

THE HEALTHY
CHURCH



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Introduction

The Unhealthy Author

Warts and All.

And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which is the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzar-adan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem: And he burnt the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire.

2 Kings 25:8-9

Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.

Ezra 1:3

It is said that when Oliver Cromwell commissioned his portrait to Sir Peter Lely, he gave these instructions, “But remark all these roughnesses, pimples, warts, and everything as you see me, otherwise I will never pay a farthing for it.” Over time, the expression has developed regarding the truth: “give me the truth, warts and all.” To fix a problem, we must face it. We must define the difficulty and decide what to do about it. We need to see the truth as it is—to admit it—warts and all.

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I want your church to be rebuilt. I want it to be rebuilt correctly. I want you to be healed. I want your church and community to have a spiritual awakening! I don't know your church, your community, your local culture, or what kind of pain you are going through. But I know a God who heals and saves and restores. I know a God who will deliver you from the mouth of the lion, and He is not intimidated by the pain that you carry. If you let Him in, He can help you carry that pain and heal your wounds.

“Who is there among you?” Your God be with you! Go up to your personal Jerusalem and build His house again! It may just be that the hour is not too late for you, or even your church.

God wants the best for us. His desire is for our Kingdom success. Such is a selfless success that directs all glory to the Savior. True prophecy dwells in the realm of confirmation. I am writing this book with the prayer that it serves as a release of spiritual healing into our movement. I believe in your ultimate healing and in your Kingdom success with all my heart. I also believe that you already know that God wants you to come out of your hardships as a triumphant leader in Him.

- For this victory to happen in our lives, we must first assess the situation honestly, warts and all.
- Next, we must define the details.
- Then, we must decide what must be done. Surely, even now, you have an idea what must be done.

I do not have all the answers. I have some of the answers. I am simply a vessel sending you a message to get up and go act upon those answers.

I decided to stop feeling guilty.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Rom 8:1

If you're doing the best you know to do, don't feel condemned. If you're not doing the best you know to do, don't feel condemned. Condemnation is a tool of the enemy of our souls. Condemnation doesn't necessarily come from Satan. It often comes from our own mind, and it offers only one possible outcome: destruction. It also only offers one solution: quitting. The Spirit of God does not condemn those who walk by faith in Jesus Christ.

Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

1 Cor 2:13

The Spirit of God offers a clear alternative to condemnation: conviction. Conviction is that by which we are measured in the Spirit and led by the Spirit. Condemnation leads to destruction and death. Conviction leads to deliverance and decision.

“Spiritual things with spiritual,” the church should never measure itself by carnal standards. There are even problems with comparisons amongst ourselves. Yes, I would love to hear your testimony. Yes, there are excellent guidelines for stewardship that can be gleaned from the business world. In fact, a cursory search of the Word of God will find that most good business ideas originated from the Bible. However, the

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church is a spiritual organism. Spiritual functions are her core and character. Thus, life in the church cannot be fully compared to the institutions of this world. The limitations of such comparisons are paramount.

I decided to stop feeling guilty. I decided to stop allowing other people to define my view of what God wanted to accomplish through me. I decided to go back to the well from whence I sprung. That well within me was from my younger self. Upon examination, I found the well to be still flowing. My younger self accepted the call to ministry and gave himself completely to Jesus as an eight-year-old boy.

The key to healing from pain is to learn from it. I had frequently encountered condemnation when I heard of the successes of other ministers. I decided to let that go. I decided to focus instead on what God was doing through me. This was no mean feat, and it happened through the prayers of others and the healing of the Holy Spirit. I couldn't seem to break through the wall of trouble that was creeping ever closer to our church. I grew deeper in the darkness each day, and I lost my ability to rejoice with my fellow ministers over their successes. Maybe you, also, have experienced these feelings. But one day I decided to let that go. I remembered who I was in Jesus Christ, and I stopped listening to the unrealistic expectations of others. Now, I rejoice in Him as I work hard to obtain His approval.

Here's the unspoken truth about church work. Churches grow in different ways and at different speeds. Some churches never get big. Some communities and regions are rocky soil. At the end of the day, the spiritual growth of the local church is of the utmost importance. If a church is growing in spiritual maturity, the other pieces will fall into place. This process will take deliberate and hard work. But it won't

happen through fear, pressure, depression, or unrealistic expectations.

The indirect application of the healing powers of Jesus to the broken areas of an unhealthy church will bring about a spiritual awakening faster than you can shout “revival” at the top of your lungs.

And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.

Gen 3:8

Do you want some more unspoken truth? Church plants have many advantages. Many things that succeed in a new church must be drastically altered in an established church environment. Most of my life, I have strongly desired to start a church. I knew, even as a young man, of the freshness and innocence and purity that exists in the atmosphere of a brand-new church. I wanted to experience that. Yes, it is tough getting started in a new location. Money, facilities, and teams may be lacking. Yet, the Spirit of God loves a pure environment.

For now, God has called me to be the pastor of existing churches. Our first pastorate was at the behest of a vote of four people! We had an experience similar to that of planting a church with none of the benefits of a fresh environment. Existing churches are not simple. Existing churches are often entrenched and lacking in spiritual vitality. My hope is to help current and future pastors understand the sometimes-difficult realities that they face when assuming the pastorate of an established church. To that end, we need to discuss the

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issues that pastors of established congregations face. I do not know one pastor who “took a church” that didn’t have a struggle for a minimum of five years. This, even when pastoring a healthy congregation. Wise words from my pastor, Don Waddle, of Wyoming, Minnesota: “There isn’t one new pastor who, after a few months on the job, doesn’t wonder what he has gotten himself into.” There was a bit of humor in his words, but I have found them to be universally true.

We really need to change the expression from “he took a church,” to “the church took him.” Because that is often what happens when the installation service sheet cake is eaten, and the lights are turned out, and the honeymoon is over. An unhealthy church is like a big ole Brahma bull about to be let out of the gate. And that pastor is about to get the ride of his life. I realize this is not universal. But it is more common than you might think.

Nothing is ever the same. Even within a region, there are variants aplenty. Being the leader of a local church is less about the methods and more about the vessel and that which fills it. My good friend and mentor, Pastor Bill Jones, of Bolivar, Missouri, once said: “The older I get, the more I am convinced that the majority of the ministry is about the making of the man of God.” I have found Bill Jones to be correct. The Lord is still working on me. I am a vessel, and He wants to perfect me. That is a process that will take 75-90 years, depending on my cardiac health.

We need to eliminate theories built on assumptions of church size. Supposedly, a church that isn’t of a certain numerical size is not worthy of help or attention. The pastor of a church of fifteen people is just as important to the Kingdom of God as any other church. Furthermore, the church of fifteen is

likely a very important spiritual beachhead! Who knows what prayer warriors have spilled tears on that carpet? Each church, pastor and family, team, and each saint is of equal importance to Jesus Christ. They all deserve to be helped, healed, and held up in the hands of Jesus. Who is going to do that? We are. That's who. We are going to help them. The world isn't going to do it. The Church must do it. If the Church can help and heal pastors and ministers without condemnation, it will be performing a vital function that is sometimes forgotten or missing from the Body of Christ.

There are spirits and there are spirits.

Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ...

2 Cor 10:5

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Eph 6:12

In the realm of diseased and unhealthy churches, it is important to know the difference between spiritual and fleshly strongholds. This is kind of a big deal. As a young minister, I learned—mostly from the sermons of both Pastor Jeff Arnold and Pastor Billy Cole—spirits are relatively easy and flesh is tough.

As both Arnold and Cole have stated, a demon can be cast out in just a few moments with authority and in the name of

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Jesus Christ! But flesh will outlast many pastors. I have lived this and it almost cost me my salvation. Flesh does the work of the enemy for him. That work is intended first to destroy the pastor. Satan will not bother a church that has entrenched evil in the pews. He does not even have to touch it.

Thank God for the prayers of my mom and dad, and my wife, and so many more! How many times would I have fallen if Dan and Vicki Ross would've stopped praying for their son-in-law? What about that day I was about to give up and Aunt Mittie Phoenix called my name before the throne of God?

And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

1 Jn 4:3

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

1 Jn 4:4

It is not hard to answer this question of flesh or spirit. Find out if the trouble is flesh or spirit by unapologetically preaching Jesus Christ and focusing on building a foundation of consecration within the church. Do it with all your heart.

- Reject boldly from the pulpit the carnal stronghold by naming it in a roundabout way. I am a firm believer in a positive approach to preaching and teaching. I am also a firm believer that this positive approach doesn't neglect naming sin and offering Scriptural

alternatives to that sin. You can do this indirectly without creating an instantaneous explosion among the congregation.

- I believe that all preachers, especially pastors, should teach the Epistles frequently. Dedicated teaching of the principles found in just about any of the Epistles will easily and quickly call out a carnal stronghold.
- An entrenched saint or faction within a church cannot stand against the writings of Paul, Peter, or John. When you preach and teach this way, there will be a reaction. Either evil will uncover itself or God's Word will do the revealing.

You may have to wait it out. In the end, you may have to accept confrontation. Just remember, Jesus is with you in the waiting. Don't be surprised if some people leave. Holding on to saints that want to leave is a futile exercise. If a person is troubled and refuses healing, their leaving will be a blessing. It will usually result in a spiritual awakening in the church.

I have been told by at least five pastors that the best thing that happened to their church was when troubled cargo was jettisoned. By this I mean that troubled members left the church. The remaining saints had an awakening. Then, the church began to grow spiritually and numerically. One pastor told me he has had four congregations in twenty years and that with each change, God was refining the church. I recently preached for him. I could feel the palpable sense of unity. God is working freely in that church!

- Rebuke boldly in prayer the spiritual stronghold. Spirits are big and scary and intimidating to our flesh; not so for Jesus! One prayer warrior can defeat an evil spirit. I have encountered evil spirits before. How much easier is the battle when there are two

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or three intercessors in agreement! Some spirits are community spirits. Some are in the church.

- The Holy Ghost knows the difference. Ask Him. He'll tell you. If you are all alone, remember, Jesus is a majority all by Himself.

Was it something I said?

My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

2 For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

James 3:1-2

The answer is “yes.” It was something you said. If you are preaching the Word of God, Satan hates what you are preaching. Thus, flesh hates what you are teaching. Satan enjoys a temporary control of the airwaves of this world. He can bend and twist the thoughts of masses of people against one preacher and the preacher’s family if he so desires. He will desire to do this if that preacher is making a spiritual impact. Success is sometimes spelled “t-r-o-u-b-l-e.”

And they all forsook him, and fled.

Mark 14:50

Do you feel rejected? Jesus was rejected by all. And He won anyway. It is of the utmost importance that you ascertain whether the rejection you are experiencing is from the community or from the church.

My wife and I have experienced both. The first church where we served is no longer a church. It doesn't exist anymore. Ultimately, the community rejected the message. However,

God saw fit to rescue us and allow us to rest at a healthy church under a healthy pastor for almost two years. There, we obtained healing. Praise God for good people!

“Knowing when to change trains” is a phrase I heard T. F. Tenney utter more than once. A transition is only called for when there are no other options. I remember hearing my sister, Becky Powell, say, “No matter what happens, just stay.” Moving around repeatedly creates a chaotic emotional and family environment, and it is in your best interest to stay if you are established in a community.

- God operates through seasons. One day, it may change. However, if that community is rejecting the Gospel over an extended period, you will probably not have a desire to stay. God closes and opens doors. Define whether the symptoms of your situation are flesh or spirit.
- Join in prayer and fasting with at least one other peer and at least one mentor until you are sure.
- Then, decide what to do about it. You should probably ask for help in this decision.