

“Healthy Churches...What Is It Going to Take?”

(Acts 2, Eph.4, Rev. 2))

Introduction:

1) Welcome to our IARBC 2020 “online” Annual Conference

- Due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, we are still functioning & ministering under federal “guidelines”. In Iowa, though we have not yet experienced a “stay-at-home order”, state mandates have impacted all of us.

- Everyone has been forced to **respond** to this pandemic... this “health crisis”, whether we wanted to or not. What do we do? What is it going to take moving forward?

- Ironic, or better providential, that our theme is “THRIVE: Building Healthy Churches” right in the midst of a health crisis.

- As a fellowship of churches, God has directed our steps to have a three year “push” towards revitalization:

2019	REVIVE or Die	(Revelation 3)
2020	THRIVE: Building Healthy Churches	
2021	STRIVE: Making Disciples...Working Together	

- Last year’s theme was based on a wake-up call to the church in Sardis.
- This year our focus/theme is on building healthy churches.
- We know that only Christ can build His church...produce healthy churches.

- But how should we **respond** to this spiritual “pandemic”?
- What is it going to take? What do we need?

2) My responsibility in this “opening” session?

- To set the table...to set the journey. Big picture...speakers fill in
- Illustrate along the way with what we have “seen” in ministry (pastor & SR)

Christ loves His church...gave Himself...building...glory in the church...Healthy!

So let’s get our journey underway... **What do we need?**

1. We need a _____ for a healthy church (churches)!

words: hunger, long for, delight, seek, affection, heart, love, please, desire

1) Desires are _____...behind what we do.

-MWCR speaker: **feel** what we feel because we **do** what we do...
do what we do because we **want** what we want
(**want = do = feel**)

- (James 4:1) “*What causes quarrels...causes fights...passions...*”
- (Revelation 22:17) “*...let the one who is thirsty come...desires*”
- (Matthew 5:6) “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for R...*”
- (Deuteronomy 6:4-6) “*you shall love the Lord...your heart...teach...*”
- (Matthew 22:40) “*...love the Lord...neighbor...on these two hang...*”
- (Luke 12:31) “*...seek first...all these things will be added to you...*”
- (Prov. 4:23) “*Keep your heart with all diligence, for from it flow...*”
- (James 1:13-14) “*...desire is conceived...brings forth...fully grown...*”

2) Desires are impacted or _____ by...

- world (Romans 12:2) “*do not be conformed*”
- sinners (Pr. 1:10) “*...When sinners entice you...*”
- devil (Gen. 3:1) “*...more crafty...*” (deceiver, tempter)
- flesh (Ephesians. 4:22) “*...old self...corrupt deceitful desires...*”
- God... **works in us to will and to do*” (Phil 2:13) (Psa. 37:4)
* through His Word (Heb. 4:12) “*...intents of the heart...*”
* through other believers (Timothy: mother, GM, Paul)

3) We are ultimately _____ and need to _____ them.

- (Deut. 6) “*you shall love the Lord...shall be on your heart*”
- (Col. 3:1-2) “*seek the things...set your minds (affections)...*”
- (2 Cor. 5) “*pleasing to him...love of Christ controls me...*”
- (James 1:13-14) “*Let no one say...enticed by his own desire.*”

4) Desires can be _____ to deal with. (Jer. 17:9)

- (1 Cor. 4:4-5) “*...not aware...bring to light...now hidden...purposes...*”

- Seems like an obvious statement...We Need a Desire...

-But I don’t think it is that simple.

- We may actually be driven by **other desires** that have little or nothing to do with healthy churches...may even contribute to its unhealthiness!

SO: What do you, me, and our people *REALLY want* from church?

Suggest a few observations:

2. We need a _____ of a healthy church . (Acts 2)

This text is *descriptive* NOT *prescriptive*.

- tells us what they did, not what we should do
- not exhaustive treatment...everything that makes for a healthy church
- still profitable as an example of a healthy, vibrant, thriving church!

1) They were _____ about God, His Son, and His Word. “*witnesses*”

- All of them spoke of the mighty works of God.
- Peter proclaimed Jesus who is both Lord and Christ...saved by Him
- The *apostles* taught the Word of God.
 - * As a priority
 - * With authority & regularity

2) They _____ to the Word of God.

- Quickly
- With genuine conviction “...*heart...what shall we do?...*”
- With obedience “...*received his word...*”

3) They were _____ in their church.

- “...*they devoted themselves...*”
- This was personal “...*themselves...*”
- This was...**intense!**
 - * to be strong (vigorous, steadfast, enduring)
 - * towards (forward, directional...to these things...ALL of them)

4) They were overcome with _____ at what God was doing.

- “awe” (fear) = afraid...alarmed...awe (context) (old dictionary)
- in what God is doing IN and THROUGH ordinary people

5) They _____ and _____ for one another.

- They were in this “*together*” (in one place, but more).
- They had all things in “*common*”.
- They were “*distributing...to all as any had need*”
- This was personal...voluntary...creative...proactive...tangible...
- ...sacrificial...hearts that were generous and filled with joy (FRITZ)

6) They were living for Christ _____ the walls of the church.

- God gave them _____ for the the lives they lived.
 - * “*favor*” = “grace...the divine influence on the heart and its reflection in life.”

-“*powerful testimony among the Jews...day to day reality, not once a week routine, because the risen Christ was a living reality to them, and His resurrection power was at work in their lives through the Spirit*” (WWW)

- God gave them _____ for the good news they proclaimed.
 - * connecting with unsaved people, pointing them to Christ
 - * staying on **mission** to make disciples

7) They gave God all the _____! “...*praising God...*”

- This was, by the grace of God, a happy, healthy, growing, reproducing church!

3. We need to know what God wants us to _____ (Eph. 4)

- Epistles include “prescriptive” texts.
- One in particular...started with a bang...relatively healthy... **Ephesus**
- Many central truths for a THRIVING church.

Note: Christ builds his church...grows the body...uses people yielded to Him who will do what He wants them to do. Working in and through them.

SO: What does God want a relatively **healthy** church to do? (Eph. 1-4)

1) He wants us to _____ Christ.

- Chapters 1-3 are one big praise song of who we are and what we have in Christ...identity...blessings...

- (3:21) "...to him be glory in the church..."
- 2) He wants us to _____ worthy of our calling. "...no longer walk..."
 - *Motivated* by Christ...and all we have in Him "...therefore **urge** you..."
 - *Manifested* by how we live...order our lives...in & outside of church.
 - *Measures* up to our calling "weighs the same as"
 - *Matures* in Christ: process of putting off and putting on (4:17-32)

- 3) He wants us to _____ together.
 - **Working** to keep the unity created by the Spirit of God (4:3)
 - Effective **working** of every part (4:16)
 - * Saints?
 - doing the **work** of the ministry (4:12)
 - using the gifts that God has given you (4:7-8)
 - loving...learning from & following their shepherd
 - * Shepherds?
 - God gave you to the church...to this church (4:11)
 - Here the Scriptures tell us why: "...for..."
 - * **Equipping** the saints for the **work** of ministry (4:12)
 - * Being an **example** of a godly *walk* (1 Tim. & 1 Pet.)
 - * Doing the **work** of an **evangelist** (2 Tim. 4:5)

BUT: What does God want an **unhealthy** church to do? (Rev. 1-3)

- Of course Ephesians (book) describes what EVERY church should do.
- But unhealthy people and churches may need more radical, specific treatment...such as resuscitation...rescuing...remedial...revitalized...
- What if a church declined in health...for whatever reason?
- What would Jesus say to them?
- We know! **Ephesus** was not the church it used to be.

This is VERY instructive because it happens, it is a heartache, but there is hope!
Possibly a pattern/template for revitalization ministry. Listen...

- 1) Jesus calls them to _____
 - "Blessed is the one who reads...hear...keep" (1:3)
 - "Write what you see in a book and send it to the 7 churches" (1:11)
 - "He who has an ear. let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:29)
 - It matters who is speaking! "The words of **him** who...(2:1)
- 2) Jesus gives them _____ (things that are STILL true)

- He is the Alpha & the Omega (1:8, 17)
- He is worthy of our praise "to him be glory & dominion"
- He still walks in their midst (2:1, 1:12)
- He still holds the "stars" in his right hand (1:16, 2:1)
- He is still loves them (1:5)
- He gives them hope (Sardis = "yet you have a few"...))

- 3) Jesus gives them his _____ (true condition, diagnosis)
 - Starts each letter with "I know..."
 - In many cases we do not know...perception not reality "not that bad"
 - * What they were doing (well) "...your works..."
 - * What they lost along the way "...the love you had at first..."

- 4) Jesus gives them an _____ plan. (what to do)
 - "remember...repent...do the works you did at first"
 - strayed from their mission...abandoned love along the way
 - needed to jump start the process
 - Take time...setbacks...resistant...hard work...need some help?

- 5) Jesus holds them _____
 - Choices always have consequences...decision time...all in!
 - Keep going and see what happens? Doing nothing? No!
 - "If not...unless you repent"

4. **We need to sense our utter _____ on the Lord.**

- We know this...but need a constant reminder
- Do we work? Or does God work? YES!
- "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it"
- "...can these bones live?...I will cause breath to enter...and you shall live"
- "...born of the Spirit...born of God..."
- "I will build my church..."
- "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6)
- "...I am alive forevermore"... (1:18)

(1 Corinthians 15: 8-11)

- The **grace of God** had made him what he was.
- The **grace of God** was not in vain...it caused him to work harder.
- But it was not him...but the **grace of God** that was with him.
- Paul preached...they believed...did not matter who got the credit.