

The Marks of a Healthy Church

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[0 : 0 0] When our bodies are healthy, we have vital signs that are evident, and doctors are trained to check those vital signs to see whether or not we have health.

There are some vital signs in our body. We have our blood pressure. If our blood pressure is a little too high, we have risk of heart attack, stroke, if our blood pressure is too low.

There is a risk of fainting. If we also have our heart rate, heart rate too fast, too slow, that's dangerous. We have irregular heartbeat. That is not good either.

We have our temperature when you're not feeling well. One of the first things that mom did when you were growing up is stuck that thermometer in your mouth and checked your temperature.

If our temperature is too high, it's an indication that there's illness in the body. And the pulse, we check the pulse to see if our heart is beating. In the absence of a pulse, it means there's no life.

[1 : 0 8] It's the same in the life of a church. In an unhealthy church, there's going to be dissension, there's going to be fighting, there's going to be maybe negativity, lack of worship, lack of sharing the gospel, lack of service, lack of people.

There was one dead church where the pastor did something a little unusual during the sermon. He asked everyone to stand and to go around and greet one another.

And there was a lady in the church, she was new to the church, and so she goes to a man who was sleeping. And because of all the bustling and the noise, he woke up as she stuck out her hand and she said, hello, I'm glad it's done.

And he looked up at her and he says, ma'am, I'm glad it's done too. Not the mark of a healthy church. I've been in some of those churches before. And when we are in a healthy church, there's going to be some vital signs as well.

People will be serving. People will be sharing the gospel. There will be families. There will be fellowship. There will be food, just like the early church did, ate on a regular basis together.

[2 : 3 5] And there's going to be going out in the community, serving the community. And there's going to be edification of the saints. There's going to be exaltation of the Savior.

There's going to be evangelism of the community. And so we have all of these vital signs of a church, of a healthy church.

So we need to ask ourselves the question, are we a healthy church? Hopefully, not like this church.

In October 2006, there was a story in the Reader's Digest. And in that story, Retha Mayhew was going over the financial statements of the church.

She was going over the receipts. And there was a receipt from a paint store. And it was signed by an individual named Christian.

[3 : 35] And so she gets on the phone. She didn't recognize the name. There was no one there by that name. And so she gets on the phone. And she gets an individual from the paint store who answers the phone.

And she tells him about this receipt and says that they didn't buy any paint from this paint store. And he looked.

He put her on hold. He goes back. And he comes back. And he says, ma'am, yes, there, this, I see the receipt. It's billed to your church.

And it was signed by someone named Christian. And she said, I want you to know that there are no Christians here at First Church.

Well, I think that we have signs in the New Testament in Acts chapter 9 and verse 31, which is where we are today.

[4 : 32] We have signs that not only were there Christians in the early church, but they were serving and they were doing what they were supposed to be doing.

Let's take a look in our Bibles this morning at Acts chapter 9 and verse number 31. And what we see in verse 31, Luke gives us a summary statement about what's been going on in the church.

And Luke gives us the state of the church address, if you will. And so we have had, remember, we've had Saul who came to know the Lord.

He comes to Jerusalem. He was rejected by the people in the church. And Barnabas, the encourager Barnabas, goes to the apostles and he advocates for Saul.

The church accepts him. And then we have the main persecutor of the church becoming the main promoter of the church, who then in turn becomes the one persecuted in the church because he goes out to the synagogue of the Hellenists and he starts telling them about Jesus and they get upset and they want to kill him.

[5 : 54] And so the other disciples took him out to Caesarea and sent him out to his hometown of Tarsus.

And we get to verse 31 where Luke, as we said, gives the state of the church and the health of the church. He says, then the churches throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and were edified and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

In a healthy church, there is going to be, as we are going to see, the edification of the saints. There is going to be evangelism of the community and then there is going to be exaltation of the Savior.

What do we see first in verse 31? All the churches throughout Judea, Galilee, Samaria, the areas there around Jerusalem where the people had been persecuted and they are spread around, it said they had peace and were edified.

That word peace, the Greek word *erene*, which means peace. And so we had, first of all, when Saul started his persecuting the church, they had Saul to worry about.

[7 : 26] And then there were others persecuting the church. And when Saul leaves for the first time in a while, the church has some peace.

Well, there was a reason why the church had peace. They had peace from without, but they also had peace from within because of their sins being forgiven.

The Bible tells us that when we trust Christ as our Savior, we all of a sudden, we were alienated apart from God.

When we trust Christ as our Savior, we now have peace with God. So they had peace with God because they had come to know Christ as their Savior, but they also had the peace of God internally.

They were a healthy church. And they were also, because the persecution was beginning to lessen around them, Luke says that they are beginning to have a little bit of rest.

[8 : 32] They kind of have a breather. But we see something else going on. Well, we see that in a healthy church that there is edification.

So we have that word here. They had peace and they were edified. That word edified, by the way, is an architectural term.

When a house is built or when a building is built, you have workers, you have builders who place stick upon stick, brick upon brick, and you have an edifice that is built up.

So that's where we get our English word edifice from, from that word, which means to build up. And interestingly enough, that word in the Greek, in the tense, it's a present passive participle.

So they were continually being built up by one another. They were continually, they were edified presently.

[9 : 51] They were continuing to be edified. And it's passive because, like we would have today here, I am built up by you.

And you're built up by someone else. You're encouraged. You're taught. So we have, the edification came from the teaching of the word of God. It came from the encouragement by the Spirit of God and serving as well in the Spirit of God.

So they were being built up. They had peace with one another. They had peace with God. And they were encouraged and being built up this entire time.

You know, it's been said that God cannot do something through a church until God does something in a church.

So if we want God to be working through us, if we want to be able to accomplish things, if we want to see more people, if we want to see growth, not only physical growth, numerical growth, but spiritual growth, where we can handle the things, we can face the things that life throws at us, God has to do the work in us before He can do the work through us.

[11 : 15] Now we say, you know what, we want people. We want people. But we have to be ready to receive them. We have to have the systems in place so when they come, we know how to mentor them.

We know how to disciple them. We have a place to put them. We have places for them to serve. And we have the elements in place for us to be working together, just like the human body is made up of systems, the body of Christ, the church as well, is made up of systems as well.

We have leadership systems. We have systems that serve. We have systems that clean. We have systems that teach. And we have systems that care for and nurture.

So all of this works together. So the early church were edified. So in a healthy church, there's going to be edification.

Going to be encouraged, built up, taught, mentored. So that is going to be one of the marks of the healthy church. But let's continue in verse number 31.

[12 : 30] So not only was there edification and teaching and serving and encouraging in this healthy church at this time, we see, we continue on, and they were walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

So there's going to be not only edification in the church, but there's going to be glorification in the church. What were they doing? They were walking in the fear of the Lord.

It doesn't mean they were afraid of God, but it means there was reverence, and they lived in awe of God, and it made a difference in their conduct.

If we expect to make a difference in our community around us, we're going to have to live differently. Do you know what the world needs?

The world doesn't need more of the world. They got enough of the world. Matter of fact, that's why people are getting stressed out.

[13 : 49] That's why people have ulcers, and that's why people are thinking about, you know what, I'm done with all of this, and there's got to be something else. I wish I had some hope that things could be better.

Well, guess what? We can offer the greatest hope in the world. And so they were walking in the fear of the Lord, two different Greek words for walking.

Now there's parapateo, which means you put one step in front of the other, but this word is different, it's a word that means to travel, to go from point A to point B.

So as they were journeying through their life together as the church, they were doing it in the fear of God.

They had a good testimony to those around them. It means that their life backed up what they said.

[14 : 54] You know what? We're Christians. We are followers of Jesus Christ. We love God. They were known for what they were for. They were not known for what they were against. They were known for loving people.

They were known for loving one another. They were known for caring for one another. They were known for caring for others. They were walking in the fear of the Lord.

Their conduct showed it in Philippians chapter 1 and verse number 27. We see only let your conduct, he's talking, Paul is talking to believers.

He says only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ. Think about your life. Think about last week. Was your conduct last week worthy of the gospel?

Was the way you lived last week worthy of the gift that you've been given? You know, there's stories where, in other cultures where someone's life is saved by someone else.

[16 : 06] And in some cultures, I know historically, I'm not too sure about this today, but if someone saved your life, he owed the rest of your life to the other person. So you served that person for the rest of your life.

And we think about lives that were saved. We think about those who, and there are plenty stories of someone who runs out in traffic and pushes someone out of the way and they end up being killed in the process.

And then the person whose life was saved goes on and lives a horrible life. You know what? They didn't live a life that was worthy of being saved. So the question is, what kind of life are we living?

Are we living that same kind of life? Paul in Thessalonians said, Thessalonians 2.10 said, you are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly, Paul said, we behaved ourselves among you who believe, as you know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you as a father does his children, that you would walk worthy of God.

Next week, as we are going through, traveling through life, consciously think about, God, I want my life.

[17 : 35] I want to be living a life that's worthy of the name that I bear. We bear the name of Christ. Let's walk worthy of that name. So in Acts chapter 9, verse 31, they were building each other up, encouraging one another.

Now here's the thing. When someone, when you've got a crew that has a contract to build a house, they've got the blueprint, and they know exactly what they're going to do, they know what the house is going to look like, what kind of contracting crew you think it would be if part of the crew were putting up the frame, putting up the two-by-fours, and they were framing it, and they were doing it, and another part of the crew came with their crowbar, and they were breaking off the two-by-fours, one-by-one, right behind the other people.

You wouldn't get much done, right? And you wouldn't have the house that was supposed to be built according to the blueprint.

But what happens in many local churches? God is using some who are passionate about serving Him, passionate about sharing the gospel, and passionate about serving children and going out in the community, and then we have others that are taking pot shots from the back and say, well, you shouldn't be doing that, and you shouldn't be doing that, and you should be doing this instead.

Well, that's like going behind the builders and tearing out the two-by-fours. You should be helping them build rather than distracting or tearing down.

[19 : 24] So, he says, they were being built up, the word that was used. He says, they are, they had peace, and they were being built up, and they were walking in the fear of the Lord, so their conduct was worthy of God, but also there was comfort.

Shouldn't the family be a safe place? Think about your family. A family that is operating based upon the principles of God's word should be a place, should be the safe place where you can come in from the cold, cruel world out there, get encouraged, get built up, so you can go back out.

Not so you'd come in and get torn down and how a horrible person you are and a terrible person and bickering and, no, a family should be, if a family is operating based upon the principles of God's word, it should be a safe place and it should be a place where you can come home and go, I'm home.

Have peace and relax. But there are homes that, there's no peace in some homes, unfortunately, and there's no peace in some churches. But here, here we see that they were experiencing the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

So how can we glorify God? We can exalt Him with our lips, we can magnify Him with our lives, and we can obey Him with what we've learned.

[21 : 11] So the early church had peace, they were building one another up instead of tearing down, and they, in their conduct, they were living a life that was worthy of the Lord, and they were also receiving the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

That parakaleia, the parakaleia, the similar word that was used for the Holy Spirit, one called alongside to help. They were receiving the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

And then, what do we see thirdly? Look at the rest of that verse. They were what? They were multiplied.

So when you have a church that's being edified and being built up, when you have a church that's glorifying God and living a life that's worthy of the gospel, you have a church that will be multiplying.

They were all working together. They were using their spiritual gifts. They were sharing the gospel. And it's wonderful when all of this is happening, there's also going to be evangelism of others.

[22 : 31] So we have the edification of the saints, we have the glorification of God, and also what we see here in this verse, there will be the multiplication of the church.

And I always, I'm always excited when I hear testimonies of this going on. Heard a testimony just yesterday.

Someone was at Dollar General, I believe it is, and they encouraged someone to come and be our guest at faith. And do you know what this worker behind the counter said?

You're the second person today that invited me to that church. Isn't that amazing? You're the second person today that invited me to that church.

What does that say? What does that tell us? That tells us that we're out there at least talking, and we're at least inviting. And I know there are some of you who share with your neighbors, share with your friends, and it's always exciting when someone says, we made friends with somebody new.

[23 : 45] And our goal is to be friends, but also we want to make sure they know Jesus as their Savior. So Luke says that because they were building one another up, because their conduct was such that they were walking through their life, they were traveling through the journey of their life, glorifying God, they were receiving the comfort of the Holy Spirit, and they were being multiplied.

what we see in the book of Acts, we see an equation in the book of Acts. Those of you who like math will catch this.

What we see in the book of Acts, boldness plus witness plus the power of the Holy Spirit equals growth. growth. Boldness plus witness plus the power of the Holy Spirit equals growth.

So when we ask ourselves, are we a healthy church? Not as healthy as we could be. Not as healthy as we should be.

Just as a human body. Yep. If you got a pulse, you're alive. But as the doctor takes, or the nurse takes that blood pressure cuff, so she takes the first vital sign, and it's, yep, there's a pulse, your heart's beating.

[25 : 30] But then she takes that blood pressure cuff, and she says, ooh, don't you hate it when a medical professional goes, hmm. And she goes, hmm.

And she writes something down, and you're thinking to yourself, I wonder what that means. And you ask. And sometimes they'll tell you. But when the doctor comes in, the doctor looks at what all the vital signs the nurse took.

She'll take your temperature, take your pulse, take your blood pressure. Well, they make you weigh first thing. I mean, that's, they make you weigh. So those of you who don't like knowing that, you just don't look at the scale.

people. And so we take all these vital signs, and so you might be alive, but you might have trouble in one area. See, there's no such thing as a perfect church.

There's always places where we can improve. Just in the human life, we can improve our diet, we can improve our exercise, we can improve, there's so many ways that we can improve.

[26 : 36] So we all have a measure of health, and I think we could all say we could do things that would improve our health.

The same in the body of Christ. We're alive, and we have a measure of health, but we could be healthier.

We could build one another up a whole lot better. We could be serving our world, a whole lot more actively. We could be taking care of the poor.

We could be doing so many things. We can't do everything. Obviously, we can't do everything. But what we can do, we can do.

So when we stop and think and ask ourselves, are we healthy? If we have a problem, go to the doctor, Dr. Jesus.

[27 : 35] He's always in his office. You never get his answering service, and he'll always take you in whenever you call out to him.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you today for you giving us the marks of a healthy church, that we will be building one another up.

We'll be glorifying you with our lives. We'll be receiving the comfort of your Holy Spirit as he is moving in our lives.

And also, we're going to be seeing multiplication, people coming to know Christ as their Savior, as we are sharing your gospel with those around us.

Thank you, dear God, for all that you're going to do in us, so that you can do great and mighty things through us. We thank you, we praise you, for it's in Jesus precious, his holy name that we pray.

[28 : 42] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.