

Marks of a Healthy Church Family

Franklin Church of Christ
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AM Assembly

Introduction:

Recently, while reading a book entitled ***On Becoming Preteen Wise*** by Gary Ezzo and Robert Bucknam, I read a list of marks of a healthy family. I thought it was a great list in which all families should strive to gain mastery. However, the more I read it, the more I realized it also contained the marks of a healthy congregation. That should be no surprise since we consider ourselves a family. Examine the list and then see how they mirror what makes a healthy congregation. The earmarks were:

1. Healthy families share core values that all members embrace and submit to.
2. Healthy families recognize that maintaining the marriage is a priority for family health.
3. Healthy families know how to communicate with one another.
4. In healthy families, parents are not afraid to say, "I was wrong."
5. Healthy families choose conflict resolution over conflict avoidance.
6. Healthy families make time to be with each other and to attend one another's events.
7. Healthy families have a corporate sense of responsibility to all members.

Discussion:

- I. Healthy families share core values that all members embrace and submit to.
 - A. In **I Corinthians 1:10**, Paul encouraged the Christians to be of the same mind and judgment. In **Philippians 2:2**, Paul said the Philippians would make his joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit and intent on one purpose. We should definitely be united in our values.
 - B. Some churches value emotional experience. Some value social welfare. Some value personal fulfillment of individual members. What are we to value? According to **I Timothy 3:15**, the church is to be the pillar and support of the truth. That is what we must value—the truth. It is not about how we feel. It is not about providing for the physically needy. It is about getting the truth out because the truth is what will sanctify us and make us free (**John 8:32; 17:17**). **Matthew 6:33** says we must seek first God's kingdom and righteousness. This is what we value, God's rule in our life and His righteousness. We can only know this by valuing God's word and basing our lives and the congregation's life upon it (cf. **Matthew 7:24-27**).
- II. Healthy families recognize that maintaining the marriage is a priority for family health.
 - A. Sadly, in many families parent/child relationships supersede the marriage relationship. Because of this, parents at some point realize they are married to someone they don't know. Too often, they decide it is someone they don't want to be married to anymore. Healthy families have learned that the marriage relationship has to be maintained first and foremost or the family will crumble, destroying all of the relationships.
 - B. **Ephesians 5:25-32** demonstrates that the church is the bride of Christ. Each of us as members of the bride, must recognize we must work first and foremost on our relationship with Jesus Christ. If we want our relationship with one another to be positive and healthy, we have to keep our relationship with Jesus positive and healthy. It doesn't work the other way around. If we spend more time on our relationships with one another than our relationship with Jesus, we will have an unhealthy family. We will know each other well, but we will not know how to help each other. Further, we will be more concerned with upsetting our brethren than upsetting our Savior. In **Philippians 1:27**, before Paul commented on how united we ought to be with one another, he said we must conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must spend time working on our marriage to Jesus in prayer, Bible study, self-control and discipline if we want our relationship with one another to be healthy.
- III. Healthy families know how to communicate with one another.
 - A. Obviously whole lessons can and have been preached on this one issue. If we want to have healthy relationships, we have to communicate well. One of the best books I have ever read on communication is ***Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High***. They use the term "dialogue" instead of "communication," but they define it, "The free flow of meaning between two or more people." They said, "At the core of every successful conversation lies the

free flow of relevant information. People openly and honestly express their opinions, share their feelings, and articulate their theories. They willingly and capably share their views, even when their ideas are controversial and unpopular.”¹ When two or more people approach one another, we have separate pools of meaning, with our own opinions, preconceptions, background, filters, etc. The goal of communication is to end up with one pool of shared meaning, understanding each other (even when we don’t always agree) and able to come to a consensus on issues.

- B. To deal with this point in brief, instead of preaching a sermon within a sermon, I believe **James 1:19** provides some overall keys on positive communication. I recognize that this passage deals with our relationship to God and His word, but I think it provides a good map for our communication with one another as well. We must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger. When we think communication, we think speaking. But we must not jump the gun with our speaking. First, be quick to hear. We have to listen in order to understand what is going on in the mind and heart of others. We must not simply listen in order to know when we get to start talking. Then we must learn to speak. We must not say the first things that come to our minds, but speak cautiously that what we say may add grace to those who hear (**Ephesians 4:29**). Finally, we must refrain from anger. Too often we jump to conclusions and then jump on our brethren. We must refrain from anger, giving each other the benefit of the doubt, loving each other and replying with soft answers that turn away wrath. These are helpful points, but the main issue is we actually have to communicate. We have to learn to listen. We have to learn how to speak clearly. We have to learn to control our tempers. If we don’t communicate, we will not be healthy.

IV. In healthy families, parents are not afraid to say, “I was wrong.”

- A. In families, we teach our children early to apologize for their wrongs. But few parents lead by example. Too many parents act as if they are never wrong and when they are wrong, they certainly do not have to stoop to redress those wrongs with their children. Sadly, this is too often the case in churches. Few people will admit they were wrong and seek forgiveness.
- B. However, in a healthy church, when someone has done wrong, they will seek to deal with it quickly (**Matthew 5:23-25**). They will admit their wrong, confessing their sins and seek forgiveness. We must not allow our pride to get in the way, thinking more of ourselves than we ought (**Romans 12:3**). Rather, with humility we should admit our wrongs, make restitution where we can and move forward together in Christ.

V. Healthy families choose conflict resolution over conflict avoidance.

- A. Conflict is the most important time for the communication about which we spoke just minutes ago. However, conflict is the time we least want to communicate. Few of us enjoy conflict. Most of us will avoid it at all costs. Somehow we convince ourselves that we should avoid conflict with each other in order to maintain peace. That, however, only increases personal frustration. It causes us to internalize bitterness and resentment. We think we are helping the congregation maintain peace, but we are not. The reality is when we internalize these feelings by avoiding conflict it is like we are shoving too much jello into a mold. Sooner or later it will seep out somewhere. That will only destroy the peace of the congregation.
- B. Rather, wise and healthy families learn that conflict is merely part of family life. When different people come together we will rub each other the wrong way sometimes. Instead of trying to avoid it, we learn to resolve it. **Matthew 5:21-26** demonstrates the importance of resolving our conflicts healthfully. Consider the Jerusalem church in **Acts 6:1-6** and **Acts 15**. They had conflicts, but instead of sweeping them under the rug, they dealt with them in positive ways. In both cases, the church was strengthened.

VI. Healthy families make time to be with each other and to attend one another’s events.

- A. In **Acts 2:46-47**, we learn the Jerusalem Christians were spending time assembling with one another and spending time from house to house with each other, eating meals together and praising God together. There are a lot of families whose together time is made up mostly of sleeping in the same house or watching the occasional movie together. They are in close proximity, but they are not really spending time with one another. Sadly, many congregations mirror

¹ ***Crucial Conversations***, Kerry Patterson *et al*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 2002, p 20.

this sort of relationship. They spend time together listening to a sermon occasionally, but the individual members rarely spend time together in meaningful conversation and interaction whether spiritual or otherwise.

- B. If we are going to grow spiritually in the face of the devil and his world, we have to spend time with those who will build us up. We know how important this is even though we find it hard to do. We put so many things before spending time with each other. But another aspect of spending time with each other and supporting each other is being there when others are doing something important to them. We talk about how important it is to be there when our kids have an event. How about our brethren? Maybe it is not our child in concert but our brother or sister in Christ's child. Do you think we could improve our family situation if we were there during those kind of events? What if we were there to cheer on our brother or sister who plays softball for one of their games? What if they are having surgery? Can we be there to pray with them beforehand and not just leave that up to the preacher? We need to spend time with each other and be there during the important moments of one another's lives.

VII. Healthy families have a corporate sense of responsibility to all members.

- A. **Romans 12:4-5** demonstrates that we are not just individually separate members of a body. We are members of one another in this body. As **I Corinthians 12:26** demonstrates, what happens to one member affects us all. Therefore, we recognize we are not allowed to simply go off as our own individual and independent selves. We are part of a greater whole that takes precedence over our individuality. I know as Americans, this concept is foreign to us, but it is the biblical concept. This takes sacrifice. It is hard. But it is necessary.
- B. **Philippians 2:1-4** demonstrates this point. We establish the unity of values and healthy relationships we have talked about throughout this whole lesson by putting others before ourselves. But putting the good of the group before our own individual desires and goals. The needs of the many outweigh the desires of the one. We are willing to sacrifice ourselves in order to further the goals and purposes of the group. We have to feel responsible to the group and all its members. Only then will we have health.

Conclusion:

How are we doing on this list? If everyone here were just like you, how would we be doing? I think at this point, we are relatively healthy. However, like all families, I think there is room to grow. Let's all work on our marriage to Christ and all work on our relationships with one another in this family. May God be with us and help us be a healthy church family.