

“Marks of a Healthy Church”

Acts 2:42-47

~ Delivered at DHBC on August 24, 2014 (Soli Deo Gloria)

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Please open your Bibles to Acts 2.
 - **READ 42-47** – *“⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”*
- Life always expresses itself. If there is no expression, there is either no life or something is seriously wrong.
 - Mannequins do not express themselves because they have no life but a new-born baby sure does. You know this because for the first few months of its life the baby’s parents walk around like zombies with great big bags under their eyes. Why? They have been awake all night because new life has been expressing itself.
 - Life always expresses itself. If there is no expression, there is either no life or something is seriously wrong.
- Jesus declared that just as all people are born into physical life, so all people must be born into spiritual life. In fact he said, **“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God, unless he is born again.”** By nature then all people are spiritually dead and must experience a spiritual birth or they will not be included in God’s kingdom. How is this done? Jesus said it is the Holy Spirit who grants spiritual life.
 - But listen, here is the point: when the Holy Spirit grants spiritual life to a person that life will express itself. What then are the evidences of new spiritual life? What are the evidences that the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit is flourishing in our midst?
- In Acts chapter 2 the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit was poured out and 3000 people became Christians in one day. Those 3000 people were ethnically, linguistically, financially, and temperamentally different and yet despite their differences every one of them began to manifest the same signs of new life. After describing this event, Luke pauses to take a snapshot of this new community and he describes five signs of new life.
 - This is intensely practical because as we look at these signs of life we need to ask ourselves, **“is this true of me? Do I give evidence of new life? Is there an area where I do not give evidence?”** You see a Christian is not simply a person who goes to church. A Christian is one who has been supernaturally granted new life in Jesus and you can tell if you have this new life because new life always expresses itself. If there is no evidence

of these five signs in you then either you have no spiritual life, or like a car that won't start something is seriously wrong and needs fixing.

- In order to help you diagnose yourself I will frame the five evidences in the form of five questions – five questions to check your spiritual pulse.

PULSE CHECK QUESTION #1 – COMING TOGETHER

- Pulse check question #1 – **(SHOW SLIDE)** Do I love to get together with the church?
 - When the life-giving Spirit was poured out and these people turned to Jesus their new life was immediately expressed in that they loved to get together. Notice three things about this getting together.
- First, notice they came together constantly.
 - **READ 42** – *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”* All of this is corporate language and the word ‘devoted’ means with constant diligence and persistence. They were always together. You could not pull them apart. Verse 44 says again, *“they were together.”* Look at the corporate language of 46. **READ 46** – *“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.”* The first instinct of their new life was to gather together.
- Second, notice they came together willingly and not out of compulsion.
 - This is why the pulse check question is not, *“do you obey God’s commands to meet together?”* because even a person with no spiritual life can come to church, small groups, prayer meetings. But to have a heart that loves to do this is evidence of new life. Notice in the middle of verse 46 it says, *“with glad and sincere hearts.”*
- Third, notice they came together with all types of people.
 - This is important because some people will write off Christianity saying it is merely cultural. If you are Italian then you are Catholic, Scottish then Presbyterian, Arab then Muslim but since they are Canadian they dismiss it. Or they write it all off saying, *“I am not the religious type.”* They think certain personalities and temperaments are attracted to religion and since they are not attracted they must not be of that religious temperament.
 - But this cannot work. Christianity cannot be merely a cultural phenomenon because according to Acts 2:5 these 3000 people were from *“every nation under the heaven.”* Moreover, it cannot be simply a temperament thing because in 3000 people you would have every temperament there is.
 - One of the great evidences of new life is that you sense a oneness with people who are totally unlike you but who share the same Lord.
- According to Acts the first sign that you have new life, that the Spirit is flourishing among us, is that you love to get together with the church. These people could not be stopped. They loved it. They hungered for it.
 - You never hear the apostles pleading with people to commit themselves to the life of the church. They did not have to. Why? Let me ask you this:

do you have to tell a new-born baby to cry? Do you have to tell it to kick or to want food? New life always expresses itself.

- This is why I am always so dumbfounded to hear people who profess to be Christians but who say, ***“my faith is a private thing between God and I”*** or ***“What matters is being a Christian and following Jesus, not being a member of a church.”*** When people speak and live this way they are in direct contradiction with what we are told in the book of Acts.
 - When a spiritually dead person is granted new life this life expresses itself first in a love of getting together with the church.
- So let’s take a pulse check for spiritual life. When you look at your life and heart do you have a desire to be with people who love Jesus, who talk about what God has done through Him, who pray, who love to study the Bible? Do you feel a oneness with people who though different in age, culture, ethnicity, and temperament, share the same love you have for Jesus? Do you love to come to church? To gather in homes with other believers?

PULSE CHECK QUESTION #2 – LEARNING TOGETHER

- As we come to the next four pulse-check questions, you can see that every one of them is a subset of the first. They are all expressions of what those who have life do when they get together.
- Pulse check question #2 – **(SHOW SLIDE)** do I love to learn doctrine with the church?
 - **READ 42** – ***“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.”*** The NIV translates what should be the word ‘doctrine’ as ‘teaching’. That is for obvious reasons. People today hate the word and the idea of doctrine. It has to do with teachings that are dogmatic and no one wants to be known as dogmatic.
- Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Tim Keller both point out that conservatives and liberals struggle with this. Many conservative Christians say they are not into doctrine because it divides people. They say, ***“doctrine divides but Jesus unites so let’s just focus on Jesus.”*** But this makes no sense because you immediately have to ask, ***“who is Jesus? Do you believe John 3:16 that ‘whoever believes in Jesus will not perish but have eternal life’?”***
 - If so, that is all doctrine. The doctrine of sin and judgement (that we are perishing), the doctrine of salvation (that people need to believe in Jesus), the doctrine of what happens when you die (eternal perishing or eternal life).
- Liberals say Christians need to stop being so dogmatic and get beyond doctrine. But this is impossible for anyone to do because everything a person believes is a doctrinal and dogmatic statement, even the supposedly open and tolerant statements.
 - If for instance you say, it does not matter what a person believes about Jesus you are making a dogmatic statement. You are dogmatically saying that people are not so sinful as to need a Saviour, that Jesus is not who he claimed to be, and that Jesus is irrelevant. If for instance you say every person can determine right and wrong for themselves you are making the

dogmatic statement that all ethics are relative – that there is no God who exists who defines these things and that the vast majority of the earth who believe in absolute standards of right and wrong are totally misguided.

- You see, lurking behind these statements of supposed openness and tolerance is dogmatism at its highest.
- So you see there is no way out of this. We are all devoted to doctrine. Every time you make a statement about what should be you are making a doctrinal statement. We are all devoted to doctrine. The question then is which doctrine and is it true?
 - We read that when new life came upon these 3000 they devoted themselves to the apostles' doctrine. They submitted their thinking and lives to the apostle's doctrine.
- Who were the apostles? The ones who were with Jesus and whom Jesus commissioned to disseminate his truth. In Peter's sermon he had said that God accredited Jesus' life through miracles and here in verse 43 we see God accrediting the apostles. **READ 43** – *“Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.”*
- What did the apostles teach? They taught about God's rescue mission to sinners in Jesus. They taught about Jesus' life, death, resurrection, ascension, and future return. And when these people were given spiritual life they loved to learn more about all of this and they submitted themselves to the apostles' teaching.
 - How do we submit ourselves to the apostles doctrine today since they are all dead? The answer is obvious. The apostles teaching was written down and was collected into what we now call the New Testament.
 - We should never therefore posit the Holy Spirit against doctrine. These people did not think that just because they had a powerful experience of the Holy Spirit they had no need for teaching or for teachers. To the contrary, according to this passage the greatest evidence that the Spirit is moving in power is that people love to learn the Bible and sit under faithful teaching and preaching.
- So let's take another pulse check. Do you love to learn the Bible to see who God is, what he has done, and how you should live? Have you committed yourself to a church where the Bible is faithfully taught and preached? Do you love to make sure you always attend so that you can grow?
 - Once again we do not see here the apostles pleading with people to come and learn the Bible. Why? Because life does not have to be told to express itself. If you do not have these desires you are either not a Christian or there is something seriously wrong.
 - Go to God and repent. Confess your sin. Tell him you realize you are dead and ask him to breathe new life into you.

PULSE CHECK #3 – FELLOWSHIPING TOGETHER

- Pulse check question #3: **(SHOW SLIDE)** Do I love to do acts of love for the church?
 - Look at verse 42 again. **READ 42** – *“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship.”* Fellowship refers to the sharing of life, a sense of connection to and between and for each other.

When these early Christians received new life the third sign of life was how intensely they cared for each other and particularly how generous they were.

- **READ 44-45** – *“All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.”*
- Some have seen in this verse a biblical endorsement of communism. In communism goods are shared but it is an enforced sharing on the belief that no one has the right to own anything. This is the very opposite.
 - First, the Old Testament law endorsed the right to private property and gave laws to protect it. Second, it was not compulsory for them to sell their possessions; it was voluntary. Third, they did not sell everything and put it into one big pot. We know this because many still owned houses so that verse 46 can say, **READ 46b** – *“They broke bread in their homes.”*
 - What we have here is not communism but lavish love and radical generosity because God had been so generous to them.
- Now you may breathe a sigh of relief to know that you do not have to give all your possessions to the church but let us not evade the challenge here.
 - When you check your pulse do you see a love for the other believers in your church? Do you see ways you can sacrifice for them with time, money, and service? Friends, I am so proud of this church. When we tell people about our some of the ministries we have here they are dumbfounded. People cannot believe the way we love each other - the way we provide 2 weeks of meals for people who have babies, who have surgery, or are in need; the way you volunteer to baby-sit, to help each other move and so many other things.
 - Truly the Spirit of God is at work in our midst for this church is expressing signs of life. Do you see this in your life? Do you love to do acts of love for your church?

PULSE CHECK #4 – WORSHIPPING TOGETHER

- Pulse check question #4: **(SHOW SLIDE)** Do I love to worship with the church?
 - Look again at verse 42. **READ 42** – *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”* Now in front of both these last terms is the definite article so it should read, *“they devoted themselves to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.”* The breaking of bread can be a meal in the home but it most certainly also a reference to the Lord’s Supper. The prayers refers not to private prayer but to prayer meetings and prayer services.
 - Verse 46 says, **READ 46** – *“They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.”* So you could not stop these people from worshipping.
- Notice three things about their worship. First, it was both formal and informal.
 - Verse 46 says they met in the temple. New spiritual life never rejects the formal church meetings. Those who are spiritually alive embrace the formal church services and make it their highest priority to be there. But

they also supplemented this with informal small group worship in their homes. It was not one or the other. It was both.

- Second, their worship was joyful. **READ 46** – *“ate together with glad and sincere hearts.”* How can you not be joyful when you see how undeserving you are, that you deserve nothing but God’s judgement and wrath but in Jesus you are forgiven, adopted into his family, and giving new life in the Spirit?
 - Friends, let our Sunday worship and our small group worship never be dull or boring. Let us express our joy. Lift your voices. Lift your hands. Lift your heart in joy.
- Third, their worship was reverent. **READ 43** – *“Everyone was filled with awe.”* If some people today lack joy and are too reverent there are others who are too flippant. The God we worship is not Mickey Mouse. He is the thrice holy, eternal Creator and judge of the universe. Worship of Him demands the utmost respect and awe.
 - So our worship should be characterized by reverential joy. It should have gravity *and* gladness.
- Pulse check. Does your heart love to worship God? I am not asking if your heart always leaps to God for in our sin we often struggle to have hearts that love to worship. I am asking if when check your pulse you can say, *“yes, although I need more of this heart, I do love to worship God.”*
 - C.S. Lewis points out that that all enjoyment flows into praise. You can tell what you delight in by what you praise. Lewis writes, *“I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise...The world rings with praise – lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite game – praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, motors, horses, ...flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles...I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urges us to join them in praising it: “isn’t she lovely? Wasn’t it glorious? Don’t you think that magnificent?”*¹
- New life always expresses itself in worship. Christians love to worship because we are so delighted by who God is and what He has done for us in Jesus that we cannot help but lift up our voices and call others to join us. It is not simply that we are commanded to. We want to.
 - Do you find that pulse alive in you?

PULSE CHECK #5 – TELLING OTHERS ABOUT JESUS

- Finally and quickly pulse check question #5: **(SHOW SLIDE)** Do I, along with the church, love to tell others about Jesus?
 - When those 3000 people received new life they did not just focus inward in learning, fellowship, and worship. Look at verse 47. **READ 47** – *“And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”*
- Note that it is the Lord who adds people to the church. Only He can grant new life. But clearly he did not do this in a vacuum. He did it through people –

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, pg 93-95.

through the preaching of the apostles, through the witness of the people as they went out and told others in their circles of influence.

- The early church did not explode because a few educated, eloquent, paid church leaders told people about Jesus.
- If when you check your pulse you see that you would never want anyone to know you are a Christian then either you are not one or there is something seriously wrong.
 - Do you have a desire to see others come to Jesus? Do you pray and ask God to help you bear witness to him? Again, I am not asking you if you are Billy Graham. I am sure like me you get nervous and are not always sure what to say. What I am asking you is if you have this desire and try to act on it as best as you can. Can you feel a pulse there even if it is faint?

CONCLUSION

- Life always expresses itself. If there is no expression, there is either no life or something is seriously wrong. What has God said to you today?
 - If from these five diagnosis questions you see evidences of life then give thanks to God and for this is evidence that He has given you new life. Pray that he will cause that life to grow to maturity.
 - What should you do if you sense a pulse but it is really faint? Go to Jesus with thanksgiving for the pulse that you do feel, admit that there are things wrong with you, ask for a new heart, and make the changes necessary in your life.
 - What should you do if you sense no pulse? You do not love getting together with other Christians to learn the Bible, to fellowship, to worship, and to evangelize. Realize that you are still spiritually dead and that no one can see the kingdom unless he is born again. You are in the position of the 3000 before they repented. If you want new life go to Jesus and ask him for it. Turn away from you dead living and be baptized to pledge allegiance to Jesus. Only Jesus can grant you new life.
 - Life always expresses itself.

Keywords: church, fellowship, worship, evangelism, doctrine.