



Title: Spiritual Health Checks
Theme: Four Signs of a Healthy Christian

Introduction: *Rick Warren wrote, "The key for churches in the 21st Century will be church health, not growth."* When a congregation is healthy, it will grow spiritually and enjoy the benefits of a live, vibrant relationship with Jesus Christ. A healthy Christian will not find his strength or determine his weakness in the size of the church he attends.

What are four signs that the child of God lives a life that is nourished by the Word of God and illuminated by the Holy Spirit?

Acts 2:42, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." These Holy Spirit filled believers devoted themselves to these four things.

Let us Pray!

Life expressions of a Holy Spirit led child of God

Today's text gives the first look at the early church and gives us a look at the results of a Holy Spirit revived heart. These Scriptures should prick at the heart of the modern day church and serve as a key guide for examining ourselves. All healthy things show signs of life. If the child of God is not growing spiritually in any or all of these four areas, that Christian is dying. A church will only be as healthy as those who attend her. Therefore it is a necessity that those who are part of the Body of Christ get a fair evaluation of their spiritual condition.

I would propose to you that a healthy church begins with a consuming passion for the Lord Jesus Christ. The early church at Pentecost received the Word gladly, continued steadfastly, enjoyed Christian fellowship and was a praying church. These are the life expressions of a Holy Spirit led child of God.

It must be noted that today's text does not hold the complete list to everything a born again Christian does. However, it contains seeds that determine how much spiritual life is birthed forth in all the other activities the child of God applies himself to.

Devotes himself to the apostle's teachings

A key sign of a healthy Christian is that he devotes himself to the apostle's teachings. The New American Standard Bible says, "...they were continually devoting themselves to the apostle's teachings." (Acts 2:42) Devoted (*proskarteroutes*) means to continue, persevere, stick to and persist.

The Christian surrendered to the Holy Spirit will not quit, back off from truth, fade away or slip back. He steadfastly stays in true Biblical teaching. He is diligent and constant in attendance to the proclaiming and teaching of the Word of God. The on fire child of God makes a conscious hearing of the Word of God and he surrenders to the Holy Spirit's prompting to obey it.

The mark of a true church is not the size and beauty of her buildings. It is not the number who attend or how modern the sanctuary looks. The important issue is whether it holds to the apostle's doctrine. Born again Christians have a teachable spirit and a hunger to learn more and more of God's will for them by painstaking study and listening to the Word of God.

Albert Barnes wrote, "One of the evidences of conversion is a desire to be instructed in the doctrines and duties of [Christianity] and a willingness to attend the preaching and teaching of [God's Word]. Christians are hungry for Holy Spirit inspired teachings and they will make time to be exposed to it."

The Christian who is devoted to the teaching of the Word of God goes to church and Bible studies, prayerfully reads his Bible, watches quality Christian programs, listens to Christian music and takes every opportunity possible to fill his eyes, mind and heart with things of God. There is an eagerness of mind and openness of heart to seek and hear what God's will is for him. The child of God who is devoted to the teachings of God's Word will place himself in the position where He can be led by the Holy Spirit. He walks into church with anticipation and expectancy that the Lord has something specifically for him. These Christians are far apart from church attendees who walk out of church unmoved, critical and unfed because they refuse to eat from the table prepared for them.

Christians who are devoted to the teaching of the Word of God are like the Bereans that you read about in Acts 17:11. They were of more noble character than the Thessalonians for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."

Luke gave the Jews at Berea undying fame by characterizing them as being "more noble" than the Thessalonians. They tested what Paul said to the truths of what we call the Old Testament. Rather than judge what he said by political and cultural consideration, they were captivated by what he said as it agreed with the Word of the law.

Once again the New American Standard Bible has the best translation with; "more noble minded," (*eguenes*) meaning to be generous in giving attention.

In his research on the Berean church, Dr. J. Vernon McGee discovered that the Berean church was a persecuted church. He also notes that even though the Bible says very little about the Berean church, Scripture presents her as of having noble character. In others words very pleasing to God.

I have discovered that Christians and ministries that become the most beneficial to me are those who are daily, prayerful readers and studiers of the Word of God. They have withstood the test of time and they grow spiritually in the test of trials.

The Bereans “...received the message with great eagerness...” (*prothumia*) The King James Bible says, “readiness of mind,” meaning to listen attentively and respectfully...” They were willing to hear it, they could comprehend it, and they had hearts hungry to know God’s will for them.

Solomon in writing to those who would listen wrote, “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.” (Ecclesiastes 5:1)

There are some real questions that need to be answered as the Holy Spirit brings you through the first spiritual health check today. Can those who see your life say, “There goes a Berean? There goes a man or woman of God that has high regard for the truth and one who lives out a life of devotion to the Lord.”

A healthy Christian has true fellowship

Another sign of a healthy Christian is fellowship with other Christians. “Fellowship” (*koingnia*) means to share in something which involves participation. Mel Lawrenz gives this definition, “It has various translations such as “fellowship,” “participation,” “sharing,” “partnership,” and “communion.” The practical application is sharing material goods, sharing ministry, and being partners in the gospel. All these are rooted in the spiritual reality of a connection between believers that is based on their connection to Christ. This fellowship is literally brought forth by the Holy Spirit of God.

Christians not only devoted themselves to the apostle’s teachings, but united in the work of spreading the gospel. Christians in true service are united in feelings, interest, in dangers, in conflicts, in opinions and in the hopes of blessedness that comes in serving Jesus Christ. They have a joined life in sharing blessings and gifts bearing each others burdens, sharing in the conflicts that come and the victories that are won in fulfilling the Great Commission.

The Sunday School Times ran the story about Christians bearing each others burdens in their living to the Lord Jesus. In one section of China, there were several missionaries working together. When they held services one man would attend regularly, showing much evidence that the Holy Spirit of Christ was doing a great work in his life. One day he confessed that he was a Christian and that he no longer worshiped his ancestors in the usual manner.

This occurred at the New Year time when he was supposed to perform the usual rites of burning paper and incense to his ancestors. When he refused he was given fifteen days to recant or be beaten with 1,000 stripes. As the fifteen days drew near, a Christian from a different Chinese clan went to talk to the head of the clan of the sentenced man whom was about to receive the 1,000 stripes. The Christian explained, "When a person becomes a believer and worshiper of Jesus Christ, they become a part of the family of God. We cannot stand by and watch our brother in Christ beaten, so we propose that if you insist in carrying out this sentence, we will all join in with him and take our share of those stripes."

The head of the clan knew that there would be great trouble if a member of one clan would beat a member of another clan. He said, "If we would have understood the sharing of the burdens of Christians, such a verdict would never have been passed." Thus, the Christian man nor his Christian brothers or sister had to take one stripe.

A healthy Christian has true fellowship because he shares Spiritual experiences with other soldiers of Christ. This builds faith and trust. Through their Christian service they have shared material possessions together. (Acts 2:45) They worship together. (Act 2:46-47) The church is not to become a social club where people are just nice to one another. 1 Peter 2:4-5 says, "As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

The Lord knows to be a healthy Christian you need Biblical fellowship. The fact is, going to church does not make you a Christian, and you can be Christian and not attend a church. However, it is impossible for you to grow mature in the faith without Christian fellowship.

A young fellow who was fed up with church went to see this wise old Christian in his cabin to get some advice. He told him all the things that were bothering him about church, and how he felt that he would be better off without the company of other Christians. As he was speaking, the old man silently took the fire tongs and removed a red-hot glowing coal from the middle of the fire and set it on the hearth. The coal glowed for a while, but eventually dimmed and turned black. He let it sit there a while and then took the tongs and places the coal back in the middle of the fire. Within seconds the coal was glowing red hot once again. The young man took the wordless lesson and left determined to stay with church and become an active member.

Just as coals soon burn out when they are removed from the company of other coals, we will not last long in the faith unless we are working closely with what other Christians are doing in the local church. A healthy Christian exercises his Spiritual gift to help make a special outreach, project or ministry become successful. It may be prayer, giving, encouraging, administrating or applying hands on work. The fact is he will be doing something. It must be noted, that he will not be a part of everything going on in the church.

Listen to what the Bible says: “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12) Proverbs 27:17 says, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

Vance Havner pointed out, “Snowflakes are frail, but if enough of them get together they can stop traffic, shut down airports and cities, and take lives.” You get enough Christians who are devoted to the Word of God and living in Biblical fellowship, there is nothing God cannot do with them in accordance with His will.

Observes the “breaking of bread”

A healthy Christian will have fellowship with his Christian family and with the body of Christ. He also observes the “breaking of bread.”

A healthy Christian steadfastly remembers the Cross of Calvary with other believers in obedience to the ordinance given by Jesus Christ. Psalm 77:11-12 says, “I will remember the deeds of the LORD, yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds.” The greatest deed ever done for sinners was when Jesus Christ allowed all the sins of the world to be laid upon Him and when He gave His life on the Cross.

Communion is to be observed very often in remembrance of Jesus Christ. The bread is in remembrance that His Body was given for us and the cup is for remembering that His blood was shed for us. Because of what Christ has done, Christians have been reconciled to God and can have fellowship with Him.

When the child of God meditates upon all that Jesus has done, can and will do for them, there is nothing that can rob his heart of wanting to observe communion so he makes effort to be where communion is being served. He also continually asks God to search his heart so that nothing will keep him from enjoying the breaking of bread with his brothers and sisters in Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:28 says; “A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.” He remembers what he was before Christ came into His heart and life and he rejoices over what the cleansing blood of Jesus has purchased for him right now.

A powerful ruler built a great palace. Among the rooms was one that was always locked. He called it the Chamber of Memories. Every day he visited that room, but no one else was permitted inside. Finally one day the servants got a peep inside the locked room. There was no silver, no gold, no precious jewels. All they saw was a humble shepherd's robe; the one the king had worn before he came to the throne.

The Lord's Supper reminds a healthy Christian what he was and that it was his sin that put Jesus on the Cross. A healthy Christian is like the Apostle Paul who wrote, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. (1 Corinthians 2:2)

A healthy Christian will strive to make decisions and live a life that revolves around the fact that he is not his own, he was purchased with the highest price that can be paid for the redemption of sinful man. Because of that price paid, the child of God will choose to attend a Bible believing church that spreads the gospel message, avoids watered down theology and false doctrines. That is why we make time for the Holy Spirit to examine hearts before we serve Communion in this church.

Devotes himself to prayer

A healthy Christian partakes regularly in the Lord's Supper and devotes himself to prayer.

Without the power of God there can be no lasting work done for Christ. A healthy Christian knows that if the church is too busy to pray there will be a great amount of activity with little accomplished, many services but few conversions, many programs with little life changing results. This is why the apostle Paul wrote, “I urge your brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me ...” (Romans 15:30) The child of God faces many trials, many obstacles and even spiritual perils as he walks with the Lord down here.

Watchman Nee wrote, "Our prayers lay the track on which God's power can come. Like a mighty locomotive, his power is irresistible, but it cannot reach us without rails." Prayer is like art or music. It can only be enjoyed by and through those who have disciplined themselves to actually spend time in prayer. An artist or musicians cannot fully reach his full potential unless he learns about and spends time developing his gift. Most people enjoy the benefits of looking upon art work that has had much time and hard work put into it. All mature adults appreciate the benefits of listening to a musician that has put a great deal of time and energy into their music. So it is with prayer. It is those who spend time in prayer individually, corporately and continually who bless those for whom they have been praying.

Corrie Ten Boon expressed the life of being a vibrant Christian and she asks, "Is prayer a steering wheel or your spare tire?"

Christians are to use prayer for seeking God's will, grace and empowerment. It is not to be used as a spare tire or as a tool to order the Lord around. The prayer that blesses God is the one offered according to His will and purposes.

The Bible says, "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful." (Colossians 4:2) (James 5:16b) "...be faithful in prayer..." (Romans 12:12) "...Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and request..." (Ephesians 6:18) And there is God's promise about prayer, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

What does it mean to be devoted to prayer? If it means anything else it means to be regular and often in prayer. It means to have a lifestyle in which prayer is an integral part. When I say that he is a devoted father or she is a devoted student what do we mean? It means that you can expect the man who is head of his family to get done what ever needs to be done. It is in his power to be a father to his kids. It means a devoted student is going to do what needs to be done in order to be seen as a student worth investing time and money on.

A healthy Christian's life is not limited to prayer, but is devoted to prayer. Saying that someone is devoted to their family does not mean that family is all they have or all they do. It does mean that their life, their habits, their attitudes gives evidence of a life devoted to their family. They provide a home, they are together at important family gatherings, and support one another in family tragedies. A praying Christian may be busy with life situations, but as the Holy Spirit moves him, he takes a moment to pray, he makes time to pray in one accord with other believers for important church issues, and he his most certainly seeking the Lord' grace, peace and comfort in times of tragedy.

The Christian Index ran the story of a black man who was in service to General Stonewall Jackson. Many noticed by that he was able to discern whenever the General was about to start another expedition. When asked how he knew, the

black man said. "Mr. Jackson prays every night and every morning. But when he prays two to three or four hours during the night, that is when I pack his baggage, I know we are going on an expedition."

A healthy Christian prays regularly, faithfully and wholeheartedly. But when his church is about to go out on another expedition for the Lord, he arranges extra time to be in prayer.

For a heart check, do people expect to see you in prayer? What do you fast from to spend more time in prayer as the Lord leads the leadership of your church out in expeditions? Can those who are closest to you see that you are about to go out with the Lord to do His work by the amount of time you spend in prayer?

Today's text is recorded history of when the Holy Spirit was doing a work in the lives of those who have surrendered their hearts over to Jesus Christ. The same Holy Spirit is at work today in lives of those who understand that Jesus is much more than just Savior, He is Lord. Where there is a surrendered heart to the Lordship of Christ there are healthy Christians exhibiting these four signs. A life devoted to the teachings of God's Word, Christian fellowship, observance of Communion, and Prayer.

Let us Pray!