



A Healthy Diet For Healthy Churches:
Concluding A Biblical Vision For A Healthy Local Church

By Danny Ovalle
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Please turn with me to Mt 28 as I read

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
(Matthew 28:18-20 ESV)

and then Acts 1

And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."
(Acts 1:4-8 ESV)

and last, Acts 2

Acts 2:1-47 ESV **When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. (2) And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. (3) And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. (4) And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. (5) Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. (6) And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. (7) And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? (8) And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? (9) Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, (10) Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, (11) both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians--we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." (12) And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" (13) But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine." (14) But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them,**

"Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. (15) For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. (16) But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: (17) "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; (18) even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. (19) And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; (20) the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. (21) And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

(22) "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know-- (23) this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. (24) God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

(25) For David says concerning him, "I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; (26) therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. (27) For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. (28) You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence." (29) "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. (30) Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne,

(31) he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. (32) This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. (33) Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. (34) For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, (35) until I make your enemies your footstool." (36) Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." (37) Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (38) And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (39) For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." (40) And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this



crooked generation." (41) So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (42) And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (43) And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. (44) And all who believed were together and had all things in common. (45) And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. (46) And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, (47) praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Over the past 6 months we have been working our way through the series entitled "A Biblical Vision For A Healthy Local Church". In the next 3 weeks we will bring this season of our preaching life to a conclusion. As we do we want to step back and reflect on where we have been in this series, what we may have been learning and what are those things that God has been seeking to reveal to us - to teach us and show us so that we may walk in His ways, that we might enjoy Him, find blessing for our lives and ultimately how we may glorify Him by spreading the Fame of His Name.

In a sense, we have been examining a healthy diet for a healthy church family. The Bible has been our "cookbook", our recipe catalogue, our foundation for all we believe and do as God's people. All in all, we desire to be a healthy church family that is getting healthier by the day, as Mark Dever has said:

"A healthy church is a congregation that increasingly reflects God's character as His character has been revealed in His word."

In our journey we have looked at these 5 main courses of a healthy Christian diet: (you can tell I like food, in spite of my size!)

- The God-centeredness of God
- The centrality and supremacy of Jesus Christ in all things
- A strong preaching/teaching / thinking / questioning / Bible-searching ministry model
- Genuine Christian community and relational vitality
- Creative cultural and civic involvement

This morning, by way of descent as we are approaching our landing, lets look at 4 more "ingredients" as stated in Acts 2.42

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

(A bit about the context)



As you look at people around the room, around the city, state, country and world...and across time and geographical boundaries, what kinds of things do we all hold in common? In other words, what is true of every single solitary human being who as ever been alive on planet earth? What kinds of things do you find common to man? What traits are “absolutely true” of each on of us?

- Born of a woman, by the merging of a male sperm and a female egg
- Pulmonary drive / Breath air
- Thirst drive / Need to drink water
- Hunger drive / Must eat food
- Bladder and bowel drive / need to use the lue/ john / bathroom

There are more...

There are certain things true of every one of us, no matter when you lived on planet earth, what sex you are, what the color of your skin is or where you live...be it a little boy who lived in the furthest reaches of the Amazon 300 years ago, or a rich businessmen living in a Manhattan loft right now. There are certain “absolutes” that are true of each one of us who are made in the image and likeness of God, from Adam to Zerubbabel!

Well, the same holds true of each and every congregation within the Christian faith. For each and every church which has been created by God, birthed by the power of the Holy Spirit, having been purchased by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ there are certain things you will find happening in every true church gathering that is a healthy gathering of Christians...no matter if they were in Jerusalem in the first century, or in the frozen tundra of Iceland in the Dark Ages, or in the towns throughout Europe during the Protestant Reformation of the 1500's, or in the urban setting of a city called Haverhill in the state of Massachusetts, USA in 2009.

Acts 2.42 tells us of what sort of characteristics are present among His people, as He saves them and prescribes those activities that become precious to them, because they are all about their God and Savior Jesus Christ! What sorts of activities are they up to? What do their spiritual disciplines look like? Did they just sit around the proverbial campfire singing Kumbayah 24-7?

So let's be introduced to these particular marks of this healthy local church of now 3,000+:

**And they devoted themselves to
the apostles' teaching and fellowship,
to the breaking of bread and the prayers.**

They devoted themselves...

Here is the description (and prescription) of what God has produced, because of the knowledge of the death and resurrection of Jesus that had come to their souls – like to the cutting of their hearts – so that these 3,000 souls were converted, magnetized to the Lord Jesus Christ and now devoted to Him in wonder, love and praise.

This is what God puts into the hearts of His people: a devotion to Him!

They devoted themselves, continued steadfastly, kept on with, immersed themselves in these things concerning Jesus!. They were disciple-making disciples and church-planting churches!



It was now the joy of their lives to know Him and be in His affairs wholeheartedly! Unlike the Christians throughout Galatia, who were “*so quickly deserting Him who called them by grace*”, they could not NOT do these things...God has come to them, opened their eyes to their nasty sin of killing the Author of Life, Jesus, and then opened their eyes to the reality that God has forgiven them...CAN YOU IMAGINE? Full forgiveness, free forgiveness, forever forgiveness!! Are you merely a church-goer? A do-gooder? A nice person? A moralist? Are you devoted to Jesus Christ as your supreme treasure and joy of your soul? O Learn of Christianity from the Bible...not from TV, your traditions or your own personal conceptions – but from the living and active Word of the Living God!

1. They devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching:

The Apostles taught a lot and we have a lot of it before us in this book. Their teaching centered on Jesus Christ, as foretold in the Older Testament, Genesis to Malachi...the things concerning Jesus, who is our justification, our righteousness, our life, joy, peace. He is our sanctification, He is our eternal redemption! He is the hero of every page of scripture... Whatever we learn from any teaching, it is meant to help us see, savor and share our treasure even Jesus...

And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.
(Acts 5:42 ESV)

and they did this 24-7-365 till they dropped or had their head removed from their shoulders...as they were instructed:

2 Timothy 4:1-5 ESV I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: (2) preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. (3) For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, (4) and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. (5) As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

They desired to know nothing while they were among God’s people except Jesus Christ and Him crucified!

So...

LET’S STUDY THE WORD OF GOD TOGETHER, HARD, JOYFULLY SERIOUS AND ...TO THE GLORY OF GOD!



2. They devoted themselves to the Apostles fellowship

A devotion to what they had in common with the Apostles and with each other. A devotion to the Greatest reality that IS! A devotion to what they shared in common as part of the Body of Jesus Christ! What a joy to be together in Jesus, mutually loved by Him, mutually forgiven of our sins by Him...now mutually forgiving and loving one another as He has loved and forgiven us!

1 Thes 2.8 ...longing to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives as well.

1 John 1:1-3 NIV That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. **(2)** The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. **(3)** We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

LETS CELEBRATE WHOLEHEARTEDLY AND OFTEN WHAT WE HAVE IN COMMON IN JESUS WITH ONE ANOTHER... TO THE GLORY OF GOD!

3. They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread

This may refer to communion and a devotion to the Lord's Supper, but I suspect is referring to sharing of meals together, as very important component to life in the culture.

Acts 2:46-47 NIV 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.

(A.T. Robertson)

The problem here is whether Luke refers to the ordinary meal as in [Luk 24:35](#) or to the Lord's Supper. The same verb *klaō* is used of breaking bread at the ordinary meal ([Luk 24:30](#)) or the Lord's Supper ([Luk 22:19](#)). It is generally supposed that the early disciples attached so much significance to the breaking of bread at the ordinary meals, more than our saying grace, that they followed the meal with the Lord's Supper at first, a combination called *agapai* or love-feasts...to denote "intimacy or friendship," the phrase "to break bread together" would be very expressive!

1 Corinthians 10:31 NIV (31) So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

LETS CULTIVATE DEEP FREINSHIPS BY EATING AND DRINKING TOGETHER ...TO THE GLORY OF GOD!



4. they devoted themselves to prayer (pray 73, prayer 33, prayers 22, praying 20 =148X)

Like their Jesus, the Master, The Lord...they liked being with God in prayer!

All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. ([Acts 1:14 ESV](#))

[Ephesians 6:18 NIV](#) And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

[Philippians 1:4 ESV](#) ... every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy,

[Philippians 4:6-7 NIV](#) Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (7) And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

[1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 ESV](#) (16) Rejoice always, (17) pray without ceasing, (18) give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

LETS JOYFULLY BE WITH GOD IN PRAYER FOR HIS WILL TO BE DONE IN OUR BRIEF LIVES...TO THE GLORY OF GOD!

By the grace of God and by the power of the Spirit...Lets be devoted to these Godly ingredients...not for their own end, but to the end that we may see Jesus clearly and truthfully, as He is.



Kevin Deyoung writes these words about our Jesus!

There are a lot of popular versions of Jesus in culture. There's a Republican Jesus who's for free-market economics. There's a Democrat Jesus against Wall Street and Wal-Mart. There's a therapist Jesus who helps us cope with life's problems. There's a Starbucks Jesus who loves fair trade coffee and Apple computers. There's a touchdown Jesus who helps Christians run faster and jump higher. There's the martyr Jesus who died so that we could feel sorry for him. There's nice guy Jesus. There's spirituality Jesus. There's good example Jesus.

And then there's Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter says, "You are the Christ of God."

Most people have a shrunken, domesticated Christ who is safe, easy and manageable instead of the real Christ. The closer you get to him the more you love him and the more you fear him. God is calling (us) to stop playing games and to stop making excuses and to open (our) eyes to see Jesus as the Christ. He is more glorious and loving and gracious and powerful and more wonderfully terrifying than any of us can ever imagine.

AMEN!



The Mission of 9Marks

We believe the local church is the focal point of God's plan for displaying his glory to the nations. Our vision is simple: Churches that reflect the character of God. Our mission is to cultivate and encourage churches characterized by these nine marks:

1. Expository Preaching

This is preaching which expounds what Scripture says in a particular passage, carefully explaining its meaning and applying it to the congregation. It is a commitment to hearing God's Word and to recovering the centrality of it in our worship.

2. Biblical Theology

Paul charges Titus to "teach what is in accord with sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). Our concern should be not only with how we are taught, but with what we are taught. Biblical theology is a commitment to know the God of the Bible as He has revealed Himself in Scripture.

3. Biblical Understanding of the Good News

The gospel is the heart of Christianity. But the good news is not that God wants to meet people's felt needs or help them develop a healthier self-image. We have sinfully rebelled against our Creator and Judge. Yet He has graciously sent His Son to die the death we deserved for our sin, and He has credited Christ's acquittal to those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus' death and resurrection. *That* is the good news.

4. Biblical Understanding of Conversion

The spiritual change each person needs is so radical, so near the root of us, that only God can do it. We need God to convert us. Conversion need not be an emotionally heated experience, but it must evidence itself in godly fruit if it is to be what the Bible regards as a true conversion.

5. Biblical Understanding of Evangelism

How someone shares the gospel is closely related to how he understands the gospel. To present it as an additive that gives non-Christians something they naturally want (i.e. joy or peace) is to present a half-truth, which elicits false conversions. The whole truth is that our deepest need is spiritual life, and that new life only comes by repenting of our sins and believing in Jesus. We present the gospel openly, and leave the converting to God.

6. Biblical Understanding of Membership

Membership should reflect a living commitment to a local church in attendance, giving, prayer and service; otherwise it is meaningless, worthless, and even dangerous. We should not allow people to keep their membership in our churches for sentimental reasons or lack of attention. To be a member is knowingly to be traveling together as aliens and strangers in this world as we head to our heavenly home.



7. Biblical Church Discipline

Church discipline gives parameters to church membership. The idea seems negative to people today – “didn’t our Lord forbid judging?” But if we cannot say how a Christian should *not* live, how can we say how he or she *should* live? Each local church actually has a biblical responsibility to judge the life and teaching of its leaders, and even of its members, particularly insofar as either could compromise the church’s witness to the gospel.

8. Promotion of Christian Discipleship and Growth

A pervasive concern with church growth exists today – not simply with growing numbers, but with growing members. Though many Christians measure other things, the only certain observable sign of growth is a life of increasing holiness, rooted in Christian self-denial. These concepts are nearly extinct in the modern church. Recovering true discipleship for today would build the church and promote a clearer witness to the world.

9. Biblical Understanding of Leadership

What eighteenth-century Baptists and Presbyterians often agreed upon was that there should be a plurality of elders in each local church. This plurality of elders is not only biblical, but practical — it has the immense benefit of rounding out the pastor’s gifts to ensure the proper shepherding of God’s church.

In identifying and promoting these nine marks, we are not intending to lay down an exhaustive or authoritative list. There are other significant marks of healthy churches, like prayer and fellowship. We want to pursue those ourselves as well, and we want you to pursue them with us. But these nine are the ones we think are most neglected in most local churches today, with the most damaging ramifications. Join us in cultivating churches that reflect the character of God.