

A Healthy Church Plan | 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.

INTRODUCTION

In 1961, Coach Vince Lombardi, walked into the first day of practice as the head coach of the Green Bay Packers. All 38 football players showed up when just a few months prior had lost the championship game to the Philadelphia Eagles. The players had been thinking about their loss throughout their off-season and now it was time to get to work – ready to think and work on the finer details of their strategy.

In his book, *When Pride Still Mattered*, David Maraniss, explains what happened when Lombardi showed up for the first day of training camp:

- He took nothing for granted. He began a tradition of starting from scratch, assuming that the players were blank slates who carried over no knowledge from the year before... He began with the most elemental statement of all. "Gentlemen," he said, holding a pigskin in his right hand, "this is a football."

Vince Lombardi was known for his drive on the fundamentals of the game throughout their training camp. Each player remembered and relearned how to block and how to tackle. One author writes that Lombardi had an "obsession with the basics." At one point during the training camp, Max McGee, a Pro-Bowl wide receiver, joked saying, "Uh, Coach, could you slow down a little? You're going too fast for us."

In short, a story like this one reminds us that without the fundamentals, details are useless. It is the fundamentals that help build a foundation – after all, we are only as strong as the ground we stand on. Therefore, ladies and gentlemen – friends – this is a Bible. And I want to provide you with four brief fundamentals about the Bible:

1. God's Word: The Bible is authoritative – it is not our only authority, but it is our supreme authority. Additionally, God has chosen to reveal Himself to us through His word (2 Timothy 3:16, Psalm 1- delight and dependence);
2. The Gospel: The Bible shows us the beauty of the gospel in that Jesus saves sinners (creation, fall, incarnation, redemption, and transformation);
3. Formation: We are formed and shaped by the gospel – transforming grace; the church gathered; and the church scattered;

4. Discipleship: We make disciples; we mature disciples; and and we multiply disciples –
 - a. “Every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter.” - Charles Spurgeon

The basics take hard work and great intentionality. The basics take great courage because there’s nothing to hide behind, everything is exposed, and we will either humble ourselves or be humbled. But here’s the beauty because the blessing of these basics can sound so burdensome: the Holy Spirit resides in you – the Holy Spirit works through you – be encouraged! Have we, however, neglected the Holy Spirit? Have we lost sight of Jesus?

Like the Green Bay Packers, we, too, need to be reminded of the fundamentals. And in today’s text, the Apostle Paul helps us work through three pillars of a healthy church: fruitful church leadership, fruitful church members, and a fruitful devotion. When we are better able to understand these pillars, the church is able to live out her purpose – the pursuit of holiness.

READ AND PRAYER

God,

We praise You for this morning – allowing us to gather, worship, and examine Your word together. Would you grant us understanding this morning? Understanding so that we would grow deeper in our love for Jesus? You tell us to ask for what we do not have, but to ask in faith – so we ask for illumination, understanding, and wisdom.

Holy Spirit, guide our hearts, expose our hearts, and comfort our hearts by Your grace. And by Your grace, would you call those who don’t know Jesus this morning? May You be glorified in our time together. We ask this in Jesus’ name. AMEN.

Fruitful Church Leadership (v. 12-13)

In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul writes to them because the last time he saw this church was shortly after he planted it and then an uproar in the city caused him to flee for his life. Paul was worried about the church in Thessalonica on whether or not it flourished, thrived, and survived, sends Timothy and receives word from him that they’re actually doing great in the midst of persecution ([Acts 17](#)).

- a. “Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith that no one be moved by these afflictions...For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.” (1 Thessalonians 3:1-3a, 5)

As we park in chapter five, here, Paul is giving them his final instructions and blessing on what a healthy church looks like and encourages them to not only walk in this truth, but to be rooted in this truth out of conviction based on what Jesus has done for them.

A healthy church begins with fruitful church leadership. Fruitful church leadership is vital to a church, and in particular, fruitful pastors because their entire role is to point the church to the person and work of Jesus. That's it – more than systems and leadership development (though significant), fruitful pastors point the church to the person and work of Jesus; they exalt Jesus before the church in the preaching of His word; they encourage Jesus to the church in community and counseling and discipleship; they reflect Jesus in their walk to the church for the purpose of having the church be more like Jesus, not their pastor.

Allow me to break this section down into two parts: fruitful church leadership consists of biblical leaders and healthy leaders. Biblical leaders lead the congregation in three categories:

- i. Laboring “among” the church: In other words, biblical leaders are among the life of the congregation. As the solo-pastor, for now, this can get difficult at times to keep up with everyone, but it's one of the things I love most about being pastor;
 1. Laboring – the work – is primarily that of a shepherd and preacher; (EX. Palm Valley and friends – not knocking mega-churches, but there's difficulty in many);
 2. Among: with, near, and in the congregation
 - a. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (John 1:14a)
 - ii. Lead with authority: that sometimes rubs people the wrong way; nevertheless spiritually authority, if exercised biblically and in humility, is really a leaders' commitment to you in seeing you grow to be more like Jesus; and you coming under that authority is willing and voluntary; it's you saying that you want to be more like Jesus and are inviting me (or your pastor) to speak into your life;
 1. “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” (Hebrews 13:7)
 - iii. Admonish: It's a good word for correction, teaching, and rebuking. Again, with the intention of pointing you to the Lord Jesus, when you consider correction that's coming alongside and exhorting (a type of encouragement) you; preaching and teaching God's word to you; and sometimes, even rebuking you. Fruitful leaders do it for two reasons: they love you and more importantly, their commitment to the gospel;
- b. Next, fruitful church leadership consists of healthy leadership:
- i. Paul says to respect (high esteem – 2x) church leadership “in love” because of “their work” – that is gospel work. This doesn't mean you don't come alongside them ever, but it does mean that their work greatly matters. Right now, pastors

aren't healthy. According to a newly released study by the Barna Group, they found that:

1. Only 24% of pastors in the United States considered themselves "healthy" (relational, spiritual, emotional, physical, vocational, and financial);
 2. In 2020 71% were looking for different avenues in ministry; now, pastors want to quit – 38% of pastors in the United States want to throw in the towel. Most notable reasons: "congregational divisions and financial strain, and experiencing burnout..." Within our own network of churches in Acts 29, decision fatigue, discouragement, political tensions, suicidal thoughts or attempts, and family strain – several reasons that lead to driving them to seriously consider leaving ministry.
- c. Church leadership isn't perfect – they never will be. The question is whether or not they're biblical, healthy, and repentant. Many of you come from church hurt – and let me begin by saying that I am so sorry if you were under unhealthy, unfruitful, and ungodly leadership – that's not the way Jesus has designed His church to be. Those are terrible experiences; in our history we've walked through muddy waters; and I've sat and counseled with many with those backgrounds.
- d. Additionally, allow me to encourage you with a few things, Storehouse McAllen:
- i. If this isn't me – as your pastor – you need to tell me.
 - ii. If you're looking for the perfect church, then I'm telling you right now she does not exist – not until Jesus returns;
 - iii. If you're looking for your preferences over prescription, then this probably isn't the church for you AND let me invite you to repent – the church doesn't need more consumers, the church needs disciples who will make disciples –

TRANSITION: A healthy church begins with fruitful church leadership that is biblical and healthy; pastors who are committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Fruitful Church Members (v. 13-15)

Unfortunately, for many, that's where it ends – the health of the church is simply the pastor(s) and leadership team making it all happen. After all, that's why they're paid or because they're "super Christians." And that's unfortunate because it's not how it works. In order for a church to be healthy, it also requires fruitful church members who are committed to the work of the gospel.

In Ephesians 4, Paul tells the church in Ephesus that the role of church leadership is to equip the saints "for the work of ministry..." In our passage this morning, Paul shows us what that looks like (macro and micro). And so before we dig into it, let me begin by saying that if you're a Christian, if you belong to Jesus and the Holy Spirit resides in you then you are called to ministry.

- a. "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ..." (Ephesians 4:11-12)

And just like the first section of our text, let me break this down into two parts: intentional and missional. Let's begin with intentional – what are you being intentional with? Discipleship in the context of community with one another. And here's the thing, you can only do this well if you are first rooted in who Jesus says you are – it is out of your identity that you do the work of ministry –

- i. Peace: "Be at peace among yourselves" – that is that you actually pursue peace among one another; kill gossip; repent toward one another;
 - ii. Admonish the idle:
 - 1. There's that strong word again, admonish. The word "idle" can mean two things: one that has gone rogue or one that has become apathetic and lazy
 - iii. Encourage the fainthearted
 - 1. Those who are discouraged and disheartened need the freshwater of the gospel; they need to drink deeply of the promises of God's word for them; they need you to disciple them, pray with them, and support them;
 - iv. Help the weak
 - 1. The word "weak" implies those who are struggling to abandon their sin, sinful pursuits and pleasures;
 - a. "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." (Hebrews 3:12-13)
 - v. Do Good – not repaying evil for evil, rather reflect Jesus – that doesn't mean being walked all over; that doesn't mean being passive; but it does mean having the courage to confront a brother or sister with their action AND the gospel;
 - 1. "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." (Hebrews 10:24-25)
- a. A fruitful church member is missional in word and deed:
- vi. When it comes to sinful actions from others who don't know Jesus, don't repay it
 - 1. Rather, "ALWAYS seek to DO good" – the word **always** implies that this godly conduct is a lifestyle, not just when it's convenient (Thessalonians and persecution) and the word **"do"** has the meaning of "to chase down" or "zealously hunt down." This godly character to do good is actually a result of your new nature!
 - b. The gospel at work

- i. All of these have a two fold meaning: (1) proactively pursuing people and (2) with the intention of not letting them go;
 - ii. You are so committed to one another because you're so committed to Jesus, that you pursue one another and thrust yourself into their life and mess as to not let them go; be patient with them;
 - iii. Is that not the gospel?
- c. You see, the work of gospel ministry isn't simply a work that needs to get done – rather it's a work that reflects Jesus to one another and a watching world!
 - i. You were once the idle and He pursued you; you were once the fainthearted and He comforted you; you were once weak and He rescued you; being at peace is what has been first done for us; WE were enemies once;
 - ii. All of these "things" Jesus set the example in laying hold us even in our sin, taking our guilt and bearing its penalty on the cross;
- d. Responsibility
 - i. All of this responsibility that you carry requires intentionality, but all of this responsibility is empowered by the Holy Spirit – it'll never be convenient; it's always going to rub with your schedule and your preferences;
 - ii. When we focus on the basics, we are exposed;

TRANSITION: Fruitful church members are committed to the work of gospel ministry because of their identity in Jesus and their formation by the gospel;

Fruitful Devotion (v. 16-22)

When a healthy church has fruitful church leadership and fruitful church members, we walk in fruitful devotion. That is, the church is able to walk and live out her purpose: holiness.

Holiness and maturity are so tangible because it is seen among the church as she has her eyes fixed upon the beauty and splendor of Jesus – especially in hard times (EX. Persecution, COVID). In his final instructions, Paul lays out six ways for us to pursue holiness:

- a. The first is joy – not happiness (nothing wrong with that), but happiness is circumstantial; joy is a lifestyle rooted in the truth of the gospel in spite of the circumstance; joy comes from knowing God and being known by Him;
- b. The second is prayer – it's not simply this form of communication, prayer is coming before and sitting in the presence of God;
- c. Third is thanksgiving – thankful for what God has done for us in Christ Jesus; thanksgiving is how we combat bitterness and discontentment; this is God's will;
- d. The Holy Spirit – He resides in you, making you more like Jesus, quenching is becoming idle;
- e. The prophecies – that is, what God has revealed to you through His word; hold fast to what He has revealed;

- f. Holiness – it's not just don't do this and don't do that, but it is that you have been made holy; therefore we have been made new; and if we are new, then we seek the things that are above;

All of this is because we are first rooted and established in the work of Jesus for us – Paul says it this way to the Colossians, “as you have received Jesus, so walk in Him.” Walking in step with the Spirit means that we are committed to fixing our eyes on Jesus – it's not that we're perfect, but that we're repentant; it's not that we have it all figured out, but that we know the one who does; it's not that we rely on our way, but we point one another to the way of Jesus as we respond to the Holy Spirit's work in us;

TRANSITION: A fruitful devotion is cultivated as we respond to the Holy Spirit's work in us.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Giving Update:

- a. Email from last week: Two big realities coming at us as we close 2021 and we look toward 2022 –
 - i. 2021:
 - 1. In order to NOT dip into our savings further, I mentioned that we need an additional \$3500 on top of our budgeted giving for November and December. Currently, we budget about \$10k every month. For the month of November (not even finished), you have given over \$15,000!
 - 2. For December, I want to ask and challenge us as a church to raise another \$15,000 for two reasons: (1) we will end the year without having to dip into our savings any more, (2) we will end in the black, and (3) this will help us have a much better projection of our budget for 2022;
 - 3. Would you continue to give generously? Would you prayerfully consider giving more – and into the new year (pray now with family)? If you haven't been giving and this is home or you're a member (not hardship), then as we close the year would you consider one -time gifts and then what it looks like for you to commit to giving consistently, generously, and faithfully in 2022?
 - ii. 2022:
 - 1. If we can raise between \$13-\$15k every month for 2022, we will be able to start saving again – if we're unable to do so, then we dip into savings and here's the reality: at some point that money will end;
 - 2. I'll be doing some fundraising with our partner churches;
 - 3. Ministry Plan/Goals will be given to you by December (theological development, community groups, and missional efforts);

I want you to know a couple of things: I love you Storehouse McAllen, but I love Jesus infinitely more; I love you Storehouse Family, but I love my wife and son all the more. The health of the church is never one-sided; just because I and others are leading from the front doesn't mean you're simply a passenger. You are a participant in the health of Storehouse McAllen.

And to what end? To what purpose? For the purpose of pursuing holiness; exalting Jesus as you live, love, and serve one another and McAllen.

Christian: I don't think any of your preferences were listed. Do you embrace preference over prescription? Is there complaint rather than confession? Gossip instead of gratitude? The beauty of God's grace is that even now, He pours his grace out onto us; it is by His grace that we are saved, convicted, and able to repent – repentance is a grace where He meets you where you are and points you back to Himself; lean into that, confess and repent;

Non-Christian: My hope is that you come to know Jesus – the church is all about Jesus; the church is filled with hypocrites yet here's the only difference. They're not better, they're simply repentant. So if you don't know Jesus, you're not a part of the family of God; you are still an enemy of God; estranged from Him, yet He provides a way for you to come and know Him and that's through Jesus. Ready to pardon, repent,.

Church, what is the purpose of a healthy church? To pursue holiness and present one another mature in Christ Jesus.

PRAYER

God,

In Your presence we confess our sinfulness, our shortcomings, and our offenses against You. In Your presence we cast our burdens that our bones have grown so weary off before You.

You alone know how often and how easily we wander from Your ways, forgetting Your grace, and in forgetting Your love for us Jesus – we confess that we are easily captivated by something else, even when it sounds godly or spiritual.

May we stand in awe of Your grace for us in Christ, may our hearts be captivated by the beauty and splendor of Jesus for us; may our life be marked by the fruit of our justification in Christ.

May the words of our mouth and the meditation of our heart be pleasing to You this morning.
AMEN.

Benediction | Galatians 5:22-26

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.