

Rick Warren Shares 8 Characteristics of a Healthy Church

B. H. Carroll, a famous Bible scholar, in his commentary, estimates that there were probably a hundred thousand members in the Jerusalem church after 25 years. Peter Wagner and many have agreed. G. Campbell Morgan estimates a minimum of 60,000. In any Bible dictionary it will tell you that in New Testament times that the city of Jerusalem was approximately 200,000 people. What we have here is a church with 100,000 members in a city of 200,000 people. Half the city had come to Christ. No wonder they said, "you've filled Jerusalem."

When you look at the book of Acts, you find at least **8 characteristics of the early church** that positioned them for this kind of blessing from God. If we echo the actions of the early church, we can expect God's blessing on our church as much as those ancient leaders saw a blessing on the church in Jerusalem.

1. We must minister in the Holy Spirit's power. Acts 1:4 says, "Don't leave Jerusalem but wait for the gift My Father promised which you've heard Me speak about. John baptized with water but in a few days you'll be baptized with the Holy Spirit..." If you're a Christian, you already have the Holy Spirit living inside you, but we must rely on His power on a moment by moment basis. The power of God is given for witnessing, for ministry, for mission. To minister in the Holy Spirit's power means to have Spirit-filled, Spirit-controlled members. One of the characteristics of people who try to minister in a church without God's Spirit is simple – tiredness, fatigue. You end up running on your own steam rather than running on the power of God's Spirit. So the starting point is to minister with the Holy Spirit's power. He said, "Don't leave Jerusalem. Wait until you've got My power."

2. We must maintain a warm fellowship. Next, according to Acts 2:42-44, "They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and to the fellowship and the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe and many wondrous and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All believers were together and had everything in common." This is a perfect example of fellowship. They loved each other. When God has a bunch of baby Christians, He looks for the warmest incubator He can find. The church that has warmth and fellowship and harmony, God blesses that church with new believers because He wants them to be in an environment where they can grow. Ten times in the first five chapters of Acts it says, "they were unified". He uses phrases like, "they were of one accord... one heart... one purpose... one spirit... all united in thought." God can overlook a lack of facilities, a lack of programs, and a lack of leadership. But one thing He will not overlook is disharmony in the church. Harmony, unity, must be maintained at all costs because the church is a fellowship. We need to build fellowship into each other. Notice the results of fellowship: v. 47 "The Lord added to their number daily." The result of people being close to each other and celebrating warmth and harmony was that other people wanted to get involved.

3. We must multiply small groups. There are four advantages to meeting in small groups house to house:

1. It is infinitely expandable.

2. It is unlimited geographically.
3. It is good stewardship.
4. It promotes relationships.

There's benefit, wisdom, in God's way of multiplying small groups. As a result the Lord added to their number daily those that were being saved.

4. We must magnify our vision of God. In Acts 4:24, the apostles were essentially praying, "God, there are rulers and there are leaders and there are people against You but You're in control. You're the sovereign Lord. You made everything in heaven and on earth." We are children of the king. We're on the winning side. We've read the last chapter. We know how it's going to end. Jesus Christ has broken our chains and Jesus says in the Bible, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." We're attacking hell with squirt guns! And we're trying to snatch people right out of the jaws of hell. There are a lot of churches that want to play it safe. They get as far away from unbelievers as they can so they don't get tainted. I want to get so close to hell that I can smell it! That's where you set up your rescue station. Don't be afraid to rock the boat if Jesus Christ is the captain of the boat. We need to magnify our vision of God.

5. We must maximize the power of prayer. Forty-eight times in the book of Acts it says, "they prayed." We will have the power the early church experienced when we pray like the early church prayed. Spiritual warfare requires the use of spiritual weapons. Notice Acts 4:31, "After they prayed the place they were meeting was shaken." When was the last time you were in a prayer meeting like that? "They were all filled with God's Spirit and they spoke the word of God boldly." We must maximize the power of prayer if we're going to be like the church of Jerusalem.

6. We must model Christlike generosity. The New Testament church in Jerusalem was a giving church. Acts 4:32-37 says, "All the believers were one in heart and one in mind [there's unity again]. No one claimed any of that which was his possessions as his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and grace was with them all. There were no needy persons among them." Notice there were three results of their generosity. - v. 32 says there was unity in the church. - v. 33 says it was a powerful testimony to the community. - v. 44 says there were no needy people.

7. We must mobilize every member for ministry. Acts 6 describes a problem that arose in the early church between the Greek-speakers and the Aramaic-speakers. One felt that the other was receiving special treatment and needs were going unmet. So, they chose seven guys to oversee this area of ministry to people. They presented these men to the Apostles who prayed and laid hands on them. Then the Bible says, "So the word of God spread and the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly." When every member is a minister, discovers their God-given SHAPE, and serves someone else, the church moves from just a leader "adding" more people to the church "multiplying."

8. We must move out with God's mission. Acts 8 records God's reminder to the apostles of the Great Commission, "Go! Go into all the world and make disciples!" They initially started

sharing the faith and the church at Jerusalem started getting bigger and bigger. But God never said, I want just the church in Jerusalem to be big. He said, I want you to go not to just Jerusalem but Samaria and to Judea and to the uttermost parts of the world. But they didn't do it. They didn't spread the gospel. So God applied pressure by allowing persecution to get them to spread. The Bible says, "On that day a great persecution broke out against the church of Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered through Judea and Samaria." Notice that: the pastors stayed home but all the people were scattered into Judea and Samaria. Why? Because that's where He wanted them to go. They scattered everywhere and shared the good news. Jesus never said, "I came that you might have meetings." He said, "I've come that you might have life." Where is life lived? In the marketplace and in the family.

We will be the New Testament church when we magnify the vision of God, pray like they prayed, when we are filled with the Spirit and when we are generous with each other. I am a believer and I know I'm going to heaven. Nothing can take that away from me. But between now and when I go to heaven, I want to take as many people with me as possible. I hope you'll commit to that same thing.

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