

South Bay Church Plant Sabbath School

7 – A Healthy Church

Introduction

What makes a church growing and healthy? A global study of over 70,000 churches from a variety of dominations has discovered that there are eight characteristics of healthy churches. The key in each trait is the *adjective*. They have *effective* structures, *empowering* leadership, *gift-based* ministry, *holistic* small groups, *inspiring* worship, *loving* relationships, *need-oriented* evangelism, and *passionate* spirituality. Churches with these characteristics tend to grow naturally.

Where do you feel Adventist churches are strongest and where do you feel we are weakest?

Acts 11:19-26

Notice how the founding church at Jerusalem responded when they heard that the gospel was being spread in Antioch. They quickly sent Barnabas who was “full of the Holy Spirit and faith” so he could plant a church there. Then Barnabas in turn, sent for Paul, who was a gifted teacher. The result was a new church with “a great many people.”

How many of the eight characteristics can you identify in the churches at Antioch and Jerusalem?

Acts 11:27-30

Which one of the healthy characteristics do you think this is describing? How might this characteristic be practiced in a new church plant?

Acts 12

In this chapter we have the persecution of the new church by Herod and the imprisonment of Peter. Even when we are doing good things for God, that doesn't mean there won't be difficulties. How a church handles criticism, opposition, and failure will show if it is healthy.

Verse 7

How did the early church handle opposition and difficulty? What may be helpful for us when we face challenges?

Verses 13-17

Why do we struggle to believe that God answers our prayers?

Verses 20-23

What was Herod's sin? How might church leaders also be susceptible to this same sin?

Verse 24

What was it that caused the church to grow and be healthy?

A study of over 2000 churches by Thom Rainer indicated that 90% of new members attended a church because of the preaching. They mentioned factors like clarity, conviction, and being biblical.

What factors do you look for in a sermon? What makes a sermon transformational?

Do you find it easy to pay attention to sermons? Why or why not?

Acts 12:25-13:3

What was the process that the church used to send missionaries? How might this apply to how church leaders could be chosen for the new church plant?

Acts 13:4-12

What impressed people of Cyprus about these missionaries? (See verses 4, 7, and 12). What are ways in which we can share God's word today?

Acts 13:13-41

Paul and Barnabas ended up in another Antioch, this one in Pisidia (part of modern-day Turkey).

In his sermon to the Jews in the synagogue, Paul used history, prophecy, and current events (John the Baptist) to show that Jesus was the Messiah. How do you feel about prophecy being used today to reach people? What are the pros and cons of this approach?

Where was the good news in this message? (verses 26, 30, 32, 34, 38-39).

Acts 13:42-51

The preaching of the word of God brought the whole city together on a Sabbath, which was clearly remarkable. In fact, the gospel spread from Antioch to that whole region, but not without conflict. Many churches today are growing by offering a great program and services in a comfortable environment. However, the New Testament church grew by preaching and sharing the Good News.

What is the difference between a healthy church and a successful church? How can you be both?

Acts 13:52

What characterized the early believers? How can you experience more of the Holy Spirit in your own life?

Conclusion

This week we have looked at the modern characteristics of a healthy church, and seen that the early Christian church had most, if not all, of these characteristics. However, what distinguished the early church from both Jewish and pagan traditions was Jesus, as foretold by history and prophecy. Not only that, these early believers were different because they were filled with the Holy Spirit and joy, with prayer being a powerful part of their lives.

What do you think would make our church plant healthier?

How do we prevent ourselves from making some of the mistakes that Adventist churches have made in the past?

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL FROM ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Angels

“To the worker for God the record of these angel visits should bring strength and courage. Today, as verily as in the days of the apostles, heavenly messengers are passing through the length and breadth of the land, seeking to comfort the sorrowing, to protect the impenitent, to win the hearts of men to Christ. We cannot see them personally; nevertheless they are with us, guiding, directing, protecting.” *Acts of the Apostles*, 152.

It is the work of the angels to come close to the tried, the suffering, the tempted. They labor untiringly in behalf of those for whom Christ died. When sinners are led to give themselves to the Saviour, angels bear the tidings heavenward, and there is great rejoicing among the heavenly host. “Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.” [Luke 15:7](#). A report is borne to heaven of every successful effort on our part to dispel the darkness and to spread abroad the knowledge of Christ. As the deed is recounted before the Father, joy thrills through all the heavenly host. *Acts of the Apostles*, 153

The principalities and powers of heaven are watching the warfare which, under apparently discouraging circumstances, God's servants are carrying on. New conquests are being achieved, new honors won, as the Christians, rallying round the banner of their Redeemer, go forth to fight the good fight of faith. All the heavenly angels are at the service of the humble, believing people of God; and as the Lord's army of workers here below sing their songs of praise, the choir above join with them in ascribing praise to God and to His Son. *Acts of the Apostles*, 154

The cause of God in the earth today is in need of living representatives of Bible truth. The ordained ministers alone are not equal to the task of warning the great cities. God is calling not only upon ministers, but also upon physicians, nurses, colporteurs, Bible workers, and other consecrated laymen of varied talent who have a knowledge of the word of God and who know the power of His grace, to consider the needs of the unwarned cities. Time is rapidly passing, and there is much to be done. Every agency must be set in operation, that present opportunities may be wisely improved.

City Evangelism

The example of the followers of Christ at Antioch should be an inspiration to every believer living in the great cities of the world today. While it is in the order of God that chosen workers of consecration and talent should be stationed in important centers of population to lead out in public efforts, it is also His purpose that the church members living in these cities shall use their God-given talents in working for souls. There are rich blessings in store for those who surrender fully to the call of God. As such workers endeavor to win souls to Jesus, they will find that many who never could have been reached in any other way are ready to respond to intelligent personal effort.

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Working Together

God has made His church on the earth a channel of light, and through it He communicates His purposes and His will. He does not give to one of His servants an experience independent of and contrary to the experience of the church itself. Neither does He give one man a knowledge of His will for the entire church while the church—Christ's body—is left in darkness. In His providence He places His servants in close connection with His church in order that they may have less confidence in themselves and greater confidence in others whom He is leading out to advance His work. *Acts of the Apostles*, 163

The Lord in His wisdom has arranged that by means of the close relationship that should be maintained by all believers, Christian shall be united to Christian and church to church. Thus the human instrumentality will be enabled to co-operate with the divine. Every agency will be subordinate to the Holy Spirit, and all the believers will be united in an organized and well-directed effort to give to the world the glad tidings of the grace of God. *Acts of the Apostles*, 164

Facing Opposition

Not without a struggle does Satan allow the kingdom of God to be built up in the earth. The forces of evil are engaged in unceasing warfare against the agencies appointed for the spread of the gospel, and these powers of darkness are especially active when the truth is proclaimed before men of repute and sterling integrity. Thus it was when Sergius Paulus, the deputy of Cyprus, was listening to the gospel message. The deputy had sent for the apostles, that he might be instructed in the message they had come to bear, and now the forces of evil, working through the sorcerer Elymas, sought with their baleful suggestions to turn him from the faith and so thwart the purpose of God.

Thus the fallen foe ever works to keep in his ranks men of influence who, if converted, might render effective service in God's cause. But the faithful gospel worker need not fear defeat at the hand of the enemy; for it is his privilege to be endued with power from above to withstand every satanic influence. *Acts of the Apostles*, 167.