

# SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 5 APRIL 2020



## The Second-Most Important Book for Every Christian

*Garrett Kell*

For Christians, the Bible is our most important book.

After the Bible there are a few books every believer should probably read, re-read, and apply. On this short list I'd include Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Augustine's *Confessions*, Lewis's *Mere Christianity*, Packer's *Knowing God*, and *Operation World*. But even these great works fall behind what I consider the second-most important book for every Christian.

What book? Your local church's membership directory.

Before you roll your eyes and run off to read something else, please give me a moment more of your time.

Christians are not isolated pilgrims on a journey to heaven. Rather, we are all members of Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12:27), children in his family (1 John 3:1-2), and sheep of his flock (John 16:10). These descriptions show that God intends Christians to be part of a tight-knit community.

One day that entire universal community will be together in heaven with Jesus (Revelation 5:9-14, 7:9-17), but for now we come together in local churches. These churches are assemblies of believers who regularly gather to worship Jesus and foster relationships in which we help each other toward heaven. Consider these verses:

*Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.* (Hebrews 3:13)

***We aren't a social club that gets together for sweet tea and chitchat.***

*Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* (Hebrews 10:24-25)

These verses highlight the kind of relationships formed in a local church. We aren't a social club that gets together for sweet tea and chitchat. We are in a spiritual battle awaiting our Saviour's return.

So what does this have to do with a church membership directory?

I believe it is the second-most important book you own because it keeps before your eyes the brothers and sisters you're responsible to help to heaven. God has called you to help specific brothers and sisters fight against sin. He's called you to stir up particular people to love and good works. He's called you to encourage certain people every day until it is no longer called today.

Here's how a directory can help you fulfil this calling.

### **1. It gives every member a practical tool to aid in prayer and encouragement.**

No one can develop deep relationships with everyone in his or her church, but we can encourage everyone by praying for them.

Make the membership directory part of your daily devotions. Keep a copy in your Bible or in your car and try to pray through a page of the directory each day. By making prayer for

fellow members part of your daily life, God knits your heart to theirs. And when you pray, ask God to help them love God and hate sin; to become more like Jesus; to seize open doors to share the gospel; to grow in humility, wisdom, compassion, and courage; to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's conviction and leading; to be willing and able to endure persecution for Jesus' sake.

Make it part of your family's devotions. Maybe your family picks one person each night or one person each week and prays for him or her. This practice teaches your family the importance of loving and praying for those with

whom you're running the race. You may also want to pray for missionaries your church supports as a way to stir your family's heart for the people your financial giving supports.

If you pray for another member, consider taking a moment to text, e-mail, or call them and let them know. Also, if the Lord brings to mind something specific to pray about for someone, check in with him and see if he needs any further prayer or counsel. You might be surprised how often God's Spirit uses prayerful people to encourage other members of his body.

## 2. It helps pastors better shepherd the flock Jesus entrusts to them.

"Obey your leaders and submit to them," we're told in Hebrews 13:17, "for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account."

As pastors we need to know whose souls Jesus expects us to be watching over and preparing to give an account for. Church membership helps make this accountability clear, but a church directory helps make it practically clear.

As a pastor, few things help me feel the weight of Hebrews 13:17 like praying through the pages of our church's membership directory. As I do so, I see the eyes of those who have said, "I'm following Jesus by obeying and submitting to your leadership." If that responsibility isn't weighty to you as a pastor, I'm not sure what is.

Here are two ways I've found the directory helpful to our church's leadership:

**Elder/staff meetings.** Our elders take 30 to 40 minutes to talk about and pray for members at the beginning of every elders' meeting. To make this process more fruitful, we try beforehand to e-mail or call those we'll be praying for to see how they are doing spiritually.

**Sermon preparation.** By taking time during sermon prep to look through the directory, I'm able to think more clearly about how Scripture's promises and commands best apply to different types of people who will be hearing my sermon. I often take a truth from the sermon and pray it over several people from the directory. This practice tends to bear good fruit for my preparation and the people who hear the message.

## 3. It keeps homebound members on your mind, though they may be out of sight.

The apostle James writes, "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and father is to visit orphans and widows in their distress" (James 1:27).

Members who are no longer able to worship with us in person are marked as "homebound" in our directory. We encourage families and non-married members to write them letters or stop by and visit them. God has used this practice to help us keep these sometimes-forgotten members close to our hearts.

## 4. It helps homebound members continue to invest in the spiritual health of the church.

For many members who can no longer gather with the church for worship, prayer has become their primary ministry. By ensuring they get updated copies of the membership directory, we remind them that they're not forgotten and that they still play a vital role in the life and health of the church. Names and photos in a booklet that they can look at each day helps remind those whose memories may be fading.

## 5. It helps alert church members to people who may be in danger.

In James 5:19-20, we read: "My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."

We'd like to think our church is a tight-knit community where everyone knows who's showing up regularly and how each one is doing. Nevertheless, some get overlooked.

If, however, your church and elders are regularly praying through the directory, the probability dramatically increases of someone saying, "Have you seen \_\_\_\_\_ in a while?" And, over time, as God develops a culture of members knowing (and caring) that they're responsible for each other, they will take initiative to seek out members they haven't seen lately.

I know several people who'd been absent from church and wandering in sin, but when a praying member noticed they hadn't seen them in a while, they reached out and God used them to help that fellow member begin walking with the Lord again. May God make us a people alert to those who may be wandering into danger – and may other Christians pursue us when we wander ourselves.

This idea of a membership directory being the second-most vital Christian book may not seem trendy, but I hope you see my point. Few other practical resources can help every member in your church love one another by praying for each other. So, if you have a directory, start using it. If not, lead the charge to get one put together. To help spark some ideas, consider this article.

May God make us a people intentional to pray and care for one another.

*We'd like to think our church is a tight-knit community...*



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Source: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-second-most-important-book-for-every-christian/>

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