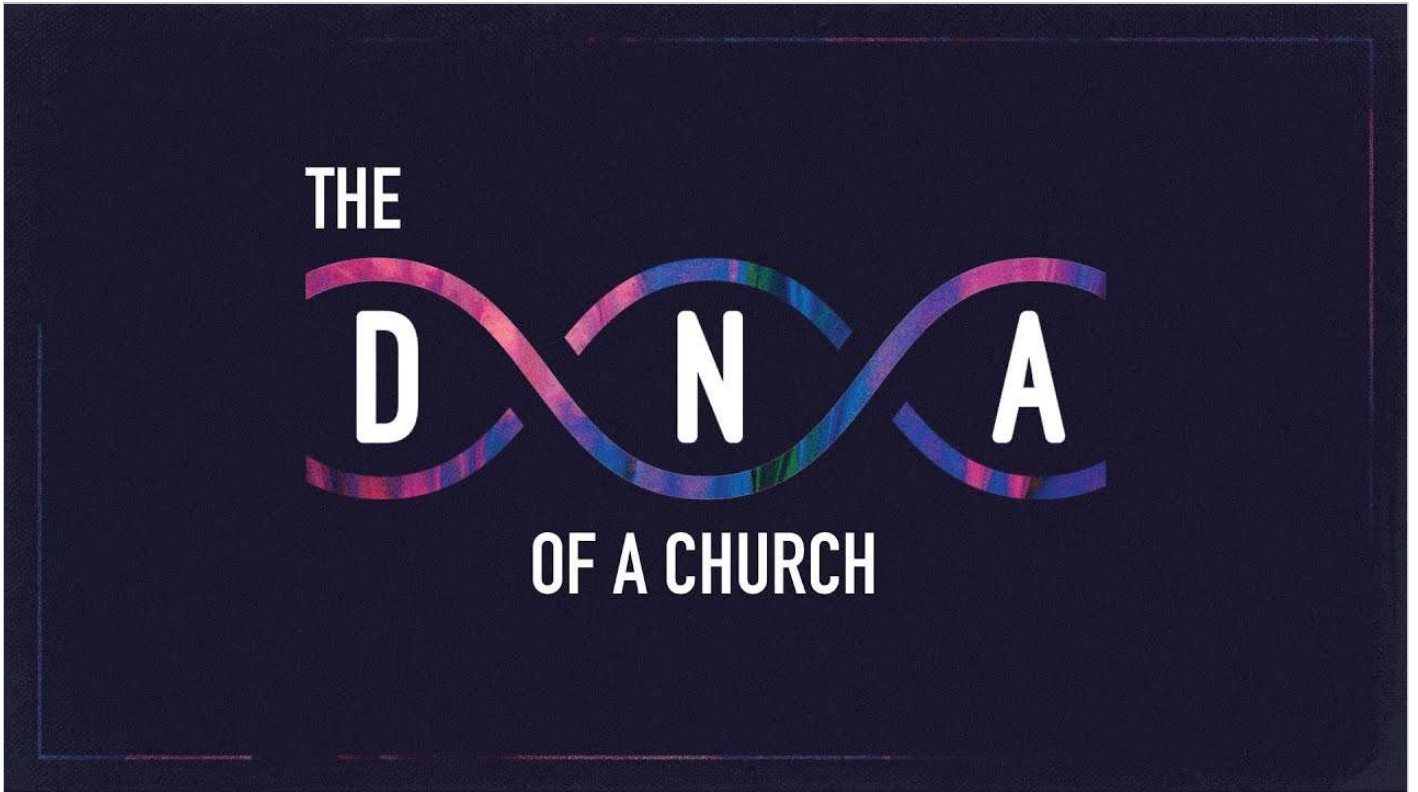
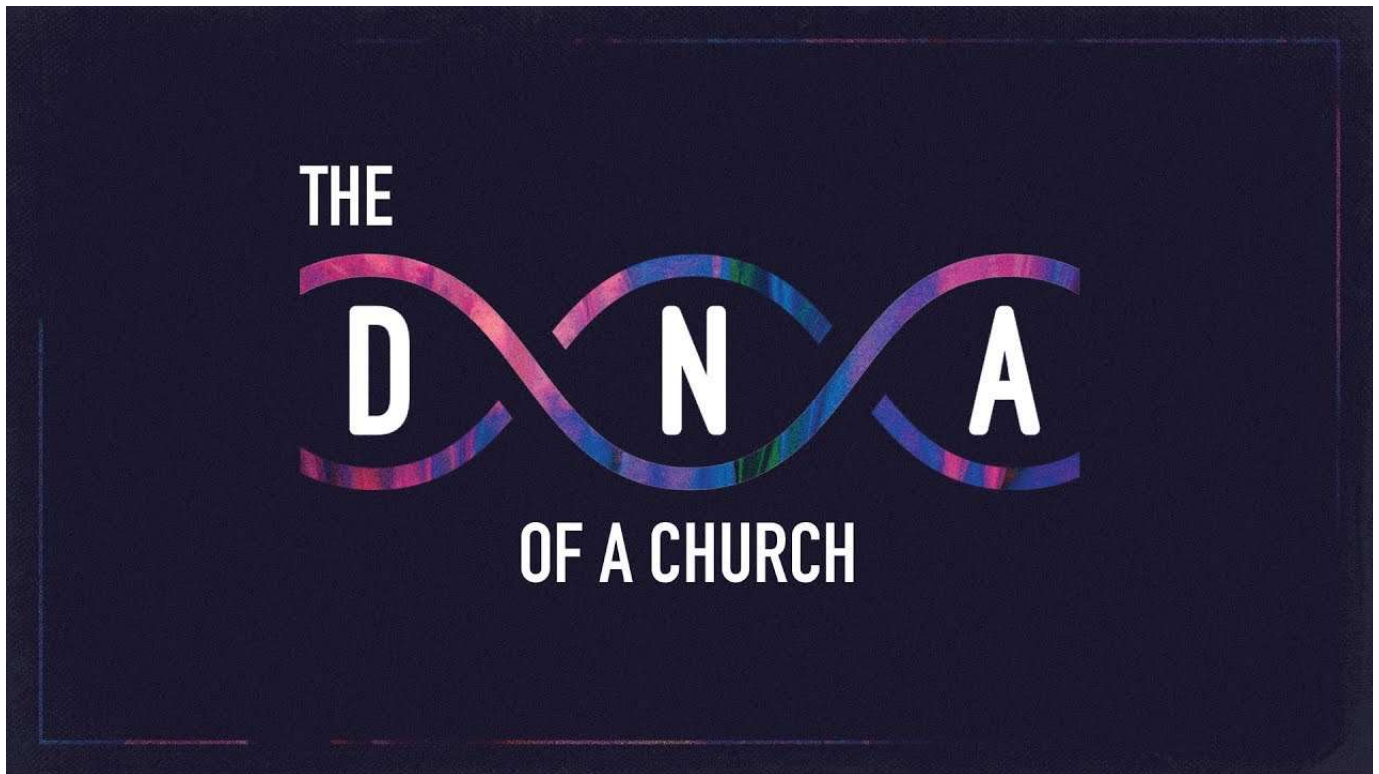


# The DNA of a Church



By Vice President of Strategy and Training Larry Barker



In 1 Thessalonians 1 Paul speaks to the believers thanking God for the church they had become. He says that he remembers them often in his prayers and he recalls their “work of faith, labor of love, and endurance of hope.” He is describing the DNA of the congregation of believers Thessalonica. In verse 6 he says that they had become imitators of them and imitators of Jesus Christ. In other words, they had the same spiritual DNA that caused others to recognize them for these characteristics. There was not only individual imitation but institutional imitation as well (1 Thessalonians 2:14).

DNA is defined as “a self-replicating material that is present in nearly all living organisms as the main constituent of chromosomes. It is the carrier of genetic information. The fundamental and distinctive characteristics or qualities of someone or something, especially when regarded as unchangeable” (Oxford Languages). Every church should have the same DNA, but churches do not have to look exactly the same. Parents give birth to a child, but the child does not look exactly like them; a blood test would prove their lineage. Churches should have the same DNA, but there are different expressions of a church all over the world.

In *Organic Church* by Neil Cole, Cole defines the DNA of a church as divine truth, nurturing relationships, and apostolic mission. These three strands give a church its biblical identity as expressed in the scriptures and determine their validity and their ability to replicate and multiply what matters. Several books have been written on the need to examine a church’s DNA to determine if it’s effective, such as *Purpose Driven Church*, *Simple Church*, *Sticky Church*, *U-Turn Church*, *Vertical Church*, *Organic Church*, and probably my favorite, *Presence-Centered Church*.

These resources can indeed be helpful but can be overwhelming and even paralyzing in trying to decipher your DNA code. First Thessalonians provides a biblical example to imitate: divine truth – embracing the cross, nurturing relationships – experiencing community, and apostolic mission – engaging the culture. Your DNA is determined by what you believe (faith), where you belong (love), and how you bless others (hope). It is imitation at its highest level. In *Organic Church* Neil says, “If we concentrate on one part of DNA and eliminate any other part we will lose the whole of it; death and mutation are the result.”

It all begins with biblical truth. Doctrine is important, and if you as a church do not know what you believe, false doctrine can easily begin to penetrate your congregation. Faithful works is believing in his truth and the power of the gospel. It is standing upon absolute truth, and that is a biblical decision regardless of what any person or any culture says. Make sure your church is dedicated to knowing what it believes, delivers sound doctrinal preaching and teaching, and follows a process of making disciples

who make disciples. The goal is not only your ability to feed your flock, but more importantly your flock's ability to feed itself.

Next you must also focus on nurturing relationships. The book of 1 John gives the picture of a family caring for one another and the importance of biblical community. This is where you are called to practice the "one anothers" emphasized in the New Testament. You need to think through what your small groups will look like and how they will meet and what style of study they will implement. They can utilize SOAP individually and the Discovery Bible Study method when they get together. You must also develop skill sets such as conflict resolution and how to deal with difficult people. It is not always easy, but it is well worth the journey.

The most elusive strand of DNA in far too many churches is apostolic mission. Your church is focused on truth and relationships, but all too often it is not concentrating on engaging and exegeting its community to effectively communicate the gospel. This mutated church has neutered its ability to reproduce. It is so easy to adopt a "come to us" mentality where there is no spiritual reproduction, and the congregation becomes selfish and immature. Consumerism begins to take over and a "country club" mentality can win the day. How are you making people around you aware of Christ's love in a positive way?

Our missional DNA should be this: To bring the gospel to as many people as possible in our surrounding geography. We will expand our influence and impact through being imitators and by containing everything necessary to replicate our DNA. This requires focusing on divine truth (faith), nurturing relationships (love), and apostolic mission (hope). Here is some good news. Healthy Church Solutions can help you through several venues such as online video trainings, consultations, a dedicated website, podcasts, pastor zoom huddles, and more. Be sure to check us out at [healthychurchsolutions.org](https://healthychurchsolutions.org) or [healthychurchpodcast.com](https://healthychurchpodcast.com).

Healthy Church Solutions is committed to helping churches and pastors where they need it, when they need it most. This ministry exists to come alongside churches in helping you to develop your church's values, vision, mission, and strategies. We have online video trainings, which include student curriculum along with teacher notes on topics such as system training, assimilation, discipleship, prayer outreach, leadership, a pathway for revitalization, and more. Many of these have three or more trainings on each of these subjects and can be delivered to your people in whatever way fits you best.

Healthy Church Solutions is not only committed to helping you with solutions in your church, but it is built upon the deep conviction that your church is the solution to your community. Paul says in Ephesians 3:10, "This is so God's multi-faceted wisdom may now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavens." Please reach out to us and let us know if there is any way we can help!