

Characteristics of a Healthy Church

by Phil Beach Jr.

Phil Beach Jr. emphasizes the essential characteristics of a healthy church, focusing on discipleship, service, and spiritual oversight rooted in humility and obedience to God.

Duration: 49:33

Scripture: Philippians 1:1

Topics: "Church", "Discipleship", "Healthy Church"

Description

Phil Beach Jr. emphasizes the characteristics of a healthy church, focusing on the importance of hearing and responding to the call of the Holy Spirit. He encourages believers to surrender unreservedly to God's grace, fostering a community that disciplines one another and serves Christ selflessly. The sermon highlights the need for spiritual oversight and care within the church, urging members to prioritize genuine fellowship and mutual support. Beach Jr. calls for a heart of thankfulness, prayer, and joy among believers, as these are essential marks of a vibrant church community. Ultimately, he reminds the congregation that true spiritual growth and revival come from a deep commitment to the teachings of Jesus and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

We're looking together at what Christians look like when they have heard the call of the Holy Spirit and by the grace of God and the Spirit of God have surrendered themselves unreservedly to that call. Now before we begin, it is important that we ask ourselves this question. Is this the desire of our heart this morning? Is this the desire of your heart this morning? To be privileged to hear the call of God's Spirit as he speaks through his word.

And not only to hear the call of God's Spirit, but to be given the multiplied grace and mercy that comes to every heart that hears so that you can offer yourself unreservedly, unconditionally to the grace of God. Having no confidence in yourself. Having no confidence in your power to perform what God has promised to do.

But simply a heart that is persuaded that through the power and grace of Jesus Christ, Jesus can become everything in your life that God promised him to be. Is that what you want this morning? Is that the desire that God has put in your heart this morning? Everything hangs upon that one desire. Yes, Lord.

Yes, Lord. I hear your call. When we are being called in many different directions by our own desires, by the call of the world, the bottom line is going to be that overwhelming desire within our hearts that has been put there by the Holy Spirit.

Lord, I want you more than anything else. And so, as we begin to go through the book of Philippians, let's pray. God, please give me that one all-important desire in my heart.

I want to do your will. I want to do your way. I want to do what is pleasing in your eyes.

I want to be obedient to your word. I want to be obedient to your word. Now, as we had mentioned before, the call of God in the Philippian church here was a call to participate in the fellowship of the Son of God.

It was to participate in the fellowship of the Son of God. Anytime the Spirit of God is calling a group of people or an individual, it is a call to speak to them in order that they might fellowship with the Son of God. The passion of our lives, as we go through the book of Philippians, the passion of our hearts must be to fellowship with the Son of God, to know Him, to love Him, to walk with Him, to be His servant, His slave.

1 and 2 Philippians, Paul and Timothy bond servants of Jesus Christ to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Verses 1 and 2 teach us a number of things, five in particular. Number one, a church that is full of the Holy Ghost is in the process of discipling one another.

Paul and Timothy, Paul and Timothy, the two words together imply that Timothy was being disciplined by Paul. Now this discipling that was going on by Paul and Timothy was a relational discipling. It was the fact that Paul was putting his life into someone else.

Now, let me ask a question. When the Holy Spirit is in control of our lives, the most important person in our life is not ourselves. Please hear this.

Right at the very beginning of the book of Philippians, we see a man called of God pouring his life into another person. Today, there is a tendency to befriend people for our own ends. Human nature without the Holy Spirit's power, without the Holy Spirit's sanctifying power, will be attracted to certain people based on what I can get out of it, based on what's good for me, based on how that person can further my cause.

But when we go into the book of Philippians, we see the Holy Spirit working in hearts that have been set aside and sanctified by God, and we see relationships that aren't based on selfish ends, but are based on selfless endeavors to disciple others that they might become followers of Jesus. Paul was not interested in getting men and women to follow his own personal calls. Paul was not interested in befriend people in order to make personal disciples of his own ministry.

Paul's passion, and brothers and sisters, when the Holy Spirit gets a hold of us as a company of believers, our chief passion will be that we might be able to see the life of Jesus prosper in other believers. So number one, a healthy church disciplines people. Now this does not mean that by the power of human wisdom we put together disciple classes.

But what it means is that the fruit of the Holy Spirit working in mature hearts will be a movement toward befriend people for the purpose of discipling them. The word disciple means to be a pupil. Listen, a healthy church longs for each other to be pupils of Jesus, students of Jesus.

A healthy heart delights at the thought of a brother or a sister becoming more infatuated with Jesus. Now as we go through this word, we're going to find the light of God is going to be bright. And it's going to expose our shortcomings.

It's going to expose how little we know of the infilling power of the Holy Spirit. Now I want to at the very beginning lovingly admonish us all not to draw back because of this, but to boldly come in spite of how far we fall short. If we fall guilty and fall to the trap of drawing back because we say, how in the world could we ever live up to this? My life is certainly not that at all.

And we draw back. We're going to be losing out on God's call to our life. But rather when we hear God's word and we see what God wants to do and we see our shortcomings, we need to come to him through the blood of his Son, confess our lack, confess that we're not there yet, but pray by the grace of God that he'll give us the faith to believe that he'll bring us there.

Not to be swallowed up with guilt and condemnation. And don't compare yourself with other people. Let God speak to your heart through his word.

Number two, a healthy church serves Christ. A healthy church longs to serve Christ. Let me tell you brothers and sisters, we are serving someone or something.

Who are you serving? It might be the devil. It might be the world. It might be mammon.

It might be your own dreams. It might be your own hopes. You can serve a dream and miss Christ.

You can serve a passion and miss Christ. A healthy church serves Christ. Next, we learn from verses 1 and 2 that a healthy church has in its midst those who are functioning in the spiritual oversight and care of the church.

Bishops and overseers. The word bishop simply means an overseer. The word deacon means a servant.

Brothers and sisters, the church in Philippi was filled with a company of believers. And in the midst of those believers, there were those who were fulfilling the divine responsibility of spiritual care and oversight of the flock. A healthy church will result in men and women hearing the call of God, resulting in their heart and their soul and their very being, being given over to the care and concern of other people.

It's a very difficult struggle today to find true spiritual care within a flock. It's very difficult. And the reason why is because the pure unadulterated spiritual care that God wants to place in the hearts of men and women is nothing less than a selfless sacrifice for others with no reward, no personal reward, no personal agenda, no personal fulfillment by wanting, by becoming popular or recognized or known.

It is a death blow to self-interest. It is a death blow to selfish ambition. It is a death blow even to lawful things.

Lawful pleasures that you may be able to engage in. But if you hear the call of the Spirit of God on your life to assume the spiritual responsibility of caring for brothers and sisters in the ministry of prayer, or the ministry of teaching, or the ministry of just being there and helping them, you many times will not be able to do what others might be able to do because you're under the restraint of God to help others, to care for others. It's a costly call.

But a healthy church has those in their midst who are sharing together in the caring and shepherding of the flock. Have you heard the call of God? Does your heart become burdened for others? Do you find yourself concerned for the spiritual well-being and welfare of your brothers and sisters? Have you yielded to this? Or is there a struggle in your heart because of a conflict of interest? As we come together and experience a greater capacity to surrender all that we are to our Lord Jesus, we're going to find more and more, not in an outward, boisterous way, but in a hidden, godly way. We're going to find more and more shepherding, eldership, caring begin to flow in our lives and in our hearts toward others.

Believers who are not filled with the Holy Spirit cannot and will not shepherd and if they do, they will be ensnared and become proud. They will become ensnared and become divisive. They will become proud and become motivated with self-interest.

I don't want to spend too much time on each particular point, but yet on the other hand, we want to go as far as the Holy Spirit would quicken. I want to ask you to turn your Bibles to Acts chapter 20 and we just want to look at Paul's words to the elders that were in Ephesus. Acts chapter 20 beginning in verse number 17.

Acts 20 beginning in verse number 17. Listen carefully to the Word of God as we see Paul setting out the responsibilities of elders, the call of elders, the character of elders, and the inherent warning and dangers and pitfalls that elders can fall into. Just listen to these words and let's just pray the Holy Spirit will speak to us and do what only He can do in our hearts.

Acts chapter 20. Verse number 18. When he gathered the elders together and they arrived, he said to them, you yourselves are well aware with my manner of living among you from the first day that I set foot in the province of Asia and how I continued afterwards.

There you have the transparency of elders. Those who assume spiritual oversight among, not above, but among a group are vulnerable. They're transparent.

They're accountable. They're open. Their lives are an open book.

They don't have two lives, one in public and one in private. They're transparent. Paul was saying, you know what kind of a man I am and what I was.

I lived before you. I was honest and open. I'm praying that God will speak this into our hearts and that more and more we'll find arising within the hearts of mature men the desire.

Paul said, if any man desire the responsibility of an overseer, he desires a good, a commendable, a praiseworthy work. It's one that is commendable. It's one that is good.

It's one that is highly valued by heaven. The stars of the church, the angels, the messengers. Where are they? In his right hand.

What is revival? What is the move of God? What is God visiting a community? What is God visiting a company of believers? It's this. Yes, we can have singing. Yes, we can have music.

Yes, we can have tears, but it's this. It is the reproduction of the Word of God in people. It's the, it's, it's the fulfillment of what is written in living reality in living stones.

This is the Word of God. This is revival. Brothers and sisters, when anyone claims that revival is going on, I say go look, but say where is it? You mean to say that what's happening in the Bible has actually happened? This is revival.

It's when God takes the Bible and writes it into the hearts of men and women and it's being lived. Verse 19, serving the Lord with all humility in tears and in the midst of adversity, affliction and trials which befell me due to the plots of the Jews. Elders serve the Lord with humility.

We're going to do a study on the word humility if God is willing today. I don't know if we'll get to it. I hope we do, but this is the chief characteristic of those who assume the responsibility of eldership.

They're humble. They don't have a high opinion of themselves. Their humility is found from Jesus Christ who humbled himself and became a servant and washed people's feet.

Do you feel it's above your dignity to get down, down, down and serve? Eldership is not a high pompous position where you stand behind a pulpit and teach and are esteemed by men. And called the title elder so-and-so, senior pastor so-and-so. If that's what you're after, you'll never find the place of being blessed as an elder.

You'll find pride. You'll find a snare if that's what you're after. But if you truly touch the heart of the shepherd, the true shepherd, and God gives you a heart that has a heart like he does for his flock, you'll not want to be seen by men.

You'll not look for reward. You'll not seek to serve in order to fulfill your own ambitions. But you will be compelled by the love of God to wash people's feet, to help them, to point them to Jesus.

Humility. Verse 20, how I did not shrink from telling you anything that was for your benefit and teaching you in public meetings and from house to house. Elders will not shrink back from telling the truth.

They will not shrink back from warning the rich not to trust in their riches. They will not shrink back from warning those who have an eye for the things of this world, that if they're not careful, they'll be seduced by the very things that they're looking at. They will not shrink back from telling the whole counsel of God.

Verse 21, but constantly and earnestly, I bore testimony both to the Jews and Greeks, urging them to turn in repentance to God and to have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now you see I'm going to Jerusalem bound by the Holy Spirit and obligated and compelled by the convictions of my own spirit, not knowing what will befall me. Except that the Holy Spirit clearly and emphatically affirms to me in city after city that imprisonment and suffering await me.

Verse 24, but none of these things move me, neither do I esteem my life dear to myself. This is the heart of an elder. This is the heart of one who assumes and accepts the call of God to care for the flock, to have spiritual oversight, to speak the word of God into people's lives.

I count not my life dear to myself. I do not value my own life, but rather I value the call of God. I value the interests of Christ.

Now in some sense, every single man here is called to be an elder, to help your brothers and sisters, and it starts in your home. If we as men do not ask God to give us this kind of heart toward our family, we're going to lose our family. We're going to lose our family.

We're going to raise children who do not do what we say, but do what we do. This is not only a beautiful teaching that will help us understand the responsibilities of a true elder, but this is really what it means to have oversight, and we all have oversight in our own jurisdictions. Husbands need to exercise this kind of oversight in their families.

Men, you need to stoop low in your family. The moment you get up too high, your pride is going to destroy you and your family. You've got to stay low, husbands.

Men, listen to the call of God's Spirit. All humility. Get down low.

Get down low. Your life cannot be valuable to you. That is your own life.

That is doing your own thing. When you have a wife, then you must pay due attention and pour your life into her. Not giving her what she wants, but pouring the life and the Word and the Spirit of Christ into her.

Serving her, loving her, modeling for her what a Christian man ought to look like. And when we have children, men, the solemn responsibility grows. We are to take the oversight.

And when we get connected to other believers, we're to also have this oversight. So you see, this eldership goes far beyond the elders that God raises up in the church to care for the flock. It begins in our homes and everyone has the call.

And then as we are faithful in our home, God can help us to be faithful in the church. Because Paul told Timothy, if a man can't take care of his own family, how can he have oversight in the church? If it doesn't start in the family, you can't help in the church. Verse 25, And now, observe, I perceive that all of you among whom I have gone in and out proclaiming the kingdom will see my face no more.

Therefore, I testify and protest to you on this day that I am clean and innocent and not responsible for the blood of any of you. For I've never shrank or kept back or fell short from declaring to you the whole purpose and plan and counsel of God. Now verse 28, These are words we want to take deep into our heart.

Take care and be on guard for yourselves and the whole flock over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you, bishops and guardians. To shepherd, that means to tend, to feed, to guide, to serve and ultimately to lay your life down for. Greater love hath no man than what? That he lay his life down for his friends.

And greater love has none of us than if we can demonstrate it by laying our lives down for our brothers and sisters. Now watch verse 29, I know that after I am gone, ferocious wolves will get in among you, not sparing the flock. This is why it's necessary that a healthy church has within its ranks spiritual maturity that is able to accept the spiritual responsibility of oversight.

Because there's ravenous wolves who want to get in your family, wants to get into the church family. And a wolf has one idea when he sees a little lamb and guess what it is? Dinner. He wants to devour, destroy, seduce, tear to pieces.

And so Paul said, I know that when I'm gone, ravenous wolves will want to come in. And then verse 30, even from among your own selves, men will come to the front, who by saying perverse, distorted and corrupt things will endeavor to draw away the disciples after them to their own party. So here's the two-fold warning that shepherds must beware of.

Number one, wolves coming from without, who want to come in and destroy. And then from among their own selves, from among their own selves, he's talking to the elders, the group of men who bear the spiritual responsibility, he's saying from among your own selves, men will arise who will come into the front and they'll want to draw the disciples of Jesus. Because remember, the purpose of elders is to make men disciples of Christ, to make men followers of the Word of God.

But there's going to be elders from within who are going to rise up, take the lead, and they're going to want to try and take the disciples of Christ and make them disciples of themselves, their own pet doctrines, become divisive and divide. Beware. Now there's a little picture.

Healthy church has church leaders who are leading by example. Verse number three, Philippians chapter three, or I'm sorry, chapter one, verse number three. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you.

Oh God, I tell you, it's so hard not to just focus on one verse for ten weeks. It really is. Yeah, verse three through eleven.

We're going to read three through eleven and then go through these verses. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you. In every prayer of mine, I have always made my entreaty and petition for you with all joy.

I thank my God for your fellowship, which includes your cooperation and contribution and partnership. Fellowship which includes cooperation, contribution, and partnership in the advancing of the gospel from the first day until now. And I am convinced and sure of this very thing.

That he who began a good work in you will continue until the day of Jesus Christ. Developing and perfecting and bringing it to full completion in you. For it is right and appropriate to have this confidence and feel this way about you.

Because you have me in your heart and I hold you in my heart. Oh my. You see brothers and sisters, this isn't some deep thing.

This is real simple stuff. But you see what we're reading now? Brothers and sisters, impossible with humans without the power of the Holy Spirit. Impossible to be so concerned about other people without the power of the Holy Spirit working in our life.

Guess who you and I are going to be preoccupied with without the power of the Spirit of God. The one we look at every morning in the mirror. That's right.

You have me in your heart and I hold you in my heart. As partakers and sharers with me of the grace of God. Both when I am shut up in prison and when I am out in the defense and confirmation of the good news.

For God is my witness how I long for and pursue you all with love in the tender mercy of Jesus Christ. And this I pray. That your love may abound yet more and more and extend to its fullest development and knowledge and all keen insight.

That your love may display itself in greater depth of acquaintance and more comprehensive discernment. So that you may surely learn to sense what is vital and approve and prize what is excellent and of real value. And that you may be untainted and pure and unerring and blameless unto the day of Christ.

May you abound in and be filled with the fruits of righteousness. Which come through Jesus Christ to the honor and praise of God. Verses 3 through 11.

More signs. More marks. Of a healthy.

Spirit filled. Sold out community. Of believers.

Number one. We see. The mark.

Of a thankful. Heart. Paul.

Thank God. For the believers. Paul.

Had the believers. In his heart. They were constantly on his mind.

Constantly in his prayers. If Paul thanked God. For the Philippians.

Possessing them in his heart. And on his mind. And constantly thanking God for them in prayer.

How much more should we pray. That the Holy Spirit would empower us to follow the example of Paul. Paul was filled with thanksgiving for his brothers and sisters.

And a healthy heart. A healthy church. A healthy company of believers.

Will be thankful one to another. One for another. Listen.

The presence of thankfulness is the absence of unthankfulness. It's the absence of grumbling. It's the absence of complaining.

It's the absence of biting and devouring one another. It's the absence of sowing discord. It's the absence of sowing negative evil reports about one another.

Do you know how to overcome the temptation to be critical toward your brother? Start thanking God for him. Thank God for your brother. Who are you and I to judge our brother and sister and to be unthankful? If God has received them.

If God has accepted them. We need to thank God for them. You say, well, boy, there's not much I can see to thank God for.

Well, brothers and sisters, maybe it's because our eyes are blinded. That's an arrogant statement, isn't it? There's not much I can see in my brother to be thankful for. Well, how much can he see in you to be thankful for? Can he be thankful for that very attitude that you have? Not being able to see much in him? I don't think that would make him very thankful, and I don't think it's very true.

I think that's a very arrogant, short-sighted way of viewing your brother or sister. I think that when our eyes get sanctified and we start looking at people through the Word of God and through the love of God and through the grace of God, we're going to be amazed at the things that we can thank God for in their lives. And oftentimes, we are not thankful for our brothers and sisters because we're so cocky and so self-confident and so arrogant we don't realize how much our brothers and sisters can help us if we would just humble ourselves and let them.

But we don't need our brothers and sisters. We're just nice and fine the way we are. Thank you very much.

We've got to watch that attitude. We've got to watch it. Do you know that anyone who has Jesus Christ in them has something to give you? Anyone? A healthy church is full of people who are thankful.

When I was in another country many years ago and I gathered with the believers and we had a prayer meeting, I was very, very touched by what they did as a regular custom. Number one, they prayed by name for all the believers that they knew. They mentioned by name.

And what that showed me as I was praying with them is that they truly, truly cared about their brothers and sisters. They went for an hour praying name by name by name. Oh God, I pray for Teresa.

I pray for Michael. I pray for Pedro, Michael, Joan, Ms. Hamburger, Justine. I know your name.

It just took me a second. Brothers and sisters, can I ask you a question? Are people deeply enough into your heart where you pray for them by name? Do you sometimes sense a tear coming down your cheek when you mention their name? Number two, not only do we see Paul as evidenced in other epistles that he wrote, pray by name, but he prayed for other churches. He was telling the Laodiceans to pray for the Ephesians and the Ephesians to pray for those in Colossae.

There wasn't rivalry. There was a sense of pray for your brothers and sisters everywhere. A healthy church.

So number one, we have a thankful heart. Number two, prayerful heart. Number three, verse four, joy, joy.

There's joy in the presence of praying for one another. There's a sense of joy because we know, number one, we are heirs together of the gift of God. Heirs together of the gift of God.

Number two, there's joy because we know that together, our brothers and sisters, all united, are destined to an eternal home. Number three, the hope of sharing in the very glory of Christ one day brings joy. We could go on and on, but we just want to point out these marks of a healthy church, a healthy Christian life.

Next, we see not only joy, but we see the mark of true fellowship. The mark of true fellowship. Now, when Paul talked about the fellowship that he shared with the saints, it started with them being in his heart and they having him in their heart.

True fellowship begins when there is a heart, mutual sharing one another, of heart-heart affection, heart-heart love, heart-heart care, heart-heart concern. And listen, it is a fellowship around eternal passions. The Bible specifically says in verse number five that their fellowship was around, number one, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

They were fellowshiping around the gospel. They had the mutual interest of the significance of the gospel, both in the developing of that gospel in their own lives to produce spiritual maturity, as well as the spreading of that gospel in their community, being burdened and wanting God to save as many as would call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And secondly, their fellowship was around not only the gospel, but it was around those spiritual practices that united their hearts toward heaven.

Acts chapter 2, verse 42. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and in prayers. Acts chapter 2, verse 42.

So number one, their fellowship was essentially united by a mutual passion for the gospel. Listen, when Paul got himself in prison, the Philippians didn't forsake him. The Philippians didn't say, forget about him.

They continued with their heart compassion. They continued with their prayer. They continued with their support of him.

They let... So we're going to bring this to a close. We're going to bring it to a close now. But this is the manner in which we're going to try and go through the book of Philippians, and we're going to see, verse by verse, what it looks like when Jesus Christ can get a hold of our lives in ever-increasing manner, and how contrary it is to what we see in the world.

Isn't it? This is like another world, isn't it? This is like way out. It's reverse. But this is what we're called to be.

We're called to be lights in the midst of darkness. We're called to show forth the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. I'm so excited about this, and God's Word, I tell you, I just don't know what to do with myself sometimes.

I'm so excited about it. Now listen, all right? What we've covered so far is, in 3-11, a thankful heart. Pray, God, help me be thankful.

Think about anyone that you've been critical about lately. Come on, be honest. Critical.

And say, Lord, deliver me from being critical. You know that person has something to give you, and you can't get it because you're critical of them. The moment you start thanking God for that person, suddenly you're going to find something in that person's life is going to bless you and help you along the way.

A thankful heart. A prayerful heart. A joyful heart.

And hearts knit together in genuine fellowship. Hearts knit together in genuine fellowship. And in addition to that, we saw that a healthy church has men and women who are growing in their capacity to function in helping others.

Overseeing. Caring. Walking alongside of.

And this is what we're seeing more and more as we bow ourselves before the Lord Jesus. Let's bow our hearts. Father, thank you for the word.

Thank you for the spirit. Thank you, Lord, for challenging us today. Give us.

Hearts, Lord. That are so hungry for the Holy Spirit. That he comes to us.

And opens up your word. And challenges us so deeply. That we look to you to perform the reality of this word into our lives, Lord.

We know, Lord, that these things are impossible without your divine grace and mercy overflowing in our lives. And we know they're also impossible, Lord, if our hearts are continuously divided. And if we frankly have a taste for our own life more than we do for the life of Jesus.

So we pray that you'll search us with your word. You'll strengthen our hearts and encourage us. And help us, Lord.

To offer ourselves to you today. So you can perform these wonderful things. In Jesus' mighty name.

Amen. And amen.

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