

CHA Presentation for NC 2023

The Essential Components of a Healthy Church

Acts 2:42-47

On behalf of the Church Health Community, I greet you in the precious name of Jesus! My name is Gary Kuehner. I am the denominational church health associate, and I believe in the power of the gospel! I believe that the gospel message, the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus, has the power to save people from sin AND set people free!

My life is a testimony to the power of the gospel. 49 years ago, Jesus rescued me from the darkness and brought me into the light. 49 years ago, I went from being an alcohol and drug abuser to being a devoted follower of Jesus. Jesus changed my life in a radical way! And to HIM I give all the honor, glory, and praise!

Yes, there is power in the gospel! And the proclamation of the gospel is one of the essential components of church health. I will talk more about the other essential components of church health later in this presentation, but for now let's define church health.

What is church health? When I use the phrase "church health" I'm talking about the spiritual condition of the church. In essence, I'm asking the question, "How well is the church doing when it comes to doing the things the Lord expects the church to do?" When I use the word "church" I'm talking about the Body of Christ ... I'm talking about those who have truly accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord ... I'm talking about people. A spiritually healthy church is made up of spiritually healthy people.

So a local church's health is determined by how well the people in that church are doing when it comes to doing what the Lord expects them to do.

What does the Lord expect the local church to do? What does the Lord expect your church to do? What are the essential components of a healthy church? What does a healthy church look like?

Rest assured, I will answer these questions. But before I do so, I'd like to consider another question, one of the basic questions of life. That question is, "Why are we here? Why do we exist? What is our purpose in life?"

Depending on who you talk to, you will get different answers to this all important question. But as followers of Jesus we must look to the Word of God for the answer. As followers of Jesus, the Bible must be our ultimate source of authority. In spite of what some people are saying today, I believe there is such a thing as absolute truth. And I'm convinced that this absolute truth is found in the Bible. 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that "All Scripture is God-breathed [inspired by God] and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness." So this afternoon we will look to the Word of God for the answers to all of our questions.

Why are we here? Why do we exist? What is our purpose in life? The answer is found in Matthew 22:36-39 (see also Mark 12:28-31 and Luke 10:25-28). In this passage an expert in the Jewish Law approaches Jesus and asks him this question, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law? Jesus replies, "Love the Lord your God with all you heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.”

In this passage Jesus tells us that the greatest thing we can do, our reason for existence, our purpose in life, is to love God and people. The Lord God put each one of us on this planet to love him and to love one another! Love God and love people! This is God’s “Great Command.”

I want you to notice something ... something that’s often overlooked when it comes to God’s Great Command. We are told to love God and love our neighbor as (we love) ourselves. “The Parable of the Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:30-35) makes it clear that our “neighbor” is anyone God puts in our path. So we are to love God and love people as we love ourselves. There is a sequence here that needs to be emphasized. I call this sequence the “links of love” – links like the links of a chain. Here they are.

Link one is love God. We need to understand that love begins with God. 1 John 4:17 says, “We love because he [God] first loved us.” You cannot love yourself and others right unless you know and love God right. [REPEAT] When you have a right understanding of God and love him the way you should, he enables you to love yourself right – that’s the second link in the chain of love – love God ... love yourself. And then, because you love yourself right – I’m talking about godly love, healthy self-esteem – you are able to love others right. The links of love: love God, love yourself, and love others. Isn’t that neat?

Love God and love people. This is God's Great Command. When I think about this Great Command, the question that comes to mind is, "How are we supposed to do this? What is the best way to fulfill God's Great Command to love him and love people?"

I've been a disciple (follower) of Jesus for 49 years. I got saved on April 1st, 1974 and I became a pastor on July 1st, 1978. In my 49 years of following Jesus, I have learned that the BEST way to fulfill the Great Command is by engaging in the Great Mission.

What is the Great Mission? The Great Mission (also called the Great Commission) is found in Matthew 28:19,20. In Matthew 28:19,20 Jesus says this: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit [the Triune Godhead ... the Trinity], and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always to the very end of the age." Jesus says, "This is what I want you to do (go and make disciples) and this is why you'll be able to do it (because I will be with you)!"

Go and make disciples! This is what Jesus calls us to do. This is our mission as followers of Christ. Notice that this Great Mission has four parts.

Part one is make disciples, more specifically make new disciples. When Jesus said "go and make disciples" he was talking specifically about making new disciples. This is the evangelism component of the disciple-making process – sharing the gospel ... getting people saved. This is where the disciple-making process begins.

Once someone becomes a disciple of Jesus (accepts Christ as Savior and Lord), that person should be baptized. Jesus said, “Go and make [new] disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Baptism is part two of the Great Mission. Baptize those who become disciples of Jesus. In the Early Church people got saved and then they got baptized. They got baptized in water and whenever possible this baptism was by immersion.

Get people saved and then baptize them – parts one and two of the Great Mission. Part three of the Great Mission consists of teaching. All baptized disciples of Jesus are expected to learn what the first disciples of Jesus learned. Jesus wants/expects all of his baptized disciples to become life-long learners of the Word of God.

Clearly, Jesus wants all of his baptized disciples to learn, to be informed. But he wants something more. In Matthew 28:20 Jesus talks about teaching his disciples to obey everything he commands. Jesus wants us to take information and make application because he knows that information plus application equals transformation! That’s the goal ... to be transformed ... to become more like Jesus!

Get people saved, baptize them, teach them, and exhort to obey what they’ve learned – the four parts of the Great Mission. Let me say it again. I am convinced that the best way to fulfill the Great Command to love God and people is by engaging in the Great Mission to make disciples.

How did the Early Church – the first disciples of Jesus – make disciples? The Early Church made disciples of Jesus by engaging in six basic things. Listen carefully. These six basic things are the essential components of church health. If you and the other people who make

up your local church do these six things well, you will have a healthy church!

We get a snap shot of the Early Church in Act 2:42-47. I have read this passage many times since I became a follower of Christ 49 years ago. But it wasn't until about 25 years ago that something hit me. For 24 years I read this passage and understood it strictly from a historical perspective. In other words, I read it and saw it only as history. Obviously this passage is historical. It happened and it's a part of history. But 25 years ago I realized that this historical record is more than history! God made it clear to me that this historical record is the model we can/should use to fulfill the Great Mission! I'm convinced that in Acts 2:42-47 we discover God's Great Plan – God's plan to fulfill the Great Mission!

We've talked about The Great Command, we've talked about The Great Mission, and now we're going to talk about The Great Plan.

I'm going to read Acts 2:42-47 and then I'm going to make a few observations. And then, we're going to take a quick look at each of the six things the Early Church did to fulfill the Great Mission.

As we proceed keep in mind that these six things are the essential components of church health. If you and I do these six things well, we will have healthy churches!

Let's read ACTS 2:42-47. I'll be reading from the NIV.

"They [the first disciples of Jesus] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread [this "agape love feast" is one example of fellowship; the "agape love feast" was a shared meal – similar to our "covered-dish dinners" – that

incorporated the “Lord’s Supper”] and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All believers were together [they were one in heart and mind (see Acts 4:32)] and had everything in common [they shared what they had (see Acts 4:34,35)]. Selling their possessions and goods [things they didn’t need ... extras (see Acts 4:34,35)], they gave to everyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts [to engage in corporate worship]. They broke bread in homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God [small group – “house church” – meetings] and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

I read this passage and all I can say is, “Wow!” The Early Church knew how to do church! The Early Church did what they were supposed to do and they did it well. And because they did what they were supposed to do well, the Lord added to their number daily ... church health resulted in church growth!

In Acts 2:42-47 we discover that the Early Church was “devoted to” six basic things. The first disciples of Jesus were “all in” when it came to these six basic things. Here they are: lifelong learning (discipleship); intimate relationships (fellowship); earnest prayer (prayer); selfless service (ministry); inspiring praise/worship (worship), and compassionate evangelism (evangelism).

I want you to notice something. Three of the six basic things are God-focused and three of the six basic things are people-focused. **DISCIPLESHIP** (learning about God and what he expects from us), **PRAYER** (communicating/conversing with God), and **WORSHIP** (giving

God glory and praise) are God-focused. FELLOWSHIP (sharing life together), MINISTRY (acts of service), and evangelism (sharing the gospel and inviting people to accept Christ) are people-focused.

Do you see how the Great Command and the Great Mission are connected? I'll say it again. The BEST way to fulfill the Great Command is by engaging in the Great Mission! AND the best way to fulfill the Great Mission is by engaging in discipleship, fellowship, prayer, ministry, worship, and evangelism!

Let's take a quick look at each of these six things. Once again, we'll be using Acts 2:42-47 as our reference point.

In Acts 2:42 we learn that the first disciples of Jesus "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching." The Greek word "mathetes" translated "disciple" means "learner". Disciples by definition are learners. Disciples of Jesus are called to be life-long learners – they are called to engage in DISCIPLESHIP ... always learning ... always growing ... always striving to become more like Jesus. The first disciples of Jesus took advantage of every opportunity they had to learn the Word of God, and so should we.

How did the apostles (who functioned as teaching elders) teach their students (those who were learning from them)? The same way Jesus taught his students ... his disciples.

As we examine the life of Jesus we discover that he taught people in four different ways. He used what I call the 4TD (four tier discipleship) approach. Jesus taught: the crowd, the twelve (those designated as apostles), the inner circle (James, Peter, and John), and the beloved disciple (John). I'm convinced that the apostles – the

teaching elders of the Early Church – used the same approach. I’m also convinced that this is the discipleship approach we should use today.

The first disciples of Jesus devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching. They engaged in discipleship. They were life-long learners of the Word of God.

In Acts 2:42, 44, 46 we learn that the first disciples of Jesus also engaged in fellowship. They spent time together. They built godly, intimate relationships. They became a community ... a church family. Others could see that they were disciples of Jesus because they loved each other (John13:35). Acts 4:32 tells us that they “were one in heart and mind.” There was unity in the community! And this love and unity was contagious!

In Acts 2:42 we learn that the first disciples of Jesus also engaged in prayer. They prayed earnestly for one another and they prayed for those who had not yet accepted Christ. They prayed individually and they prayed corporately. The first disciples prayed as if everything depended on God and worked as if everything depended on them.

In Acts 2:45 we learn that the first disciples of Jesus also engaged in ministry. They performed selfless acts of service. They saw needs and met needs. They ministered in various ways to those in genuine need and gained favor with all the people. Acts 4:34 tells us that “there were no needy persons among them.” Imagine that!

In Act 2:46,47 we learn that the first disciples also engaged in worship. They assembled together in small and large groups and praised God with glad and sincere hearts. The first disciples had a heart for

worship and they put their heart into their worship! Their worship was inspiring. It moved them! It energized them! It enabled them to experience the presence of God!

Finally, in Acts 2:47 we learn that the first disciples of Jesus engaged in evangelism. They shared the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and left the results up to God. Their compassion for the lost compelled them to passionately tell people about Jesus – his death and resurrection – and God used their testimony to add to their number.

Because the first disciples of Jesus were spiritually healthy, the Early Church was spiritually healthy. And because the Early Church was spiritually healthy, the Early Church grew. I'm convinced that church health will produce church growth!

If you want your local church to be spiritually healthy, you need to be spiritually healthy. You need to be a disciple who is: a life-long learner of the Word of God (discipleship); a disciple who is praying earnestly (prayer); a disciple who has godly, intimate relationships with others (fellowship); a disciple who is serving selflessly (ministry); a disciples who is praising God with a glad and sincere heart (inspiring worship); and a disciple who is compassionately sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with those who desperately need him (evangelism)!

This afternoon we've talked about "God's Great Command, God's Great Mission, and God's Great Plan." I'm convinced that God wants and expects you and me to love him and love people AND to make disciples of Jesus by engaging in discipleship, prayer, fellowship, ministry, worship, and evangelism. As I've noted, these six things –

the six things I just mentioned – are the essential components of church health.

How well are you doing when it comes to these essential components of church health? Is there a way for you to evaluate your spiritual health in these six areas? Yes, there is! I am pleased to inform you that the Church Health Community has developed what we are calling a Church Health Checkup. This Church Health Checkup is a survey that will help you to determine the spiritual health/condition of your local church in the six areas we've been talking about. This Church Health Checkup is available on the EC Church website. We encourage all of our churches to take this survey and reflect on the results. Hopefully, this survey will enable you to see where you are doing well and where you need some help. If you would like someone to discuss the survey results with you, please contact me or your District Field Director or both of us. Our desire is for your church to be the healthiest church that it can be, and we are ready, willing, and able to help you to be healthy. If you have any questions, please contact me personally.

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