

HEALTHY CHURCH - HEALTHY LEADERS

Notes from the
Rural Ministries Conference 2006

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1. Introduction

One night a Bedouin traveler was sitting in his tent in the desert. Feeling hungry he lit a candle and opened a date. It was wormy and he threw it aside. He tried another and it also had worms. So did a third. Whereupon he blew out the candle and ate the fourth one!

We cannot remain in darkness about what is happening to churches and leaders.

Activity 1

1. List the marks of a healthy church.
2. List the symptoms of a diseased church.
3. Consider your own church. What are some of the signs of health and sickness?

Let's start by stating some convictions:

- I believe that building the Church is the primary work of God in this world and its only hope.
- I believe the church is here on earth not to do what other groups can do, but to do what no other group or human being can do.
- I believe that the two greatest dangers the churches faces are that we give up on the gospel and give in to the culture
- I believe strong churches come through the influence of godly leaders.
- I believe that the most effective way to evangelize is though the planting of hundreds of new churches, while not neglecting the constant ongoing need for renewal in older ones.
- I believe that healthy church leaders need practical, honest, encouraging and Biblical input into their lives.
- I believe that there is an important difference between church size and church health

Activity 2

It is good to be able to state your convictions. Take a few moments using the phrase "I believe" to complete the sentence. Be prepared to share with others.

1. Introduction

Playing the numbers game

Numbers involved in a church are not insignificant but they are only one indicator of what may be taking place.

"You can be big and healthy, or big and flabby. You can be small and healthy, or small and wimpy. Big isn't better; small isn't better. Healthy is better."
Rick Warren

In any diagnosis of church health, basic questions must be answered: "Who and how do you measure the vertical? How do you quantify a radiant, wrinkle free, holy and blameless church?" See Ephesians 5:27

Two reminders and two questions?

Reminder 1 - Most kingdom work is unseen.

Mark includes 3 seed parables in chapter 4. Matthew records 7!

| Parable | Illustrates |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| The sower and the soils 4:1-20 | How the kingdom comes |
| The growing seed 4:26-28 | How the kingdom grows |
| The mustard seed 4:30-34 | How the kingdom impacts |

The second parable is most encouraging for church leaders. Jesus tells us that his kingdom grows:

a. Secretly

Preparing ground and sowing seed is hard work. When the day is over the farmer heads for home and goes to bed. He does not sit up all night biting his fingernails, wondering if the seed fell in the right places, or whether it will take root. During the growing season he does not constantly dig it up to check for growth. Instead he rests secure that God is at work. He waits for "first the stalk, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear" (4:28) Only when the grain is ripe is he called into action.

b. Assuredly

Jesus says, "All by itself the soil (receptive) produces corn" (4:28) There are forces at work which the farmer does not have control over. God must do the work and promises to do so. Paul makes exactly same point in 1 Corinthians 3:6a "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it – God made it grow."

One of the most destructive forces at work in the church today is that many are like the wider crowd listening to Jesus. They expected immediate and assured signs. This results in pressure on leaders to produce results. The Pastor/Teacher is not expected to be a seed sower but an expert in sales and marketing.

Remembering that Jesus says that as we sow God will be at work, reminds us that everything does not depend on us.

Reminder 2

The measure of ministry is fully known by God.

Consider the tale of two prophets - Jeremiah and Uriah (Jeremiah 26:20-23).

Both spoke in the name of the Lord and both brought similar, hard messages of judgment to the people. Yet God promised one, Jeremiah, that the people of the land wouldn't prevail against him. Although Jeremiah had many difficult periods during his ministry, "he was not handed over to the people to be put to death". However, the other prophet, Uriah, was marked for death. He had to become a fugitive, and ultimately lost his life.

Which of the two prophets was more faithful to his calling?

Which one was the "true prophet"?

The Bible gives no indication the Lord preferred Jeremiah over Uriah or that one was better than the other. They both carried out their ministries. God chose to rescue one and not the other. Why? The Bible is silent. The answer simply rests in the mind of God. Superficial comparisons with other churches may not be a sure sign the Lord is blessing one and judging the other. Unhelpful concentration on periods of past blessing, where much higher figures of general church

1. Introduction

attendance were evident, produces a gloom and doom perspective. Each congregation is called to be faithful to God at this particular time. The results are in the hands of the Lord who knows all things.

Two questions:

1. How do we avoid the refrain, “Not much is happening, but at least we’re being faithful,” becoming an excuse for apathy and laziness?
2. How do we ensure that the life message is not communicated in inappropriate ways or contained in antiquated structures?

1 Thessalonians

Consider: Which New Testament church displays the most evidence of good health? Which one might receive a health warning?

Founded by Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-9) the church in Thessalonica had a special place in his affections. Timothy had been dispatched to find out how they were getting on. His return to Corinth with positive news prompted Paul to write the first letter to the Thessalonians in AD 51. This church possessed many health indicators:

1 Thessalonians indicates that the healthy church:

1. Consists of chosen people. ch1v4

It is God who is the initiator of our salvations. This is God's work (John 15:16 and Ephesians 1:4). The church is not a random collection of religious individuals but Christ's body and bride.

Consider: Is there evidence of the activity of God on those in your church and does it result in joyful thanksgiving

2. Includes people motivated by God v3-6

Notice that the primary source of motivation is not the leaders. What resulted in work, labour and endurance is the work of the triune God. The qualities of faith, love and hope are "in our Lord Jesus Christ" and give rise to a particular kind of work, labour and endurance. This is vastly different from self promoting work for the church, that is hard labour and must be carried out with stoical endurance. At the beginning of verse 3 it is to God the Father that Paul gives thanks. He has been instrumental in producing faith, love and hope. God the Holy Spirit has been the powerful source of change.

Consider: What evidences are there of a motivated people?

3. Seeks a balance between word and Spirit v5

Words are important. The gospel came with words (Acts 17:2) The message contained a recognisable content (gospel) and was the foundation of their beliefs. The primary role of a pastor is to make known all of the word of God and encourage people to submit to it. **Words must be accompanied by power with the Holy Spirit** (Romans 1:16) or they have little effect. It is the Holy Spirit who brings people to the awareness of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-11). Deep conviction may include the strength, courage and power given to the messenger or the conviction that comes over people when the gospel penetrates their hearts.

Consider: Is attention given to the importance of word, Spirit and conviction in your life together?

4. Provides good examples to follow v 6&7

These believers became third generation mimics of Christ. Christ the first; Paul the second and the Thessalonians the third. Imitators become examples. If a leader is not an imitator of the Lord they cannot be an example. People are looking for role models and this is a vital ingredient of making disciples.

Consider: Who has been an effective role model in your life? Consider their qualities. What qualities would you more like to exhibit to those who look to you as an example? What priority does discipleship receive?

5. Is committed to mission v7 & 8

No other church is spoken of with such high praise. Their impact was felt in the two Roman provinces that comprised Greece and beyond. The gospel reverberated from these people wherever they went. They spoke good news and made the news, as a result of their changed lives.

Consider: Every church has a testimony founded essentially on the life-style of members. How is your church regarded locally and further away? Who knows you are there?

6. Knows how to endure. v3-8

(See also 1 Thessalonians 3:8)

Absolutely indispensable in the ongoing life of the church of God is the power to keep going month after month, year after year, in the path of obedience. This may mean long-haul endurance in a particular ministry in spite of emotional, relational, spiritual and financial obstacles.

Endurance comes from hope. Without the endurance of hope, the work of faith and the labour of love will prove to be no real work of God. We do not live at a time when people put a high premium on endurance in relationships or jobs or in ministry. However this is no excuse.

Consider: What does it take to hang in there when the going is tough? When might it be right to close a church or move on to another?

7. Waits expectantly for the return of Christ v10

Waiting is a recurrent theme in the Thessalonian letters. Paul considered it could happen in their lifetime. The doctrine of the second coming deserves careful attention. It will help us better understand the times we are living in; strengthen us on difficult days; motivate evangelism and mission and aid us in holy living (See Rev. 22:12).

Consider: What attention does the second coming receive in your teaching and preaching programmes? How do we avoid this subject suffering from neglect?

The Thessalonian church is not perfect. Paul would remind them of the importance of moral purity; hard work and the danger of inner tensions especially related to the second coming. Although not perfect this is a relatively healthy bride.

Final considerations:

1. Which of the health indicators has the most impact on you?
2. Which one most surprises you?
3. What quality do you consider is most lacking in your church? What could change this?
4. Identify one of the marks of the health demonstrated by your church. Like Paul in v2 use it as a source for thanksgiving.
5. Could you use the healthy church guide from this chapter, or other resources, to evaluate your church?

3. The Healthy Church Leader

2 Corinthians

Christ's kingdom operates on a different set of principles to that of the world. Many military and secular models of leadership miss the spiritual dimension. One of the best definitions of leadership is simply, "*Leadership is influence.*"

Paul is not ashamed to use himself as an example of influential leadership:

1 Corinthians 4:16 "I urge you to imitate me."

1 Corinthians 11:1 "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

The church at Corinth had been established in a busy trading centre, dominated by Roman culture, in approximately AD 50. (Acts 18) Following a period of nearly 18 months, teaching and caring for the new Christians, Paul moved on to Ephesus. His departure and consequent leadership vacuum resulted in major problems. These included: division; toleration of immorality; return to idolatry; disrupting the Lord's table; abuse of spiritual gifts; little concern for right doctrine and questions about Paul's apostolic authority. Paul's letters provide a health warning to churches and an example of healthy leadership under pressure. The second letter is the most passionate and earnest of Paul's writings.

1. Healthy leaders develop loyal followers

Proverbs 20:6 "A faithful man, who can find?"

Paul was concerned to find people loyal to the truth taught and loyal to him personally. (2 Corinthians 12:11, 15-19) These Christians were not clones but sought to combine loyalty to truth with close personal bonds of love and friendship. Such qualities are first found in God.

Loyalty comes about through being loyal. If a church leader hears criticism of other leaders they will experience pain. As a shepherd Paul writes "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy" (11:2).

A leader cannot effectively motivate people to follow through force or the external motivators of reward and punishment. Leadership hinges on trust that is cultivated through love and loyalty. Paul knew the

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Corinthians were hurting and in need of encouragement. There is the danger with objective driven leadership that people may feel used and unless loyalty is both given and received, unhealthy leadership develops.

2. Healthy leaders maintain their integrity.

Paul is accused of being unreliable and that his word could not be trusted. (1 Corinthians 4:18-19) His critics seized on his change of travel plans. Paul's defence is robust (2 Corinthians 2:12) in that he has not said or written anything that deceived or included double meanings. His sincere desire was to come twice to Corinth (1:15-19, he goes on explain his reasons in 1:23-2:4).

The personal integrity of a healthy church leader requires a clear conscience and firm convictions. There is to be no false distinction between the words spoken and the life lived. Everything was clear. (1:18 and 2:13) As his words were dependable so was he. This is integrity in leadership.

3. Healthy leaders are flexible

Paul had changed his mind and postponed the planned visit, but his reasons were not the result of insincerity or lack of desire. A face to face meeting was going to be confrontational and painful for all involved. (1:23) Writing a carefully crafted letter could be more productive and lead eventually to a more joyful visit.

Healthy leaders need both backbone and flexibility. Often the first decision made by a leader is the relatively easy one. To persevere when you are wrong or there would be no spiritual gain, is folly. Flexibility may mean pulling back, waiting, or admitting you are wrong.

4. Healthy church leaders know they are inadequate

Paul's critics claimed he was not qualified to lead. Would he attack or defend his position? In doing neither, but simply agreeing with his critics, he exposed their motives. (2:16 "Who is equal / sufficient for such a task?") The setting is the Roman triumphal parade with the accolades going to the returning conquering hero. Who will deserve the plaudits in

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Christ's triumphal parade? The false teachers assumed they met the qualifications as a result of their superiority. In fact they preyed on peoples' fears, in order to gain a personal return. (2:17)

Your security and the resources required for service are not found primarily in your gifts, training or experience, but in Christ. When confidence is placed in ourselves we will become defensive and arrogant. Paul says that another mark of healthy ministry is that when "I am weak, I am strong" (12:10).

The pursuit of health for church leaders includes other aspects, but these qualities must not be neglected by those who seek to be influential.

To discuss:

1. Consider the contrasts between expectations of dynamic leadership and Paul's defence. What connects to your situation?
2. How do you seek to develop loyal followers?
3. Give an example of how your integrity has been challenged? How did you react?
4. How do you discern when it is right to be flexible or firm?
5. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:10 "By the grace of God I am what I am." How does knowing yourself and your inadequacies help?

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2 Corinthians 4:7-12

Would you agree that:

1. It is easier to start the Christian life than finish?
2. It is easier to start in Christian leadership than end well?

Peter Brain in "Going the Distance" (Matthias Media) tells us that 27% of pastors suffer burn-out, a breakdown or serious illness within ministry, rising to over 44% after 14 years.

Paul in Acts 20:28 has a double instruction for church leaders in Ephesus: "keep careful watch over yourselves and all the flock." People pressure will often result in concentrating energies on the flock while neglecting the importance of self-care. We will explore Paul's perspective on his ministry in 2 Corinthians and enlist the help of some everyday objects.

Activity – Take a polystyrene cup and a coin

Identify what you think most valuable in your life. This is represented by the coin. Because it is your treasure and so valuable put it in a container (polystyrene cup) to offer protection. Now destroy the cup. Does the cup make the treasure any more valuable? What kind of treasure is inside each of you?

Paul's defense of his ministry includes reference to everyday clay pots. They were as common as polystyrene cups.

Ministry under pressure

Paul's critics made systematic attacks including: saying his appearance was unattractive; his demeanor unimpressive; his speech uninspiring and his leadership unassuming, unless he was writing. His opponents were essentially correct. There was nothing in his personality, style, appearance or oratory that contributed to the impact of his ministry.

Attack the messenger

The Corinthians were in danger that if the false teachers discredited the messenger, they could

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continue to distort the message. Somewhat reluctantly Paul determines a defence is required. Would he launch an all out attack on his critics and be accused of harshness? Should he list his past achievements and be charged with boasting? Would a makeover improve his image?

A remarkable defence

His approach is to agree with his critics and highlight his many weaknesses.

He remembered the Lord's words to him in 2 Corinthians 12:9. He acknowledged his treasure (Christ) was found in an ordinary, durable, expendable clay pot, our equivalent to a polystyrene cup (4:7). The pot has no virtue or excellence of its own. Within the potter's hands it is in the process of becoming.

Clay pots are:

1. Ordinary

If you were rich and had jewels you might display them in gold. A clay pot consists of baked clay made from dirt. Household pots came in a variety of shapes and sizes depending on purpose. Paul in defending his ministry is saying "what do you expect from a clay pot who is the chief of sinners, least among the apostles and a wretched man?" Deep within his consciousness he was aware that he was nothing special.

In working through the ordinary and by-passing the elite, God is drawing attention to the treasure not the pot. When people regularly remind you of your weaknesses this should not be regarded as a problem. It is God's way of working.

2. Durable

Everyday pots take some rough handling. Faced with a scouring pad they do not wear out. However we must be aware that a pot can be broken through too much pressure. Repair work is slow but not impossible.

Notice Paul's perspective on normal Christian ministry in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9

Activity – Rate yourself by placing a mark on the

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sliding scale

| | | |
|---------------------|--|-----------------------|
| hard pressed | | not crushed |
| perplexed | | not in despair |
| persecuted | | not forsaken |
| struck down | | not destroyed |

Resilience is required by leaders with the inner motivating strength coming from the treasure within. See the desire expressed in 10:15-16. .

3. Expendable

As a member of clay pot ministries, Paul is willing to give himself away. He was not desperately clinging on, even to life itself. 2 Corinthians 4:10-12 explains the significance of his trials. The attack is much deeper than on the pot, it was directed to Christ himself. Sacrifices made were ultimately to be for the benefit of others. (4:15) Every leader will have to share in the sufferings of Christ. A deeper work designed to achieve a weight of glory, is taking place through the troubles faced. (4:17) In your ordinariness and insignificance the life of Christ is being displayed. The treasure is more important than the clay pot.

5. The Healthy Church Guide



The Healthy Church Guide from 1 Thessalonians 1

For each question, circle the number that best applies to your church.

1 = "We haven't thought about it yet"

5 = "We are doing very well in this area"

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. Our church consists of chosen people who respond to God's grace and peace with joyful thanksgiving? Verses 1&4 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. There is clear evidence of people motivated by God? Verses 3-6 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. We seek a helpful balance between knowing and doing what God says in his word and experiencing the powerful, convicting work of the Holy Spirit? Verse 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. We have many good examples of people living godly lives that others would want to imitate? Verses 6&7 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. We show by our actions a clear commitment to mission both locally, nationally and internationally? Verses 7&8 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. When the going is hard our people show definite signs of endurance? Verses 3-8 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. We are aware of the Bible's teaching regarding the return of Christ and have a real sense of expectation that motivates our Christian living? | 1 2 3 4 5 |

Scoring: Total your circled numbers.

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| 30-35 | You compare well with the church Paul wrote to in Thessalonica. |
| 20-29 | You are on the road to health. Keep going! |
| 10-19 | You need loving careful attention. What will be your next step? |
| Under 10 | Positive health indicators are lacking. It's time for leaders and people to humble themselves seeking God's help and assistance from others. The Lord can restore and grant new direction. |

6. Perspectives of a Healthy Church

Many writers have sought to identify signs of the healthy church. The summary below gives an indication of some the perspectives:

Health Signs: Leith Anderson

1. Glorifying God
2. Producing disciples
3. Exercising of spiritual gifts
4. Relating positively to one's environment
5. Reproduction
6. Incorporation of newcomers
7. Openness to change
8. Trusting God & prayer

The Nine Habits of Highly Effective Churches: George Barna

1. They rely upon strategic leadership.
2. They are organized to facilitate highly effective ministry.
3. They emphasize developing significant relationships within the congregation.
4. They invest themselves in genuine worship
5. They engage in strategic evangelism.
6. They get their people involved in systematic theological growth.
7. They utilize holistic stewardship practices.
8. They serve the needy people in their community.
9. They equip families to minister to themselves.

Characteristics of a Healthy Church: Sonlife Ministries

1. Strong Christology
2. Clearly defined mission/purpose
3. Biblical strategy of a balanced win, build, & equip
4. Regularly winning the lost
5. Strategically building the believers
6. Ongoing equipping of the worker
7. Corporate & segment multiplication of shepherds
8. A broadly owned vision
9. A teachable spirit

6. Perspectives of a Healthy Church

Characteristics of a Healthy Church: Willow Creek

1. Active spiritual formation
2. Authentic community (not public)
3. Contagious evangelism
4. Mobilized spiritual gifts
5. Good stewardship
6. Strong leadership
7. Cultural relevance
8. Effective generation focused ministry
9. Collaboration and partnership

Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches: Natural Church Development

1. Empowering leadership
2. Gift-oriented ministry development
3. Passionate spirituality
4. Functional structures
5. Inspiring worship service
6. Holistic small groups
7. Need-oriented evangelism
8. Loving relationships

Twelve Keys to an Effective Church: Kennon Callahan

1. Specific, concrete missional objectives
2. Pastoral & lay visitation
3. Corporate, dynamic worship
4. Significant relational groups
5. Strong leadership resources
6. Streamlined structure & solid, participatory decision making
7. Several competent programs & activities
8. Open accessibility
9. High visibility
10. Adequate parking, land, & landscaping
11. Adequate space & facilities
12. Solid financial resources

Marks of Church Health: Bill Easum

1. Clear sense of mission
 2. Authentic community
 3. Indigenous worship
 4. Lay mobilization
 5. Organic structure
 6. Kingdom oriented
 7. Experientially focused on Jesus Christ
-

6. Perspectives of a Healthy Church

Vital Signs of Healthy Churches: C. Peter Wagner

1. A positive pastor
2. A well-mobilized laity
3. Meeting members' needs
4. Proper balance of the dynamic relationship between celebration, congregation and cell
5. A common homogeneous denominator
6. Effective evangelistic methods
7. Biblical priorities

Windows into the 21st Century Church: Leadership Network

1. Effective leadership
2. Lay mobilization
3. Cultural connectedness
4. Authentic community
5. Kingdom collaboration