



Praise for *I Am a Church Member*

There are scores of books on what it means to be a good pastor of a church. The same cannot be said for books on what it means to be a good member of a church. Thom Rainer helps cure the latter malady in this brief work that is biblical, simple and practical. This book is an easy read. It is also a convicting read. And, it is greatly needed when so many who attend church have a “what can I get” mentality rather than a “what can I give” mind-set. This book will serve the body of Christ well.

Daniel L. Akin

President, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

I Am a Church Member is a resource that is long past due. It is simple, yet profound. We intend to use it at Sherwood in our Sherwood Story class and new member orientation. This book is a must read if you want your members to understand what it means to be committed to a local church. Read it and then buy copies for potential and new members. It will impact church health and help you close the back door.

Michael Catt

Senior Pastor, Sherwood Baptist Church

Executive Producer, Sherwood Pictures

One of the great privileges of my life is to pastor a local congregation of saints. Over the last decade I have seen first hand the fruits of those who understand the content of this book and don't just go to a church but belong to one. Dr. Rainer has served us all well in this book. He has wrung from the scriptures God's commands concerning the fullness of life found in Christ among his people in covenant faithfulness. If you love your church, are frustrated with your church, or don't understand why membership matters, I encourage you to pick this book up and read it.

Matt Chandler

Lead Pastor, Teaching, The Village Church

Church membership is the shape of Christian discipleship. Wise, simple and sweet, practical and even piercing—this brief volume, if read and digested, helps us to follow Christ. It comes complete with questions to be considered and pledges to be made. Thom Rainer has written a book to instruct new members and to remind long-time members that true discipleship may sometimes be heroic; it must always be humble.

Mark Dever

**Senior Pastor, The Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC
President, 9Marks**

Thom Rainer, with this incredibly valuable little book, has once again demonstrated why he is considered a leader among church leaders. Though small in size, this insightful resource has the potential to bring about big results, helping to guide individuals and churches toward much-needed changes in how we all think about what is really involved in becoming a faithful church member. These thoughtful reflections, together with the illuminating and applicable responses, will serve as trustworthy steps toward health, renewal, and revitalization for congregations of all sizes.

David S. Dockery

President, Union University

Timely. Needed. Powerful. Simple. Clear. Biblical. This book needs to be read by every pastor and church member globally. Find a way to get it to every Christ-follower. I will do all I can to do it in my church. Thank you for calling us back to the Bible!

Ronnie Floyd

Senior Pastor, Cross Church, Northwest Arkansas

For many years, the Lord has used Thom Rainer to encourage and challenge church leaders to be evangelistic, raise expectations, design a discipleship process, reach millennials, etc. And the church has benefited. Now, the Lord will use this helpful book to encourage church members to discover or rediscover the privilege and responsibility of belonging to a local church. And the church will benefit.

Eric Geiger

Vice President, LifeWay Church Resources Division

Thom Rainer has tapped into a significant challenge in today's church that is experiencing a decline in church attendance and membership. *I Am a Church Member* focuses on the priority that all followers of Jesus Christ should emphasize and that is to serve Him by serving others based on the Biblical instruction set forth in Scripture. "Now [we] are the body of Christ and individual members of it" (1 Cor. 12:27). Thom has masterfully outlined how we should function within the context of the apostles' teaching and gives us pause to consider just how we should relate to others within the local church—Christ's words are to individuals that collectively make up the body of Christ. His work takes root in each individual heart.

Franklin Graham

President & CEO

Samaritan's Purse

Billy Graham Evangelistic Association

Thom paints the target right where it needs to be in his call to move the church from "consumer" to "disciple": our willingness (or lack thereof) to follow Jesus. This book is a timely, deeply challenging message for Western Christians. Combining the skill of a sociologist, the insight of a theologian and the wisdom of a practitioner, Thom has produced a book that easily qualifies for "best in class."

J.D. Greear

Lead Pastor, Summit Church, Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina

Author, *Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart: How To Know For Sure You Are Saved* and *Gospel: Recovering the Power That Made Christianity Revolutionary*

The church is the only bride of Christ. The church is the only plan of God to reach the world and it is the only organization that will last forever!

The Church (with a Big C) is only as strong as its local churches around the world. In a day of church decline and stagnation, it appears as if the church of today looks nothing like the church of the Bible.

I believe when church members around the world get a clear picture of what the Bible has to say about their relationship with their church—it will change the world! Thom Rainer has done it again. He has written a book that will advance the church and therefore advance the kingdom of God.

It is a must read for all church members everywhere.

Alex Himaya

**Founding and Senior Pastor, TheChurch.at (BattleCreek/
Midtown), Tulsa, Oklahoma**

As a church member I have the privilege to unite with the body of Christ in making an eternal difference through my giftedness in His service. Church membership is an honor, privilege, and joy. Where would I be without the fellowship, encouragement, and edifying of the church? I am so thankful to Thom Rainer for making that reality come alive in this book!

Johnny Hunt

Pastor, First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Georgia

Nothing compares to a group of believers who love one another, pray for each other, and serve God together to reach their neighbors and the nations. Few congregations meet this description, though. We have failed to teach about biblical church membership, and we have reaped what we've sown—membership without meaning and members without commitment. This little book will remind you and your church family that church membership carries both privilege AND responsibility. Had such a book been available years ago when I started pastoring, the churches I led would have been stronger churches. Indeed, I will be a better church member today after reading this book.

Chuck Lawless

Dean of Graduate Studies, Southeastern Seminary

Global Theological Education Consultant, International Mission Board

Think of this book as a church membership manifesto. Read it. Apply it. Get a copy of it for your pastor and every person on your leadership

team. My friend, Thom Rainer, calls us to love the church and the members of it in a way that brings glory to God.

James MacDonald
Senior Pastor, Harvest Bible Chapel
Author, *Vertical Church*

Thom Rainer has written more in behalf of the local church than any scholar I know. *I Am a Church Member* is a stellar example of such monographs, the perfect introduction for anyone serious about pleasing Jesus through responsible church membership. Fun, perceptive, challenging, and steeped in Scripture, I sincerely wish that every evangelical churchman would read—and then practice this book.

Paige Patterson
President, Southwestern Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas

Thom Rainer has created a profound and practical resource to help two generations of Christians—those who have become too comfortable and even apathetic in the church and those of my generation who are inclined to abandon it altogether. For those, like me, who have grown up in the church this is a pointed and necessary reminder of what it means to be a church member, and for those who are new to church it is a concise primer on the joy and life found in committing to a local church. I highly recommend this deep but uncomplicated book to any believer.

Barnabas Piper
Columnist, WorldMag.com

I always tell young business leaders that business is easy . . . until people get involved. Once you bring more than two people in, you're setting the stage for a lot of disagreements—and a lot of drama. The same is true for churches. In *I Am a Church Member*, Thom Rainer reminds us that it is possible to have an effective, unified church body—even if the people in the pews have different opinions.

Dave Ramsey
***New York Times* best-selling author and nationally syndicated radio show host**

What would happen if people didn't choose a church based on what they could receive from it but what they could give to it? What if they joined not only to be encouraged but to edify; not just to be served but to use their gifts and resources to serve? Dr. Rainer bravely and insightfully answers these questions in *I Am a Church Member*—a book that every single congregant needs to have in their hands. Small in size but mighty in impact, this resource will remind God's people of what the church was always intended to be and the power it was always meant to unleash. It is life giving and vision lending to a pastor and his people as they engage in community.

God's house, across the globe, will be better off because of it.

Priscilla Shirer

Bible Teacher and Author

According to Thom Rainer, Church membership doesn't simply have privileges; it is a privilege. And I couldn't agree more. In *I Am a Church Member* Thom delivers a biblical perspective and practical approach to church membership. This little book is both refreshing and inspirational. I couldn't put it down. I highly recommend you pick it up!

Andy Stanley

North Point Ministries

So much ink has been spilled to critique the church that it has almost become sport. Yet, I am confined that you cannot love Jesus and despise His wife, the Bride of Christ. Here, Thom Rainer offers a positive vision of healthy church membership and deep value for the bride of Christ. There's a deficit of books like the one in your hands, a rare treasure for a generation deeply in need of a compelling vision for this community called church.

Ed Stetzer

President, LifeWay Research

Simple, profound, practical and convicting. These are some of the words that came to mind after devouring *I Am a Church Member*.

Thom Rainer shares what Christians need: basic building blocks for the body of believers.

Dave Stone

Senior Pastor, Southeast Christian Church, Louisville, Kentucky

I Am a Church Member is a great resource for both church leaders and church members. In a world obsessed with consumerism Dr. Rainer shows that, as a biblical church member, I am called to a greater commitment. I recommend that any church that takes belonging seriously consider giving a copy to every member.

Geoff Surratt

Managing Director, Exponential

Following Jesus involves far more than believing; it involves BELONGING. Only as we belong to Christ's Body can we become what He intends us to be. In fact, it is impossible to grow to spiritual maturity by yourself. You must be connected to the other parts of the Body. This wonderful little book explains the power of belonging to a church family.

Rick Warren

Pastor, Saddleback Church

Being a member of a local church is more than merely having a church to belong to. It's your way of committing to the work God is doing in us and through us as a community of believers. It's why you'll joyfully help to unify others versus gossiping about others. It's why you'll seek to serve sacrificially instead of being self-serving. Often, these principles don't come naturally which is why you need to read this book. *I Am a Church Member* will help you understand what membership is really all about and what a gift it is.

Pete Wilson

Senior Pastor, Cross Point Church, Nashville, Tennessee

I AM A CHURCH MEMBER



THOM S. RAINER

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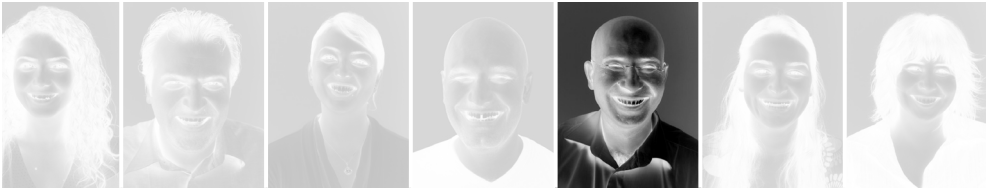
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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 • 17 16 15 14 13

Contents

Acknowledgments	xv
Introduction: A Tale of Two Church Members	1
CHAPTER 1 I Will Be a Functioning Church Member	9
CHAPTER 2 I Will Be a Unifying Church Member	21
CHAPTER 3 I Will Not Let My Church Be about My Preferences and Desires	33
CHAPTER 4 I Will Pray for My Church Leaders	43
CHAPTER 5 I Will Lead My Family to Be Healthy Church Members	55
CHAPTER 6 I Will Treasure Church Membership as a Gift	67

Chapter 1



I Will Be a Functioning Church Member

It was a big deal for this young boy living in the small Southern town. I didn't know what a country club was, but I knew one was coming to town. And it included a swimming pool, a dining area, and meeting rooms. The owners also promised to build a small golf course, a promise they would fulfill a couple of years later.

Now don't get the wrong impression. This country club was not the typical upscale clubs we often envision. It was really a small private enterprise trying to make a few bucks in a small town by offering a few amenities.

But I was overwhelmed. My parents were middle-class in income, so they could afford the small monthly fee. From my perspective, though, I had it made. I could now go to a swimming pool. I didn't know of anyone who had their own pool in town, so this amenity was exciting. I could order a burger from the dining area. And we could have birthday parties in the pool or the meeting rooms.

I began to learn a lesson. Membership means perks. Membership means privileges. Membership means others will serve me. Just pay the going rate, and you can have others taking care of you while you enjoy a life of leisure.

And, tragically, this understanding of membership is what many church members hold.

"This is my church, so you have to play the music just the way I want it."

"Look pastor, you need to remember who pays your salary."

"If you don't do this program, I'll withhold my check to the church."

"I've been a member of this church for over thirty years, so I have a right to get what I want."

"I don't pay good money to this church to listen to sermons that long."

Okay, you get the picture. Those unfortunately typical comments come from members of churches who have an

unbiblical view of membership. Their view of membership is more aligned with country club membership.

For them, membership is about receiving instead of giving, being served instead of serving, rights instead of responsibilities, and entitlements instead of sacrifices. This wrongful view of membership sees the tithes and offerings as membership dues that entitle members to a never-ending list of privileges and expectations, instead of an unconditional cheerful gift to God.

So, what does the Bible say about church membership?

I'm glad you asked.

Membership Means We Are All Necessary Parts of the Whole

There are a number of places in the New Testament where we can see a clear picture of church membership. One of the more voluminous sections is 1 Corinthians 12 to 14. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul explains the metaphor of the church being a body with many members. In 1 Corinthians 13, he established love as the central attitude and action all members should have. And in 1 Corinthians 14, he returns to the messed-up church at Corinth that has the concept of membership all wrong.

Some church leaders and members view membership as a modern business or organizational concept, so they reject the label as unbiblical. Membership, to the contrary, is very biblical.

The Bible explains “members” differently than secular culture. For example, look at the term in 1 Corinthians 12:27–28: “Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it. And God has placed these in the church.”

Do you get the difference? Members of a church comprise the whole and are essential parts of it. The apostle Paul would carry the body metaphor further and explain that members are individual parts of the body. Some are eyes; others are ears. Some are feet; still others are hands. That is why he concludes: “For as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many are one body—so also is Christ” (1 Cor. 12:12).

Membership Means We Are Different but We Still Work Together

With a country club membership you pay others to do the work for you. With church membership, everyone has a role or function. That is why some are hands, feet, ears, or eyes. We are all different, but we are necessary parts of the whole.

Each part, therefore, has to do its work, or the whole body suffers. There is a beautiful diversity in the midst of unity in

church membership. The Bible makes it clear that if one part does not do its job, the whole body does not function well. But if one part does its job well, the whole body rejoices and is stronger: “So if one member suffers, all the members with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Cor. 12:26).

Membership Means Everything We Say and Do Is Based on a Biblical Foundation of Love

Most Bible readers will speak glowingly of 1 Corinthians 13, commonly known as “the love chapter.” It is read at weddings. It is used for a husband to declare his love for a wife, or vice versa. It is preached to demonstrate a fuller meaning of *agape* or unconditional love.

While there is nothing wrong with using the love chapter in these contexts, its original meaning was to demonstrate how church members relate one to another. Can you imagine 1 Corinthians 13 being read at an acrimonious church meeting? In its full biblical context that might be the best place to read it.

If we could just abide by the principles of the love chapter, we would have completely healthy churches. It would be a revolution!

Just look at some of the relational principles of 1 Corinthians 13: “Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not conceited, does not act improperly, is not self-ish, is not provoked, and does not keep a record of wrongs” (vv. 4–5).

The principles of these two verses alone are sufficient to cause a revival in most churches!

We are not to love fellow church members just because they are lovable. We are to love the unlovable as well. We are not to pray for and encourage our pastors just when they are doing things we like. We are to pray for and encourage them when they do things we don't like. We are not to serve the church only when others are joining in. We are to serve the church even if we are alone in doing so.

Church membership is founded on love. Authentic, biblical, unconditional love.

Church Membership Is Functioning Membership

Do you know how to remain a member of a country club? Pay your dues. Do that and people will be available to serve you.

Do you know how to remain a *biblical* member of a church? Give abundantly and serve without hesitation.

Note the italicized word: *biblical*. Sure, you can remain on the rolls of many churches and never show up or give. You can remain an “active” member in other churches by being a CEO Christian: Christmas and Easter Only. You can even be a revered member in a number of churches by giving a nice sum to the church each year, even though you never lift a finger in service or ministry.

But please understand. That type of membership is not biblical membership. That approach to membership is man-made, man-centered, and man-maintained. It is totally contrary to what the Bible teaches. It has no place in our churches.

Biblical church membership gives without qualification. Biblical membership views the tithes and offerings as joyous giving. There are no strings attached. Biblical church membership serves and ministers as a natural way of doing things.

Biblical church membership is *functioning* membership.

Again, let’s return to 1 Corinthians 12 to grasp this concept more fully. When Paul was using the metaphor of the body to speak of the church, he did so for two primary reasons. First, the body is a unified whole. Likewise, the church is to be unified in its mission, purposes, ministries, and activities.

Second, the body is not only unified, it is made up of many parts. Think about the parts noted in 1 Corinthians 12:12–26:

- The foot.
- The hand.
- The ear.
- The eye.
- The nose (at least indirectly by referring to the sense of smell).

Each of these parts is supposed to function. The foot is to walk. The hand is to grasp and hold. The ear is to hear. The eye is to see. The nose is to smell.

We who are church members are all supposed to function in the church. The concept of an inactive church member is an oxymoron. Biblically, no such church member really exists.

Such is the reason we are exhorted to know our gifts and abilities, so we can use them best to serve the church for the glory of God. The fact that there is so much diversity in our church is our strength. Everyone has a function. Everyone should be functioning. Everyone should have a role.

Because we are all different with different gifts and abilities, we will function differently from other members. But if we are true and biblical church members, we will be functioning members.

One of the ongoing questions you should ask yourself and God in prayer is: “How can I best serve my church?” You should never ask yourself if you *should* be serving your church.

If you are a member, you must be a functioning member.
It's just that simple.

The First Pledge

It's hard to know for certain. Church membership rolls are not always easy to research, and some churches just refuse to face reality. But, by our best estimates, we think most church rolls are overinflated by a factor of three.

That's big. Really big.

What that means is, if your church has three hundred members on its rolls, it probably only has a hundred real biblical members. Only one-third are functioning members. Only one out of three gives abundantly and serves without hesitation.

In fact, I bet many people will question our own numbers as being overstated. They will question if *as many* as one out of three members are biblical, functioning members.

But you are making a different commitment.

You are making a pledge to be a member the way the Bible speaks and the way God designed it.

You are committing to giving cheerfully and abundantly. You are committing to serving and ministering without hesitation.

You are pledging to be a functioning church member.

The First Pledge

I am a church member.

I like the metaphor of membership. It's not membership as in a civic organization or a country club. It's the kind of membership given to us in 1 Corinthians 12: "Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it" (1 Cor. 12:27).

Because I am a member of the body of Christ, I must be a functioning member, whether I am an "eye," an "ear," or a "hand." As a functioning member, I will give. I will serve. I will minister. I will evangelize. I will study. I will seek to be a blessing to others. I will remember that "if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12:26).

Sign and Date

Questions for Study

1. Explain how country club membership and church membership are so different. Give scriptural references to support the differences in church membership.

2. Explain why church membership is a biblical concept, using 1 Corinthians 12 as your biblical foundation.

3. How is the “love chapter,” 1 Corinthians 13, related to church membership? Explain using all 13 verses of the chapter.

4. How are the different parts of the body (ear, nose, mouth, hand, foot, eyes, etc.) related to church membership? How do the parts play out in your church?

5. In relation to church membership, why is it important for members to know and use their spiritual gifts? Relate your answer to 1 Corinthians 12.

