

# 10 Signs of a Healthy Church

by Shane Idleman

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*A healthy church or Christian is characterized by boldness, spiritual power, reading and exhortation, and a balance of boldness and grace.*

**Duration:** 56:27

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:16, Acts 13:2

**Topics:** "Spiritual Disciplines", "Church Health"

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## Description

This sermon delves into the importance of spiritual disciplines like prayer and fasting in a healthy church and individual Christian life. It emphasizes the need to remove distractions, engage in spiritual warfare, and prioritize joy and the Holy Spirit. The sermon also highlights the significance of baptism as a declaration of faith and the necessity to end excuses hindering spiritual growth.

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## Transcript

Acts 13.9, here's my challenge, I went through all the way to 14 and pulling out historical aspects and things, I kind of turned this into a topical expository. So I pulled out some key elements from this to speak on this topic. Now last week we read that they were sent out by the Holy Spirit.

They were praying and they were fasting. They were praying God and fasting is basically starving the flesh, putting the flesh in submission so you can be filled with the Spirit of God. And to point a confession, I am very hungry this morning.

I promised God I'd stop yesterday and just go to tonight, just water only, and I wanted a donut and coffee this morning at 6.30 and I fought the devil for a half hour. And he did not win. Praise God.

But I feel, and the only reason I share these with you is to let you know, when it comes to fasting, I fall often. You know, we think of fasting as this perfect 30-day fast, didn't touch any sugar. I mean, people sometimes blow it and the key is to get back on track.

So prayer, and I've seen fasting, it's like prayer on steroids. And steroids aren't necessarily bad if you're using them for a good way and medical purposes, but it's like increasing your prayer life. You don't want to stop, you want to keep going.

You pull down heaven, the flesh is starved and the Spirit is alive in God. So they were praying, they were fasting, and they were sent out by the Holy Spirit. As a result, they encountered a sorcerer.

And I found that to be true often. Sometimes we're full of the Spirit, Lord, just let me run into a Girl Scouts who just want to pray for them and give me flowers, but instead I run into the devil himself. Sorcery, these things, going to Walmart and people, there's this attacking and cussing and looking at you and it's like this demonic realm is real, isn't it? It is, and they do not like people filled with the Spirit of God.

So the disciples were filled with the Spirit, they encountered a sorcerer, it was Paul, in verse 9, then Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit. You know what, it's interesting. I just thought of that again, we've talked about it months ago.

But when the Bible says Paul filled with the Holy Spirit, that tells me we should take notice. Because if every Christian was just filled completely, overwhelming with the Holy Spirit, the Bible would never mention it. It would be a giving.

And Peter, breathing, it doesn't say that. And Peter, looking or walking, these things, and Peter being filled with the Holy Spirit. There's something unique that comes upon a believer when they consecrate their life and they're filled with the Spirit of God.

He looked intently at the sorcerer and he said, oh, full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil. You know it's okay to confront the devil like that, right? Sometimes here's what we do. I'm sorry, okay, no problem, I know, I just cowered down and just, you're right, and gentle, mild, meek Christians turn the other cheek.

But sometimes you can say, you know what, you full of deceit, you son of the devil. I'm going to tell you what God's Word says. And you speak boldly at that demonic realm.

It isn't about always cowering down. Now don't misunderstand, I'm not talking about being mean and arrogant, but I've spoke boldly to people, haven't you? No, that's not true, devil. That's not true.

You're not going to take my family. You're not going to ruin my marriage. You're not going to, you fill in the blank.

And you speak boldly to that demonic realm. You son of the devil. Well, here's why.

This sermon might take a lot of rabbit trails, I'm just telling you right now. You have, do we all agree we're in a spiritual battle? If we're in a battle, you have to be bold. What soldier enlists in battle is not bold and timid and runs.

So boldness is something you better get used to. And the Holy Spirit stirs up something with you if you're in a school district, if you work in a government office, if you work or do what I do around town sometimes, there's a boldness that has to take place. So He said, you son of the devil, you enemy of all unrighteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? This is exactly what the demonic realm does, what the devil does.

Pervert. You know what we use the word in our society? Pervert. Perversion.

A pervert, a perversion is something that is good and God-given, going this direction. They twist it and make it perverted. So now something good, marriage, it was good, the enemy perverts it.

And now the stuff in the news that you can be whatever, like I don't have to be male or female in this new gender that's nothing. And you can have it, they're trying to get on your birth certificate, and it's like what is

happening to, pervert. They're perverting the truth.

They're actually telling kids in school, you don't have to tell your parents if you're going to get an abortion or if you're doing something, you shouldn't be, they think it's fornication, don't worry about it, and they're perverting all of this stuff. So perversion is what the enemy does. So how does that apply to you? Very easily.

He'll make something seemingly that looks okay, pervert it, twist it, you come up with excuses and you fall into sin. It happens all the time. And now indeed the hand of the Lord is upon you and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.

And immediately a dark mist fell upon him and he went out seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Then the procouncil, which is the governor of that area, then he believed in the gospel. When he saw what had been done, being astonished by the teaching of the Lord.

So basically Paul called him out, said because you're a deceiver, you're going to be blind. Now I wish we saw that same kind of power today. I think it still exists.

I think that God does miracles and things, but I think, and I've said this before, the more I read the book of Acts, the more I read even the Old Testament, the men and women of God, there was a holy consecration that many people don't experience today. They walk close with God and so when they spoke, the Holy Spirit was prompting them and guiding them and leading them. So when Paul called out the blindness, God honored that because the Holy Spirit put it on his heart, in my opinion, to call out this and call down blindness.

Now granted miracles and signs and wonders were following the apostles, but I believe that same power exists today. I don't think that God just suddenly stopped. I mean, just read some good missionary books and I'm going to recommend one.

I've got the title here at the end. It's called An Asian Harvest, An Asian Harvest. I've ordered many copies.

We'll be sending those out to you or making them available here. Or missionary books on the mission field. They see this.

We see this often when it's, for some reason, not in America. I haven't put that connection yet, but I think we're not really as consecrated as we think we are. I think we're not really, I mean, we're full of Facebook, but full of the Holy Spirit? I don't know.

I can tell you what Facebook says, but I'm not sure what the Holy Spirit is guiding me to do. I can tell you what Mike Trout did in the outfield, but I'm not sure what the Holy Spirit is doing through the Word of God. And the closer you walk with God, the more you'll see miracles and things coming to life in your life.

So the first sign of a healthy church, a healthy Christian, is boldness and spiritual power. If you're a healthy church, there's boldness and there's spiritual power. There's no way around that.

You will have both of them. So if there's no boldness, and it's just timidity, and there's no spiritual power, you haven't seen God moving in a while, you're going to need what I'm going to talk about at the end of the sermon. Spiritual power needs to take place.

Boldness needs to enter into your heart. And see, the reason a lot of times people are afraid of boldness is because they confuse it with arrogance. Right? I mean, haven't you been called, those who are bold, have you ever been called arrogant? You're just bold.

Now, you have to be careful, because there are some arrogant people who say, I'm just bold. I'm just bold. I love my faith, and I'm going to let everybody know I'm a guardian of the truth.

No, you're arrogant. You can tell. The fruit of boldness is you can feel the love.

It was said of D.L. Moody, he wouldn't even preach a sermon without tears about hell, without tears coming down his face, or Whitefield, or Wesley, these people we love to read, they were full of boldness, but full of compassion. You have to have both of those. You have to have both of those.

Verse 13, then Paul came to Perga and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. After the reading of the law and of the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to him, saying, men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on. Boy, they didn't know what they were asking, did they? They see Paul, oh, a fellow Jew, we just read the law, which was Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and the prophets, probably, they probably read portions from the major prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, they read something from there, and then the minor prophets, and minor doesn't mean they were less significant, it just means they didn't have as much to say.

And the prophets were called of God to call that nation of Israel back to God. That's primarily what they did. So they read the law, and they'd be convicted by the law, then they'd read the prophets and be convicted again and get direction to give their lives back to the one and true living God.

So the second sign of a healthy church or healthy Christian. In a healthy church, there is reading and exhortation. Now you might say, well, duh, Shane Atwood, you just got bored and threw that point in there? I mean, well, you'd be very surprised.

I can name churches around this valley where people tell me it's just, there's the pastor or different people speak, it's just they're telling stories. It's just stories and how we're gonna go paint the neighborhoods, and when I was younger, and stories are great, I tell them often, and I'm not chiding anybody because I can fall into this side as well. But to be a true healthy church, you've gotta look at the word of God.

That's why I like to put this up here front again. We look to the word of God, the centrality of scripture, we read the scripture, we're encouraged by the scripture, and actually a lot of traditional churches will read a passage of the Bible before the service, and we could even do that. There's nothing wrong with that.

You read, say, Isaiah 58, you read the first three or four verses as an exhortation to the people. That's very healthy. But then also, the reading of the scripture, and he said, exhortation, do you have any word to give the people? Now exhortation is urging someone to do something.

Urging someone to do something. If you've been here any length of time, you know that's what I like to do. I have no problem with exhortation.

Reading the word of God and urging people to do something. And, you know, it's just, I think a lot of the passion comes from, that I see is, I see so many broken lives out there. Broken lives.

I spent, it's three, not three hours, hour and a half, three hours total, different people, but an hour, hour and a half, calling out of state, marriage issues, problems with their church, other friends I know are getting a divorce. Friends I know are getting divorced, people hooked on drugs. I see the kids, the looks in the children's faces, the mommy and daddy, and the devastating, and I have to exhort.

I have to encourage. I have to push back. Push back.

We have to, because something, this attacking needs to be confronted. And if you don't confront it, you will not win that battle. Here's what happened.

Reading and exhortation. A healthy church, sin is exposed. In a healthy church, sin is exposed, but grace abounds.

That's a healthy church, a healthy Christian. Sin is exposed. If you want to be a healthy Christian, expose the sin.

Expose it. Tell somebody, I've got a problem in this area. I've fallen back into this area.

I need help. I need accountability. Spouse, tell your spouse, I'm struggling with moral purity right now.

My thought life is a mess. Can we pray? Oh, I'm never doing that. Then you're going to keep living in deception.

That sin is not going to stay there. It's going to grow, and it's going to grow, and it's going to grow, and it's going to grow. So we expose sin, but then grace abounds.

What does that look like? Well, we expose sin. We talk about sin, and we confront sin. I've confronted people.

You have. But brother, we're here for you. Grace abounds.

Grace. See, grace doesn't mean we continue in sin. Grace means we acknowledge the sin, we repent of it, and then we have grace and understanding because I'm the same way.

All of us in this room should not cast the first stone. We should be very graceful, but we should be very against sin. And that's why some of the biggest named preachers on TV, Sunday mornings, huge audience, won't ever talk about sin because they confuse, brother, it's just about grace and not beating people up.

No, that's not a healthy church necessarily. It doesn't matter the size of the church. The health of the church is predicated upon what we're talking about, not the size of the church.

Whether it's small or big. Because I've seen some churches, yeah, we're 25 people, we're the frozen chosen, we're doing everything right, and you know, that's why we're little. People don't like to hear it.

We're going to stay little, and if they don't want to hear it, they can just exit right out that door. And they think because, you know, it's just us. That's why nobody comes.

As soon as I start preaching, everybody leaves. Well, that means there's no love in your preaching. And not filled maybe with the spirit of God.

Now I have to be careful there too, right? You know, we don't want to push people out, but we also don't want to encourage sin and avoid things. And this is a hot topic for sure, because as you know, I've talked about before, the majority of people who no longer come here, or have left, or do not want to come here, is because of this issue. They're convicted.

They're convicted, they don't want to hear it right now, and people say, I'm not at that point right now. I'll go to this church. I'm not going to Westside.

I'm not ready for that yet. I mean, what does that mean? I just heard it this week. Somebody invited somebody, and they said, I'll go to, I won't name it, but I'm not ready for that church yet.

I'm not there yet. You know, but they don't understand. We're all not there yet.

It's a point of lifting up and encouraging and getting healthy. And walking people through that. And because pastors aren't perfect, we can err on the hard side sometimes.

Maybe err too much on the lost side, or too much on the pounding side, and then there's other guys who err too much on the grace side. So it's trying to find that balance, and the only way you can find that balance is to be filled with the Spirit of God, and to know, come the criticism or not, you are preaching what God has put on your heart. Criticism can be good.

It can be bad as well. You want to learn from it if there's nuggets of truth there, but you also want to avoid critical people that constantly pull you down. That was another rabbit trail.

Verse 16 through 23. Okay, well let's put this in context. So Paul went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and sat down, and there was a reading of the law and of the prophets, and the rulers of the synagogue said to Paul, hey, Paul, if you have any words of exhortation, let us hear them.

Oh my goodness, they did not know what they were asking. The apostle Paul, who's just been converted, Saul of Tarsus, this mean, angry Pharisee, is now a believer. So verses 16 through 23, I'm just going to paraphrase.

Basically, God brought deliverance from David's seed. He walked the people through Abraham, the covenant. He brought the Messiah through David's seed.

And then Paul said, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior, Jesus. And they're probably going, uh-oh, why did we ask this guy to speak? Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God. So see, this is a glimpse into the old synagogue style.

Men and brethren of children, your children of Abraham, mean there were Jews in the audience, but also, and those who fear God. So there was Greeks that wanted to convert, and they feared God. So this is a multitude, not just of Jewish believers, I believe, and those among you who fear God.

To you, to you, the word of the salvation has been sent. And though they found no cause for death in Christ, no cause for death in Christ. You should let people know any time they get upset at Christianity.

There is no cause, nothing. He died for you. He loves you that much.

He died for you. There's no cause for Him to die other than the sin of man. They asked Pilate that He should be put to death.

Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb, but God raised Him from the dead. So he's preaching the gospel at the synagogue. And it dawned on me, how do you think he's preaching this? Oh, here's what happened.

I mean, there's passionate preaching. There's passionate preaching. That's why passion should come out in preaching.

If somebody's not passionate, I don't really want to listen to them. Because they don't, I guess it says this, there has to be a passionate passion in a healthy church. That's a point I forgot about.

There should be passion in a healthy church. I mean, I don't know about you guys, but the ones who are here early, as we're singing these songs, I'm no longer a slave. If we were truly a slave to fear death and the grave and eternity separated from God, God saved us from that and redeemed us.

Oh, it might change your worship. I think Jamie had it right, right? Oh God, and just keep worshipping and worshipping. That's why we want the freedom in worship.

It's not a four-minute song, a three-minute song, a four-minute song. Shane, you come up, you've got 35 minutes, and let's go to lunch. That's not worship.

It's there. My goodness, why shouldn't we be passionate? I mean, I have a feeling more people would be passionate if we just said we just came into a lot of money. As you leave here, you're each getting \$10,000.

As you leave here, you're each, we would, oh my goodness, a passion in this place, right? So that's why you've got to take your mind back to Calvary, back to Golgotha, the place of the skull, the place of death and crucifixion to give us life. Well, if there's no passion there, I don't know what to tell you. You guys are doing good, though.

I'm just talking about others in the future that are not passionate, because people say, well, Shane, you're passionate. Yeah, this is the most exciting thing a person can talk about, but it's also the most heavy. A lot of you don't know this, but when you go in the morning after the sermon, I'm praying, and I know that I'm coming up here, and thousands of people on the radio, now San Francisco, the Bay Area, Riverside, all over Los Angeles are hearing.

So I better be very careful that I'm not just putting my opinion in there, and I'm not just, what do I think, and dumbing it down, and trying to do, but I have to say, God, what do you want to say? So the weight of that, the weight of that, I mean, if I was just a motivational speaker, I could just go wherever and no big deal. But the weight of that, and then also the passion, the passion of, you're preaching light. You're preaching the best news that has ever been heard.

You're preaching the gospel of salvation. Shouldn't there be a passion there, a something, an exciting? So there's passion. But there's also the third point that we glean from this, which I'll keep reading.

Verse 31, Jesus was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. And we declare to you glad tidings, the promise which has been made to the fathers. If we had time, we could go back to the Old Testament, but the promise to the fathers, the nation of Israel, was God would send a Messiah to save His people.

Paul just said the Messiah has arisen, arisen from the dead. Pilate killed Him. He's here.

And I would love to see the look on that audience's face. Or the rulers who said, Paul, would you like to say something? They're like, what just happened? But we can also glean something from what Paul said here in the synagogue, church style. Another sign of a healthy church is you feed the saints and you warn the sinner.

That's a goal of preaching, is to feed the saints, to be edified and encouraged, but also to warn the sinner. That's why there is such an importance put on, or I guess that's a good way to say it, the importance of going through the Bible every year. And I would say one of the things that shocks me the most is how many Christians have never went through the entire Bible.

I just asked somebody this week, thought for sure. I've talked to pastors, elders, deacons, been serving for 20 years, they've never read through the entire Bible. What happens is we put, well, I'm in John today, I'm at Psalm tomorrow, and then my daily devotion has me back in John, and we never see the whole counsel of God.

You start in Genesis to see creation, and you see Exodus, God's plan of bringing his children out of bondage. You see Leviticus, the Levitical priesthood, and the need for that sacrificial system of the shedding of blood. Leviticus, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, the going through the wilderness, and all the examples.

My goodness, you can learn so many examples of idolatry and what not to do in the book of Numbers. In Deuteronomy, the law, the blessings, the curse, and then it gets into the judges, and what happened, these judges would, people would call upon the name of the Lord, and they would depart from God, and then you get the kings, and all the prophets, and Ruth, and we learn about our kingsmen redeemer, and who Christ was, and Boaz, and you look at the whole Bible, and you see the whole counsel of God. It's 20 minutes a day.

Just start somewhere, and just keep going. I usually have a paperclip in the Old Testament and the New Testament, and just keep them going together, keep them going together, check it off, and that's how you get the heart of God. That's how you'll know when something doesn't, you're not sure, or you're not sure on doctrine or theology, you'll know the heart of God.

So that's a primary goal of the church is to feed the saints, and what I mean by primary goal, a healthy church recognizes that our primary, the primary goal is, now this, some might not agree with this, but that's okay, the primary goal is a gathering together of believers. It's to hear the word of God, to be edified to worship. What happens if the main goal of the church is the sinner, and evangelism, and things like that, the main goal, then what happens is something comes in called the seeker sensitive movement.

Have you heard of that? It was big, probably 20 years ago, and now a lot of pastors have talked, spoke against it, but the seeker sensitive movement is this, listen Shane, we have to start being sensitive to those who are coming in who are not believers. So that means you have to change everything. You change the worship so it's not offensive.

You change your messages so they're not offensive. You change the, you know, different things, you make it sensitive to the seeker. But the main goal of the church is to come and be built up and to glorify God.

The main point of the church is for the believers. Now from that, we go out and we evangelize. We reach the unchurched.

We do things, but the main core of coming together is tailoring the service for believers to worship God. Communion, worship, baptism, exhortation, it's all of us coming together. Now if somebody happens to come in, 1 Corinthians 14, 24, if an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes into your gathering and is convicted, I'm paraphrasing, and thus the secrets of his heart are revealed and so falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.

See, unbelievers often are attracted to genuine worship and to genuine anointing and genuine preaching. They're attracted to that. So you don't change things around to make it sensitive to not offend anybody.

You center it around God and they can come in and be part of that if God is drawing them. Now careful point here, we're not to be seeker sensitive in avoiding the truth, but we are to be sensitive in how we represent God. So on one hand, I'm not seeker sensitive, in case you didn't know, on the preaching, you know, and the worship and how we do things.

I'm not really thinking, okay, now if unbelievers come in, darn, they're not going to like that point either, or that point, well, I might as well just start all over, you know. But I do say, you know, how is somebody going to take that? Could I have worded that differently? Is that offensive? Did I get a little too arrogant and want to make sense of it? We want to make sure that when they come in and check their children in the children's ministry, they're not offended, it's clean, it's organized. We want excellence in everything we do, and the people are full of life and welcoming them.

See, you can be welcoming, but not affirming. You can be welcoming, but not affirming. Me and Morgan tried to invite a friend of ours we know from the gym who's gay for the church for the last 12 years.

We're welcoming. Welcoming. We just have a heart for this guy.

I won't say his name, but we'd say, you know, come on, just come to church, oh, no, no. Now, should I say, no, come to church, you won't be offended. No, come, we'll welcome and affirm.

See, that's the difference. But you don't go out of your way to pound that person. You just let the word of God speak.

You're full of love. You're full of the Holy Spirit, and if it offends, if it cuts, it's meant to offend and cut. So you can welcome and love people, and I just wrote, I re-released an article, What Did Jesus Say About Homosexuality, and my goodness, I mean, it's like 500 comments on Facebook from Crosswalk, I think it is, crosswalk.com, and it's, and I scroll through them sometimes, I know it's not a good idea, but people say, this is why I'm embarrassed to be a Christian.

Because me. Because this article. Right? This is why.

See, everybody throwing, casting the first stone, putting everybody down. Read the article. Read the article.

It's not about that. But see, we have this concept that turn the other cheek, God loves everybody, means he affirms sin. He doesn't affirm sin, he says, I love you enough, I died for that sin, so would you come out of it? So woe is me if I do not preach repentance.

I'm actually doing people a disservice. And if a person's not ready to hear it, yes, it does hurt. Of course it hurts.

Who wants to hear you need to change and repent? Not even me sometimes. Not even you, right? So I understand that. But a loving church is part of God's design.

Verse 38, Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this man, Paul is still speaking, through this man, Jesus, is preached to you the forgiveness of sins. And by him, everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. So what happened in the Old Testament, and even up to this time, they're following the law of Moses.

The Sabbath, the ceremonial laws, all the different things that Moses outlined, they're following these, he's following these. Have you ever tried to follow a lot of rules and how hard that is? I mean, you still can't do it, right? All these signs say, don't drive over 55. A lot of you are not listening to those signs.

But it's so hard. So he says, we were not justified. Justified means just as if I had never sinned.

If you remember that. Justified Christ, I'm allowed to go before God the Father because of what Christ did on the cross. He justified me now in right standing before God.

The law could never do this. Following a bunch of rules could never do this. So Paul's breaking it down.

That we've been justified through Christ. Beware, therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you. What's been spoken in the prophets? Well, if you spend time in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, not too much in Daniel, more prophetic, more Babylon, but then the minor prophets, and Micah, and Nahum, and Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, and Zechariah, and all these guys that wrote, you would know, you would say, aha, what did they do? The prophets often warned the people because they stayed in rebellion.

They despised the things of God. So he's saying, be careful, because what's happening, happened in the prophets, which we love to read on the Sabbath, is also happening in your own life, and in your own heart. So here he gets real seeker sensitive.

Beware, therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you. Behold, you despisers marvel and perish, for I work a work in your days, a work which you will by no means believe the one word to declare it to you. So he's saying, you despisers, you despisers of the truth, marvel, because you will perish if you continue to reject that truth.

But I want to just highlight point four. Ever since Paul started to speak, here's a sign of a healthy church. Here's a sign of a healthy Christian.

Everything centers on Jesus. Everything centers on Christ. Everything we do.

Now, perfectly, no. But when we start VBS this summer, and Friday evening comes, what I'm already looking forward to is presenting the gospel to the kids and to the family members. And throughout the week, what are we doing? Presenting the gospel.

He's the only one that can heal and restore these little ones. What's the focus of the youth group that we're going to start? We actually had one. Nobody knew about it, really.

I'm coming to find out. So we're going to relaunch that. What's the focus? Christ.

What's the focus when the elders get together and start to make decisions? Jesus, where do you want us to go? What's the focus of the worship? That's the center of everything. And now that can trickle into your own life before you make decisions. What would Jesus do? That's a good little thing to wear.

He's the center. It changes where you go. It changes what you'll listen to.

It changes everything, doesn't it? I mean, just for fun, I should have did this, but I'll just admit it. I wrote an article about entertainment a while back on how people, how it affects us spiritually. And I didn't even watch this movie.

I just saw some reviews. And something about Deadpool, you know, I said, it's probably not a good idea. Christians were like, email me, like, what? It's fun.

It's this. I couldn't even have five minutes on there. The cussing.

I'm like, how can people, how is this? I did this for Harry Potter, too, because somebody said, oh, it's a good movie, teaches this. Let me rent this thing. And after the snake comes out of this guy's mouth and this lady's levitating, I said, back to Breadbox.

I mean, because they challenged me. Watch it. Watch it.

You'll change your tune. No, I didn't change my tune. I actually increased my tune.

These things should not be glorified. These things should not be in a heart that's healthy. That's the difference.

A healthy heart is very selective with what they watch and where they go, because you know, right? Your flesh gets locked on it, though, right? My flesh wanted to keep going Deadpool. And Logan, Jason Bourne, all those things for guys, right? You know, but I know, the flesh wants it, but the Spirit says, don't you dare. And so you have this constant battle going on.

So a healthy Christian centers everything on Jesus. The church centers everything on Jesus. Now, have we done it perfectly? No.

But that's our goal. Look at our mission statement. It's on our website.

It's actually out front on the wall. This man has preached to you the forgiveness of sins. So just ask yourself this question.

Have you been justified? Do you truly know God? It's a little trite and people say it often, but it's probably because it's really good. If you were to die, do you know where you're going? If you were to die today, do you truly know where you're going? Because you can't live your life with a question mark here. And I talk to people, oh, gosh, Shane, I think so.

I mean, I'm a good guy. I'm a good person. Oh, ee, ee, ee, ee, red flag right there.

No, you're not a good person. And they get offended at that. See, because self-righteousness.

If somebody says, Shane, at the core, you're not a good person, I'll say, amen, brother. Preach it, please. But I need Christ.

I need to be filled with the Spirit of God. So if you've never repented of your sin, acknowledge everything I'm talking about, I would encourage you to do that this morning. You don't have to come forward.

You don't have to raise your hand. You don't have to do a special dance. You just have to say, God, I need you.

I've been running. I've been hiding. And it's funny, on this subject, too, when I talk about things like this, people do leave and they don't come back.

But weeks later, months later, that something is drawing them back. Drawing them back, it's that conviction of the Holy Spirit. And the reason I want to mention centers on Jesus is because we can become so busy.

We can become so busy, we miss why we're really here. This is actually a sad point. I've seen so many Christians, myself included, we can get so busy and we forget why we're really here.

Can't we? We're so busy doing this and doing that, and we forget. He's the center of everything. Verse 42, so when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged.

Look up this word if you want in the Greek. The Gentiles beg. It's not like, hey, Chris, would you talk about that next week? It's like, Chris, Chris, please, would you come back, please? You can't go.

Can you do it right now? No. Okay, and they're begging. They want more of the scripture.

They want more of that, that these words might be preached to them again the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes, which are converted Jews, followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. So what we see here, another sign of a healthy church, a healthy Christian, is spiritual hunger.

See, that's a good sign. That's why I often say it. I'm not joking.

If you don't want to come to the worship morning, that means you need to be at the worship morning. If you don't want to do something, that means you need to be there. If you don't like what I'm saying, it's because you need to hear what I'm saying.

See, a hungry heart desires more of God. Desires more of God. They're hungry for more of God.

That's in a healthy church, and that is in your life. The reason people are comfortable in dead churches is because they don't offend, alarm, or upset them. Have you seen dead churches? And I'm careful, because this could become one, anytime we get away from the primary goal of why we're here.

But the reason churches become dead is because they're no longer hungry for God. And when a church is dead, it becomes a ritualistic thing. Here's what we do.

Here's how we do it, and here's why we do it. And it's just this every single Sunday, the same old thing, and we're just dead. There's no vibrancy.

There's no growth. There's nothing. But if I move the pew 10 feet, we'll hear tons of complaints.

Right because it's dead. There's no spiritual life. And that's one thing I am so happy about West Side Christian Fellowship with all of you, is this is a hungry church.

This is a hungry church, for sure. I mean, and I'm not trying to toot anybody's horn, but I think sometimes you need to be encouraged. But I know churches after church, after church, after church that has just stopped prayer meetings because nobody's there.

And we've had up to 15 people next door, hopefully moving into a bigger room. This morning I was maybe 15, 20, I thought I'd be here, we had 80 people. That's a service for most churches.

80 people just to worship God before the actual service. That's a hungry church. And now I've got people ask, can we start a Thursday night prayer meeting? Can we have it dinner nights? Wow, you guys, this is a hungry church.

How can we be more involved? How can we serve? How can the altars fold? That's a hungry church. That's a spiritually healthy church. So thank you guys so much for that.

And I know it's God gets all the glory and credit, but I'm just, it makes it much funner and easier to pastor a church that's hungry for God. I mean, if it was pulling the nails and, oh, here we go, you know, and just this constant fighting and bickering, that's not healthy. William Still, I think he was an abolitionist, African American in the 1800s, he was a preacher.

He said, many, many people who for the first time come under the sound of Holy Ghost preaching are mortally offended because they've never been exposed to the white light of the Spirit. That's what happens. Many, like, when you're preaching, I mean, I'm talking anointed spirit filled preaching, people are just, what is this? What is this? I'm used to just the, like, just put me to sleep, let me take my morning nap.

And now I'm just, I'm just, I'm offended. But that can be a good thing sometimes. 44, verse 44, on the next Sabbath, almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.

But the Jews saw the multitudes. They were filled with envy and contradicting and blasphemy. They opposed the things spoken, spoken by Paul.

And I'm going to have to get through this real quick, because the second service is going to be in 15 minutes, and it doesn't matter right now, because we might as well, we've been going since 7.30, so we'll just keep, keep going. Oh, wait, actually, we've got 45 minutes. That's right, we've got 45 minutes until the second service.

Yeah, I'm fine, all right. If you need to go, you're bored, just go, honey, I've got to go to the bathroom, meet me out there. Have you done that? I've done that before.

I say, I'm going to go to the bathroom, I'm going to go to the bathroom, and two, three minutes you just go to the bathroom, too, and then we'll just, we'll just head out, in the boring, dead churches. But number six, six, growth. And if Brant wants to keep worship going in the second service, I'm not going to be upset at all.

So, here's what, in a healthy church, in a healthy Christian, now, let me talk about church for a minute. There is growth. Now, there's big debates out there with, no, you know, you shouldn't be focused on numbers, and that's true.

I mean, a guy ripped that out of me a long time ago. I think I've told you that story before. We were having good numbers, and then we dropped down to like 50 people.

I'm like, uh-oh, well, Lord, whatever you say, I'm still preaching. I don't care if it's just me, Morgan, and my mom, because I know you've called me to do this. And then it started to build up and build up, and then radio stations were contacting, hey, we heard this, can we get on the air? I'm like, we want to get on the air? Okay, and God's opening doors, and so he's doing this.

But I want to put this in perspective, because sometimes we think growth is bad, but what farmer plants seeds and doesn't want to see a harvest? You guys who have cherry orchards, you want to see just a few trees blooming? I'll tell you, that big one down in the corner wants to see every single one blooming. I'll tell you that right now. Why? Because it's fruitful, it's a harvest.

What youth director doesn't want to go from five to 50 kids that are reaching the gospel? What pastor doesn't want to preach, okay, I have 50 people hearing this. One of my biggest frustrations is I want the multitude of America to hear this. Not for pride and self and ego and all that, sure, it comes into play now and then, but the main goal is to get this message out.

I want to get it out to other people to hear it, because that's just a good steward of what God has given us. So sometimes we think numbers are bad, and I was caught in this mentality, I really was. I took pride, especially back in Lancaster, a small church, we're small and we don't have too many people, because big numbers meant big, mega churches that are walking away from God.

But not necessarily. I mean, I don't know whatever God wants to do, he'll do, but numbers, I mean, people bringing friends and family and it's growing, that can be healthy. Now at some point you have to talk about what's the plan, you know, if it gets too big and what does that look like? But be careful when we look at churches.

Now some people prefer a smaller church setting, and I get that, because I walked into a big church in Allen Valley eight years ago, in the lobby, it was like I was at a rock concert. I want to go back to a smaller church, the kids, you know, everybody. And that's why I think God has given us different denominations and different churches.

But there's also something powerful in walking in, and you've got a thousand people singing No Longer Slaves, and it just breaks out, and you're worshipping, and there's a multitude of heavenly hosts helping us out, right? It's a thousand people worshipping God, that's powerful. It's not, well, a thousand aren't holy, and these five are. These five, with hymnals, without any musical instruments, are more holy, and you thousand are just misled by that loud music.

No, not necessarily. I've been, I've seen both sides, and so have you. So see, sometimes my heart desires, I'd love to, I mean, can you imagine a thousand people worshipping God? You know? And so, sometimes we get stuck on these things.

I've been in that trap. But spiritual growth, spiritually and numerically. So if you're growing by the numbers, you better be growing spiritually.

Well, how do you know? Well, prayer, morning prayer, evening prayer, morning times of worship, the hunger of the people, they're not in a hurry. You see the spiritual health, that's how you gauge it. You gauge spiritual health by spiritual disciplines.

If you see, now I'm getting emails saying, would you please explain, take a sermon, explain fasting? You mention it, but what does it do? How do I do it? I'm like, okay, hold on, I'm getting there. I'm ramping up to that. And people are hungry for God, can we come early, just open the church and pray? Are you kidding me? Are you kidding me? Where are you guys coming? Absolutely! I mean, so we love those things.

Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. I was going to go off on the Sabbath here for a minute, but I don't think I will, I don't have time. But a Sabbath, they were always meeting on the Sabbath, they were always meeting on the Sabbath.

And this could be a sermon itself, but people say, well, Christians aren't required to keep the law, it doesn't, no big deal anymore. I think a Sabbath is still very important. God's not going to say, take a Sabbath and don't worry about it.

But what I don't, because God rested, it's a day of rest. And if you even study the Seventh-day Adventists, which I disagree with many of their fell prophecies, I disagree with their legalistic approach and many different things, so I don't promote that at all, it's not something I even want to entertain. But they're some of the oldest people in the United States, because they take that Sabbath rest, they eat very healthy, so, oh, look at those Mormons, they don't drink caffeine and beer, ha ha ha.

Well, you shouldn't either. I mean, if you want to be healthy, I mean, you know, you can't smoke and drink, yeah, if you want to be healthy, I mean, how healthy, you know, so we see a Sabbath is a day of rest, I believe it should be honored where God, I'm taking a day off from my busy schedule, I'm going to disconnect from Facebook and all this stuff, I'm going to spend time with my family, I'm going to spend time with you, I don't know what that looks like, and we're going to have a day of rest. Because that was, anytime God initiates something, here's why it's important, we don't say, well, it's not important anymore.

What we don't do is start to gauge, because there's people, and I get emails on this too, that, well, if you go back to Saturday, we'll come, that's a true church, you know, because it's Sabbath, Saturday worship. I'm like, well, then you probably aren't, you know, don't need to be coming, because that's the wrong attitude, like you can't worship God Sunday morning. I mean, I can tell you there's Chinese in the underground church, China, that they're meeting at 4 a.m. on Friday.

I know friends that get Bibles there, and they're meeting whenever they can. Now, if you, no, no, no, no, Saturday, sunup to sundown, you Chinese believers, you better not worship God on Friday. You would just get a little bit ridiculous there, but I wish I had more time to talk about that, because I think it's good, but we don't have to put, we don't live underneath the ceremonial laws, and this would fall under, you know, you have to live there.

Now, however, if people are just blatantly breaking this, I would encourage you to take a look at it, you need a day of rest, you need a day to just turn everything off and focus on God. There's very good benefits with that. Verse 48, now, when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and they glorified the word of the Lord.

So the Gentiles heard the message of the gospel, and they were glad. And then it says, and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. Now, this is a verse that those who believe in eternal salvation, those who believe in election, which I believe in election, because it's taught in the Bible, but it's how you define it, and again, time won't allow me to go into this, but those who were appointed also means prepared.

If you look in the context, it just said, since you rejected the word of God and judged yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. So those who are appointed to eternal life believed. So that's another point of a healthy church, is salvation follows.

There are salvations taking place in this church quite often. Baptisms, things, they follow a healthy church. Now, there are churches out there who haven't had baptism or salvation in a year or two, or three.

It just, it doesn't happen, because it's the frozen chosen, right? We just, it's just us, it's just us, and we're the really cool group, and we don't, you know, we're not worldly, we don't do these things, and it's just this. But in a healthy church, you see people hearing the word of God, getting convicted, God draws them to the church, and they are saved. That's why after salvation, we honor two sacraments.

What I mean by sacrament is two things that the early church did that we continue. One is baptism, and the other is communion. We do both of those.

And then verse 49, down to verse 52, I'm just going to read the end of it, verse 52, and the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. See, it's not me. The Bible keeps mentioning it, filled with joy and the Holy Spirit, so guess what? That's a sign of a healthy church, for sure.

If you're filled with joy and the Holy Spirit, that's a healthy church. Not this. You know what this is? It's disunity, and it's a lot of people being disgruntled.

It's in a lot of churches. Many, well, I'll be careful here, but many of the smaller churches, the reason they're small is because of this. There's a lot of disunity and disgruntled and picking apart and naysaying and critical spirits.

That's not a healthy church. So believers that are truly healthy are filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. And you might say, Shane, I'm not feeling too much joy today.

Well, don't be discouraged. We all go through those valleys. We all get the doctor's report, or the phone call, or life is not going good right now, and it's not a continual, I believe that it's possible to be a lot more joyful than we are, but we also have to be encouraged and know that God wants to fill us with the Spirit.

Your spiritual health depends on this. This right here, your spiritual health depends upon this joy and the filling of the Holy Spirit. And then Acts 14, we actually get into chapter 14, basically here's what happens.

As Paul is preaching, the Jews that were unbelieving, they stirred up the Gentiles and they poisoned their mind against the brethren. And you're like, oh, goodness. Well, guess what? That's number nine.

There is conflict in a healthy church. You might as well just try to keep the sun from coming up to avoid conflict. And what I mean also by that is spiritual warfare.

In a healthy church, in a healthy Christian, there is conflict, isn't there? Because it's light and darkness going like this. There's conflict. You're going to have conflict.

Now, one thing I would encourage you, too many people run from the heat before the refining process is complete. Oh, it's getting hard. I'm out of here.

Well, then you go to the next place. Oh, it's getting hard. I'm out of here.

And you never grow spiritually. If God has you here, stick with it. Yes, it's challenging.

Yes, it is. But stick with it. It's part of the battle.

So there is conflict in a healthy Christian, in a healthy church. There is spiritual warfare taking place. We actually prayed this morning at 7.30, I opened, knowing that many people were not going to come this morning because of family feuds.

In the morning. Has that ever happened to you? Monday through Friday, it's great, no arguments early in the morning, but come Sunday morning. Come Sunday morning.

You didn't take my clothes out of the washer. They're still in the dryer. They're wet.

Or the dishes. Or in breakfast, we have no milk. I'm not going to church.

Well, you should. And see, the devil says, let me get that contention, that fighting, then they won't go to church. Good, I accomplished that.

There's always going to be spiritual warfare in a healthy believer. So I'm going to close with this. How healthy are you spiritually speaking? How healthy are you spiritually speaking? What I'm going to do, I'm going to throw this out there.

I know this isn't for everybody. But we're going to actually, I'm initiating this morning a corporate fast. Asking the church, we did it in January, asking again in June, right now, halfway through the year.

What I want you to do is begin to remove things that are a stumbling block. Begin to remove things, and you know what they are, and they're going to be very hard to get rid of. Those things that keep you away from God.

You ever on Facebook so much you get a headache, and you go, I've got to stop this thing. It's very easy. Disconnect Facebook and forget your password until you have to go onto a computer or something.

Or stop the evening this and news. It's just dramatizing. Why can't you get up early and spend time with me? I'm calling for food as well, for those who want to.

Whether it's a meal or two meals. And as you do it, you'll build up strength. You'll build up strength.

Like for me, a day now with just water, two years ago I was screamed. But it builds up your flesh and submission, and it builds up things. And God honors somebody missing a breakfast just as much as a whole day, depending on where they're at spiritually, if their heart is right.

See, we have to remember, if it doesn't hurt me anything or cost me anything, it's not an offering to God. Now, I don't want to get caught on rules, and we have to do this. What I'm trying to do is prepare the body.

Prepare the body. And it's going to culminate on July 2nd. That's the Sunday I'm going to talk about fasting.

I've got a book this high, and the Bible. I'm going to give you everything I know about fasting and try to sum it up. And it's going to end on July 2nd.

But for some of you, it might just begin for a deeper fast for 10 days or so. But remove those things. Why can't you get enough time in the Word? Why can't you get to church every Sunday? What is distracting you? Begin to remove those distractions and begin to pray.

That's what we're calling the church to. So I'll send out emails more about that. So that leads me to number 10, things you already know.

In a healthy church, in a healthy Christian, there is prayer and fasting. What prayer does, why we do it at the end. People come in, they're broken, they're hurt.

Prayer leads to restoration and renewal. There's restoration and renewal. I was just reading in that book I recommended in Nepal.

In Nepal, this is amazing. I actually, these things bring tears to my eyes sometimes. It hits me at the right time as I'm reading, just thinking about us now.

He's talking about churches, underground churches, they're in the house. They put pillows on their mouth as they're praying and crying out to God, so they don't get heard by their neighbor and get arrested. And we have hardly anybody that wants to go for prayer or go in a hurry.

Jack's Place sounds really good. We got to beat the crowd. Think about where our spiritual hunger is.

Ian Bound said, the little estimate we put on prayer is evidence from the little time we give to it. See, and I didn't want to be a church that gave a little bit time for prayer. I want to give as much time for prayer as we do preaching.

Prayer, preaching, and word, and the word. Through the first, this early morning service, we were praying, we were asking God, we were at the altar. And we're going to do that again after this service.

We're going to be next door for those who want to come for prayer. I think half this room should be making their way next door to pray, just on the other side of the hallway. And then we're going to also do baptisms.

I'm going to come back up after the prayer time, after the worship, right before the first service probably, and do baptisms. I would encourage you, if you want to be baptized, we have towels. This is a step of obedience.

This is important. In that book, again, in Western Christianity, the power of the importance of baptism has largely been lost. In other parts of the world, however, baptism remains the most vital and dangerous action a believer can take.

Thousands of believers are murdered each year following their baptism, because it is a clear cut declaration to the spiritual realm that an individual has crossed the line from death to life. See, the Bible put a lot of emphasis in baptism. I'm dying to self, I'm being baptized, I'm identifying with Christ.

If people say, yeah, I believe, but I don't want to be baptized. Brother, you better check your heart. Why not? And I talk to people in the prayer room.

I'm coming back to, have you ever been baptized? No, I'm not ready for that right now. Now, I understand there's genuine concern sometimes in processing things, but the desire of a hungry heart, you want to be baptized. So if you need to be baptized today, I will baptize you.

Women are on this side, men are on this side. We'll wait, we'll take a little longer if we need to. We want to get everybody baptized.

The final point is excuses must end if you want to be spiritually healthy. I see some smiles on that one. Are you excuse makers too? Right, we have excuse for everything.

It's too early for the morning worship. I can just show you how silly that is. If you take your favorite Hollywood actor, and if I told you they were going to be here at 5 AM to greet me, you would be here.

You would be here. If I told the kids Mike Trout would be here, LeBron James, Colby, they'll be here. You couldn't even sleep.

You set your alarm for an hour and a half early to make sure. See, there should be that same type of desire for God. The problem is we've grown into becoming callous to worship, callous to being healthy for the things of God.

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