one obeys what God has been trying to teach him/her without God's visible blessing and reinforcement. That's when all the vision-casting seminars and church growth books may begin to help you.

One more item—this is not a book on church discipline. In the course of your work through this book, you may come across individuals from your church's past who should have been disciplined. They may still be in your church! The purpose of this book isn't to counsel you on what to do in the variety of situations you are apt to find. Instead this book will guide you on how to go about addressing the corporate issues that remain after a failure to discipline.

Well, there it is. I know you may be cynical and weary of people giving you advice. I do not blame you. You can hold all this at arm's length as you

evaluate it. That's okay. I sure would. I just appreciate the heart that loves God enough not to quit yet. I admire the person who still feels that mysterious call deep in the soul to hang in there, still feels motivated enough to try to solve ministry's puzzles. Enough to pick up yet another book that holds the potential to frustrate.

It is my prayer that this time the results will be quite different.

— CHURCH CARDIOLOGY —

Chapter 1

THE CONCEPT OF THE CORPORATE HEART

Once while watching Monday Night Football, I heard Al Michaels describe a condition clearly evident on the field. The home team (I forget who), behind by ten points with four minutes left in the game, had just driven the length of the football field and were at the one yard line. The fans were going nuts! Two runs failed to get in the end zone and on third down, the quarterback dropped back and threw a bullet of a pass. The ball hit the receiver in the chest and bounced into the air. A defensive back snatched it and ran it back 102 yards for a touchdown. Michaels described the situation: "When he intercepted and ran back that pass, it took the heart right out of the team. It broke their back." We know what he referred to. You could see the sagging shoulders of the players, the corporate sadness of the home team. It was not just individuals at the moment who were sad, it was the team. Indeed the whole stadium joined them in misery (except on the opposing sideline).

The idea that a team, a group, a community, and even a country could have a single heart or spirit impacted by events is not a new revelation. Does that somehow relate to what we often see in churches? We would probably not have a problem believing that the report of a beloved woman in the church receiving a diagnosis of inoperable cancer would cause a "corporate heart" response of concern and sadness in the church. Is the same "corporate heart" responding when it appears that everyone has suddenly become suspicious of a board proposal? We must address the question: Is the idea of a "corporate heart" in the church biblical? The answer to that question begins with understanding the church as a Body.

A "system of systems." When we think about a human body, we realize it is a *system of systems*, a set of interdependent systems—muscular, skeletal, circulatory, nervous, etc.—wondrously woven into a working whole. Sickness or danger to one part affects the whole. Each part should work

properly and proper working means its interdependence and linkage to other parts. If the hand does not pull the nail out of the foot, if the mouth does not call for help when drowning, if the eyes, brain, muscles and feet do not work together to stop for the red light, every body part is in trouble!

The New Testament teaches us to think, not just of the universal Church, but of the local church as an organic whole, a "body." The Church in recent decades has rejoiced to rediscover "body-life," the importance of believers operating with their spiritual gifts and contributing their unique ministries to the Church. However, we should apply the same principles to corporate sin, sickness and wounds. We see how Jesus does this in His letters to the seven churches of Revelation.

Revelation 2 and 3. It took me a while to grasp the biblical concept of corporateness, steeped as I was in individualistic thinking, but when I did, a lot of other things crystallized as well. I base the concept of a corporate heart for a local church on the seven letters Jesus sent to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. In these letters He evaluates their *corporate histories*. "I know your [sing.] works" is His common refrain. These "works" are behaviors and attitudes He sometimes commends ("your [sing.] love, faith, service, and patient endurance. I know that your [sing.] last works are greater than the first." Rev. 2:19). He states these clearly individual behaviors as singular corporate actions. He also sometimes rebukes them corporately ("Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your [sing.] works perfect in the sight of my God. Remember then what you [sing.] received and heard; obey it, and repent" 3:2,3).

I do not know about you, but I find this concept rather startling. In Jesus' view of a *local church*, individual members recede and He sees a single body. Jesus sees the collective actions and attitudes of church members as a *singular whole*. He defines each local church as a single entity with commendable works or failings that require a singular corporate repentance and obedience. We do not have to guess the role church leaders of these seven churches would play in this. *They would be responsible to confront the problems He addresses and lead the changes.* End of story.

Jesus knows our church. Jesus knows who and what we have in our churches. He would be aware of the new believers who are still struggling to break sinful habits from their unconverted days, the spiritual toddlers trying to learn how to walk by taking tumbles over temptation daily. He would see the things those who look godly on the outside have going on in secret. That was all happening back in Ephesus and Sardis too. All of it. Those churches would all have had their core groups, their less committed groups, their peripheral groups. They would have had people coming and going. He *still*

speaks of these local churches as if a single entity, a body by itself.

Occasionally Jesus does mention individuals in these seven letters ("Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy"). Their association with the church does not condemn those individuals who are not caught up in whatever evil occurs within the church. Personal responsibility still matters. I am not lessening it at all. Yet even when individuals appear in this context, the corporate impact still concerns Jesus most. He still recommends corporate action. Thus the Lord teaches those of us in church leadership this corporate way to view our church.

Corporate response to corporate problems. The apostle Paul addressed nine of his thirteen letters to churches with corporate problems. Only occasionally does he mention specific problem people. Most problems are presented as a *corporate concern*. The one immoral man in Corinth caused the apostle to rebuke the whole congregation for its lack of appropriate corporate response. "And you are arrogant! Should you not rather have mourned, so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you?" (1 Cor. 5:2)

When was the last time your whole congregation mourned the sinfulness of one of its members? It's hard to picture this in some of our megachurches. I would guess that the democratic philosophies of the Greeks would have impacted the Corinthians the same way we in North America have felt them. "Not *my* problem!" they thought. The apostle calls this arrogance, to believe somehow we are not a part of the problem. The sin of the one has injured the *body*. The local church of Corinth stepped on the spiritual equivalent of a rusty nail, hurtful to a small area but potentially destructive to the whole. This wound calls for a corporate emotional response – mourning – and corporate action. Everyone should feel it.

Why? What will happen if the corporate body does not respond? Paul tells them: "Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:6-7). Christ has provided the means by His sacrifice of cleaning out the leaven of our lives, and hear the apostle-of our churches too. However, this requires corporate action.

Non-corporate response to corporate problems. Sometimes sin becomes embodied in a person and that person becomes a potential danger to the corporate body. What kind of danger? Is the danger in 1 Corinthians 5 that every member of that church will start having sexual relations with their mothers? I do not think so. However, something occurs to damage the

corporate spiritual fabric of the congregation that Jesus sees and feels. I believe those in spiritual leadership must also feel this pain in order to be motivated to act upon it. Otherwise the leaders experience that “frog-in-the-kettle” desensitizing to something spiritually lethal.

Now everyone in our congregation grapples with sin daily and feels bad about it most of the time. As a pastor, I am grappling too. I do not think the apostle refers to this normal daily struggle, but to the public, deliberate acts of someone or some group who flaunts God’s grace without any regret. More importantly I believe he refers to corporate attitudes and actions that stain the church indelibly.

Let’s move to your church in the twenty-first century. What if this travesty was committed twenty years ago and your church’s leadership never dealt with it? What if thirty years ago the pastor was immoral, almost everyone knew about the immorality, but he was quietly asked to leave with nothing more said? If fifteen years ago a deacon absconded with your church’s funds? If twenty-five years ago there was a nasty church split? If fifty years ago your church looked away and never commented as a mob lynched a black teenager one night on the lot across the street? Do these things affect the corporate spiritual fabric of your church? Does time cause the stains to fade? Would it surprise you if it did not; if the spiritual poison kneaded into the corporate body at that time still spins out painful repercussions? No one ever led the church to deal with the issue. Whoever should have taken responsibility for these things before God, to confess them corporately and take steps to rectify the damage, never did so.

The church as a “body.” The Bible describes the local and universal Church as a body, but the idea of the singular “heart” of a local church might be a new concept. In Revelation 2 and 3, however, Jesus uses a singular pronoun “you” both to commend and admonish each church. Jesus expects that the church will hear and respond from its singular corporate heart. He says to the Ephesian church,

“Yet I hold this against you (sing.): You (sing.) have forsaken your (sing.) first love. Remember the height from which you (sing.) have fallen! Repent and do the things you (sing.) did at first. If you (sing.) do not repent, I will come to you (sing.) and remove your lampstand from its place.” (Rev. 2:4,5 NIV)

Let’s admit it; most of us in the West have trouble with this kind of thinking. Certainly we struggle with how to operate this way. In North America particularly we are immersed in the philosophies and values of individualism. “If it isn’t my problem, then it isn’t my problem.” That thinking simply doesn’t work in a body. Listen to Paul in Ephesians 4:11-13:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (NIV)

Here he describes the work of spiritual leadership in helping individual saints contribute to the growth of the corporate body. The ultimate goal of the individual effort is the corporate singular good—the shared unity of faith and knowledge, the maturity of the singular entity, the final measure being a church that operates with the fullness of Jesus in it and through it.

When the “body” gets sick. Though there are many things that can derail such a lofty goal, Paul explains what can keep them on corporate track in Ephesians 4:15,16:

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (NIV)

We are to become corporately all Christ intends by the proper working of each individual part at the local church level. So now a “body part,” a deacon for instance, has an affair with another body part, say the choir director. Though people come to know this, no one addresses it publicly. The leadership quietly asks the two to leave and many think nothing more needs to happen. A key joint and ligament in the body have just been discovered to be cancerous. The knee-jerk response is to remove the parts without proper treatment.

Many churches operate by the principle “out of sight, out of mind.” It’s not our problem any more. Only that joint and ligament were a part of the local body. Can a church ignore such a problem without corporate effects? The only additional questions I would ask are: What if it happened fifteen years ago? Is it possible that over the last fifteen years the corporate body would have continued to feel the effects of it? Might Jesus have it on His list of things the corporate body had tolerated inappropriately? A country gospel song called “One More Time around Mt. Sinai” captures the danger. The thrust of this comic-tragic song is that, like Israel’s wilderness wanderings, God keeps taking His people around and around through similar experiences until they finally learn the lessons that allow them to make further progress. Could that explain your church’s problems in the present? Are they taking yet again another trip around Mt. Sinai?

What you do not know can kill you. Such a shift in thinking has astounding implications to church leaders. What the pastor does not know about the corporate entity, what the church lay leaders and the pastor do not corporately address, can kill their vision for ministry, their church, their pastor or all the above.

How does this happen? I picture a pastor called to the church at Thyatira attempting to get this church off the mark down the purpose-driven highway. All the while an undealt-with influencer poisons the heart of the Thyatiran church. Or perhaps God calls him to the church at Ephesus. He does not sense, in light of the strong doctrinal statement and wide-ranging ministries this church has, that something happened in its history—a “fall” Jesus says—that will shortly remove that church’s lamp from its lampstand unless rectified. These pastors and their church leadership must rightly assess this, address it *corporately* and repent before the full purposes of Christ can be realized.

How do pastors and church leaders begin to do this?

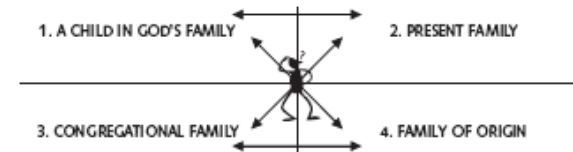
Summary. Jesus spoke to the seven local churches of Revelation 2 and 3 about present spiritual problems rooted in their historical choices. He used the singular pronoun “you” to address those congregations, indicting or praising each local church as a single entity. This is the basis for understanding the concept of the corporate heart. Your local church is a singular entity before Christ. He not only addresses individuals and works in them, He addresses the corporate body about what is happening in its heart as well. Entering a church without understanding its history and what Jesus is speaking to corporately can cause a pastor a lot of pain.

Chapter 2

GROUNDWORK: THE HEART OF THE LEADER OF CHURCH LEADERS

Socrates gets credit for saying, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” Maybe a tad overstated, but probably not much. I believe failing to examine one’s life does make living harder and leaves a lot in a life inexplicable. I came to this discovery through a very different kind of examination. Here is what I concluded.

A pastor’s four interdependent relationships. There are four “family” relationships that govern a pastor’s, or any church leader’s, experience in church ministry, four “forces”—as family is a force in our lives—that pull or push him emotionally and spiritually. For the process to be totally effective, a pastor needs to do a thorough evaluation of what is going on in these four family relationships. They are all interconnected, though we generally do not feel the interconnection. The following visual illustrates these interconnections.



I do not intend this book to provide a complete analysis of the dynamics of all four of these quadrants, any one of which could be the subject of a book. The reality is, however, that *they are all constantly at work* influencing responses and reactions to each other. However, some go deeper than others.

