

IX 9Marks

How Can Women Thrive in the Local Church?



**Keri
Folmar**

Church Questions

Endorsements for the Church Questions Series

“Christians are pressed by very real questions. How does Scripture structure a church, order worship, organize ministry, and define biblical leadership? Those are just examples of the questions that are answered clearly, carefully, and winsomely in this new series from 9Marks. I am so thankful for this ministry and for its incredibly healthy and hopeful influence in so many faithful churches. I eagerly commend this series.”

R. Albert Mohler Jr., President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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“As a pastor, I get asked lots of questions. I’m approached by unbelievers seeking to understand the gospel, new believers unsure about next steps, and maturing believers wanting help answering questions from their Christian family, friends, neighbors, or coworkers. It’s in these moments that I wish I had a book to give them that was brief, answered their questions, and pointed them in the right direction for further study. Church Questions is a series that provides just that. Each booklet tackles one question in a biblical, brief, and practical manner. The series may be called Church Questions, but it could be called ‘Church Answers.’ I intend to pick these up by the dozens and give them away regularly. You should too.”

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“Where can we Christians find reliable answers to our common questions about life together at church—without having to plow through long, expensive books? The Church Questions booklets meet our need with answers that are biblical, thoughtful, and practical. For pastors, this series will prove a trustworthy resource for guiding church members toward deeper wisdom and stronger unity.”

Ray Ortlund, President, Renewal Ministries

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Church Questions

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Why Should I Join a Church?, Mark Dever

How Can Women Thrive in the Local Church?

Keri Folmar

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For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

1 Corinthians 12:14–20



Are you thriving at your church? After years of discipling and counseling sisters in the church, I've seen a number of women struggle to find their place and spiritually thrive. My friend Joan happily attended women's Bible study but was too busy on the weekends to attend church.¹ Ashley found it hard to meet new people and felt like an outsider in our congregation. Natasha was hurt because she didn't think her gifts and talents were being adequately used and wondered how she could participate in church ministry.

Do you find yourself in any of those situations?
Are you struggling to thrive in your church?

As women, we have unique ways that we get to display God's glory. Being a woman is a gift, a stewardship from God. We are essential and indispensable to God's kingdom. But being a woman also comes with unique challenges. With busy lives, pulled this-way-and-that by responsibilities at school or work or home, how can we flourish spiritually?

If you resonate with the previous paragraphs, this booklet is for you. My goal is to encourage you to enjoy the fullness of God's grace available for you in the gospel and experience this joy in meaningful, life-giving relationships with the people of God in a local church. I want you to thrive. In fact, as I'll explain below, you can't separate those two things. We simply *can't* thrive spiritually apart from the church.

I'm sure your church isn't perfect—it's made up of sinners saved only by grace—but it is a beautiful display of God's glory. Just think about your brothers and sisters in the church. Consider that brother God saved from a futile life of career idolatry. Consider that sister he saved from chasing after elusive love in worldly re-

relationships. In story after story like these, the lesson is plain: “Through the church the manifold wisdom of God [is] made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph. 3:10). In saving people from a diversity of backgrounds by the gospel of his Son, God showcases his wisdom not only for the world to see but for all the heavenly hosts to marvel at. The church is God’s vehicle for his glory, and it’s our destination if we want to spiritually thrive.

Sisters, here are eight essentials for thriving in the church.

1. You Must Be Alive in Christ

Julia grew up in the church. Like other kids with godly Christian parents, she faithfully attended church, was part of the youth group, and even attended church camp every summer. When she went to college, she found a church that reminded her of home, but her attendance quickly became sporadic. As an honors student with a full load of classes, she began to spend her weekends blowing off steam at parties. Church

just wasn't as exciting as all the new experiences college offered—and besides, after a few days of partying, she needed Sunday mornings to catch up on sleep.

A Christian friend noticed the contrast between Julia's claim to be a Christian and the way she lived her life. This friend invited her to a church that taught the Bible and clearly proclaimed the gospel. At first, Julia was bored with the sermons, but then the Word of God started to convict her and shape the way she thought about her life. Over time, she realized that while she labeled herself a Christian, she didn't really know the God of the Bible. After conversations with her friends and the pastor, she repented and put her trust in Jesus.

From that moment, church life changed for Julia. It was no longer a social club where she could meet friends and be entertained. It was a necessity. She needed the preaching of God's word like she needed food. She longed for fellowship like she thirsted for water. Julia was baptized, became a member, and even moved into a house with other single women from the

church. Her life began to revolve around the church—she began to thrive.

Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches” (John 15:5). He told his disciples, “If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned” (v. 6). Jesus is the vine from which the church grows. We receive our sustenance from him. If you’re not attached to the vine, you’re not receiving spiritual nourishment. In other words, you’re not alive. Eventually you’ll wither up and be destroyed. But if you’re attached to the vine, you’ll flourish along with the other branches. Jesus promises, “Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (v. 5).

Jesus died so that we could live in him. God created men and women to glorify him and enjoy him forever. But beginning with Adam and Eve, all throughout human history mankind has rejected God, breaking relationship with him and ruining themselves. Although we were created for God’s glory, we “all have sinned and fall short”

of that glory (Rom. 3:23). The Bible tells us that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23), but God sent his beloved Son to pay the wages for us. Jesus went to the cross and died for the sins of anyone who would repent and believe. And God raised him from the dead in triumph over sin and death. Jesus Christ “gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession” (Titus 2:14). Those people are the church. If we are attached to Jesus, the vine, we are attached to the church.

Are you having a hard time getting up on Sunday morning? Are you bored with the sermons and apathetic about fellowship with the saints? Are you languishing in your local church? “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith” (2 Cor. 13:5). You have to be alive to thrive. It could be that you’re not thriving because you’re not really alive.

2. Join a Local Church

I grew up attending a variety of churches in different denominations. My father wasn’t a

Christian, but my mother had grown up going to church, so she would choose a church in a convenient location, and we would attend sporadically.

After becoming a Christian, I followed the same pattern. I would attend whatever church suited me best in the moment. The sermons often provided a spiritual pick-me-up, and the programs provided opportunities for friendship with other folks in my season of life. I was regularly in church, but I never thought about committing to one. I was a consumer.

Eventually, I started attending a church where the pastor systematically preached through books of the Bible. He didn't just use the Bible to talk about his own ideas or try to inspire me spiritually. The point of the biblical text was the point of his sermon. I also noticed something intriguing about the church's culture. The people were unusually committed to gathering together and to loving one another. I began to attend on Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, and Wednesday nights and was regularly greeted by the same people.

One Sunday evening, as I was saying good-bye to the pastor at the door of the church, he said, “Keri, you’ve been coming to this church for three months. Why don’t you become a member?” I had no problem with membership. It had just never occurred to me that *I* should join a church. I attended a membership class, went through an interview with the pastor, and joined.

Being a member of that church changed my life. I didn’t just attend church anymore; I was *part* of it. It was *my* church. Those people were committed to me, and I was committed to them. They were *my* brothers and sisters. Even more, I was developing relationships with everyone in the church, not just a small group of them who were my age and stage of life. Soon my calendar was brimming with meetings with older saints, married couples, parents of young children, single people, and widows. They were praying for me, rooting for me, spending time with me, looking out for me. They were family—one even became my husband!

The Bible doesn’t have a category for solo Christians: “You are fellow citizens with the

saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 2:19–21). Jesus is the rock that holds everything together. The apostles and prophets (the Scriptures) are the foundation. But the structure is made up of stones “joined together,” “members of a household.” The church is made up of people who are cemented to one another. You and your fellow church members “are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (v. 22). Don’t you want to be a part of that house?

Of course, don’t just join any church. Join a healthy church, one that rightly preaches the gospel and values church membership. Join a church like the ones we see in the book of Acts: “those who received his word were baptized, And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:41–42). This passage is the New Testament’s pattern for the church.

Baptism, upon profession of faith, is the entry-gate into the church. Devotion to the Scriptures, fellowship, and prayer characterize the church. And the Lord's Supper ("the breaking of bread") is how the church corporately confesses its faith in Christ and their commitment to one another. These elements are what you should look for in a local church.

If you're a member of a biblical church, you will be in a position to spiritually thrive. The New Testament highlights this point by regularly describing Christians as members of a body—a local church. An arm or a leg won't thrive if it's disconnected from the body. So also you can't thrive spiritually as a Christian if you're not a committed member of a local church. As Paul writes, the body of Christ "builds itself up in love" when "each part is working properly" (Eph. 4:16). Do you want to thrive spiritually? You need to be built up by the body of Christ.

I can look back on my Christian life and identify remarkable times of spiritual growth: attending camp as a teenager, cutting off

worldly ties after college, dealing with physical suffering as a young adult, and enjoying fellowship with close Christian friends. These were fruitful times. But nothing supercharged my growth as a Christian like joining a local church. As a church member, I was taught the word of God by other members who cared for my spiritual health, encouraged me to love the Lord in my personal and professional life, prodded me to serve in ways that weren't always comfortable, and challenged me to share the gospel widely.

I'm no longer a member of the church I first joined because I've moved away. But I've been a member of a church in every place I've lived since, and as I look back, I can see God's kindness in every church I've joined. Commitment to my local church has turned a life of drastic ups and downs into one of steady growth in the right direction. Daily, my brothers and sisters have built me up in love as we have pursued Christ together and cared for one another's spiritual well-being.

If you want to thrive spiritually, join a church.

What does it look like for women to truly thrive as Christians? In this short booklet, Keri Folmar presents eight essential principles to help women fully engage in the context of the local church, such as prioritizing church membership and involvement, investing in meaningful discipling relationships, and not allowing conflict or bitterness to fester. Women will come away with helpful ideas on how to experience the fullness of God's grace as they seek out biblical community with other believers.

Church Questions is a series that seeks to provide ordinary Christians with sound and accessible biblical teaching by answering common questions they have about church life. Each volume offers biblical answers and practical applications with the goal of nurturing healthy church practice and commitment.

Keri Folmar is a member of the United Christian Church of Dubai, where her husband has been the senior pastor for the last fifteen years. She has three children and is the author of *The Good Portion: The Doctrine of Scripture for Every Woman* and the *Delighting in the Word* Bible study series.