

EVANGELISM:

how the whole church speaks of Jesus

Week 8 - What does a healthy church look like?

Last week we defined the church, but churches that may fit the definition can actually become quite sick:

- Preaching of God's Word slowly turns into motivational speeches.
- Conversion can become hazy, and non-believers begin to join the church.
- Membership is seen as optional.
- Non-believers are given leadership roles in the church.
- Hard things are left undone, like church discipline.

Personal priorities vs. church priorities.

A church can get sick when it doesn't understand that there are different priorities for the *church* and for the *individual*.

Example: At a church in Dubai, members decided they wanted to give shoeboxes to poor Chinese immigrant laborers in the city. So they made boxes of toiletries and the like, put in flyers about the church...and then dropped them to the pastor's office! The people did not understand that it was their role to reach out and the pastor's role to preach, shepherd, and pray. "The well-meaning believers in Dubai...believed the church should reach out to the laborers in the same way they wanted to reach out personally." (75)

Another example of this problem is found in Acts 6:1-8. Widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution. Wisely, the apostles instructed the church to select members to take care of the need so that they would not be distracted from the Word and prayer.

Question—What personal priorities might you be confusing with church priorities?

Many members in the church can have myriads of passions, areas of influence, and personal connections. However, it is impossible for the church to create a separate program for every evangelistic opportunity or passion among its members—nor is it healthy!

Question—Some churches constantly create new programs for outreach opportunities. How is that different than what is described here?

Connecting a healthy culture of evangelism with a healthy church.

Members of the church must recognize their individual passions are Spirit-led prompts about their own priorities, not necessarily the church's. However, they encourage and help one another while protecting the health of the local church so that it is a place where non-believers experience and see the gospel lived out.

Example: Abigail was riding a bus home from the airport, when she struck up a conversation with a Chinese woman named Van who had just arrived in America. Abigail wanted to reach out.

She remembered that two strong believers were getting married at their church soon. She knew the gospel would be on full display, and the cross-cultural experience at an American wedding might interest Van. She invited her, and Van came!

At the reception, Van asked many questions. Abigail took her to the church's bookstall, where they kept Bibles in other languages—including Mandarin. Abigail offered to get together for Bible study. She even brought Mandarin-speaking church members to meet Van.

Abigail didn't wait for the church to do something. She put confidence in the church being the church. She leaned on the power of the gospel and trusted the Holy Spirit to work through her faithful steps as Christ's ambassador.