

Six years ago when I got to the church, this was my first pastorate. I was fresh out of not going to seminary. I started having these odd conversations with people, and let me unpack what that looked like. They would come and visit the church, and we were small enough then that I could meet with anyone who called in and said, "Hey, I want to meet with you." I would go and have a cup of coffee with them, and they would zealously go, "Tell me about the finances of the church. How do you handle the finances of the church?" And I would go, "I don't handle the finances of the church. I'd honestly have to make a call to find out exactly how that works." "Okay, make that call." And then I'd make that call and go, "Okay, here's how it happens. This is how they pick it up and this is who controls it and this is how it's counted. And this is all available online on the church's website. You can even get detailed monthly reports on how each penny is spent." And they're like, "Okay, okay, okay." And then I go, "Now, can you explain the zeal over finances?" And then they would unpack their story, the story about how they used to go to this church and at that church this guy embezzled this or he took this and then he did this. It was always some version of this story with some different emphasis over and over and over again. It was like people wanted to meet just to go, "Can I trust you? Can I trust you, because I was a part of what was dysfunctional and wicked before and I'm not going to do it again." In fact, some people were like, "I haven't been to church in 20 years." "Really? Why?" "Well, when I was a young man, I was a part of this church, and the pastor was a good friend of our family...and before you know it, he's having an affair with his secretary. I just felt like I couldn't trust it anymore. How do you guard your young pastors from that type of fall?" And so I'd go, "We do this...we do this...we try this..." But let me be real honest with you. At the end of the day if a guy is going to walk in deceit and be a liar, there's only so much you can do before God outs him. But here's what I can promise you. I'll drag his butt upon this stage and make him confess to all of you. I tell our guys all the time – public men are disciplined publicly.

Here's my background. My background is with pagans. I love pagans. Because they're just honest. There's no pretense. They're just like, "No, I hate that...No, I'm not going to do that...I don't even remember that." I knew how to work in that, and I loved that. I loved sharing the gospel in that. I loved talking about the difference between works-based righteousness and the gospel. So I'm coming into being a pastor in the hopes of having a church that continually engaged those who were not believers. I just had really no concept despite my own story how many of us were absolutely beat up and torn apart by our past church experiences. Very quickly, it became this place of the walking wounded that were set on a spring over these various topics, and as soon as that topic was broached or we smelled something that we've smelled before, we'd pop off and explode. And then I was left going, "What happened there?" only to hear this horrible story that you endured some place that was wrought with dysfunction long before you came here. I just didn't have those lenses on. I didn't have the lens that so many of you have been betrayed by spiritual leaders, that so many of you have had church experiences that were dark where you felt judged, where you felt betrayed, where you felt taken advantage of and where you began to doubt what we believe because of shady shepherds.

So here's what I want to do. I want to talk to you about what a healthy church looks like and show you why if they're not doing this, that's eventually going to lead them to dysfunction. And my hope in that is that I can show you biblically what a healthy church is supposed to look like and why we fail. And then here's what I need you to do. The church is made up of individual men and women. So as I talk about the church on a macro level, what I want you to do is think about the church at the micro level, namely you. So when I go, "A healthy church looks like this," I need you to go, "Am I healthy or dysfunctional?" And then if you'll do that and I do what I'm supposed to do regarding the text, then we should be able to make some movement today towards health and away from dysfunction.

That's the plan, now let's go to Ephesians 4:1. I just love this view of the church. And then from there, I'm going to spring right into ten points I have for you today. Ephesians 4:1, "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,..." Now what he's talking about there is meritless salvation. What I mean by that is that God called you unto Himself through Christ on the cross by the power of the Holy Spirit because of no merit of yours. Which means God did not look down and go, "Oh, I'm saving that one. I want that guy on My team." That's not how it happened. Your conversion, your salvation was meritless. There is nothing in you that makes God go, "I've got to have him to make this thing go." You've got to guard your mouth when you say things like, "I just really thing God could do miraculous things through me. I've got money, I've got talent, I'm a leader." Listen, if God's plans are thwarted by you, that means He's not ultimate...you are. Surely you know you're not ultimate. So what he means by "Let's walk in a manner worthy of our calling," he's talking about the fact that you and I have been saved by grace through faith, and even the faith to believe was given to us by God so that nobody would be able to boast in anything but Him. So let's walk in that way. What does that look like? Well, he's going to unpack it for us. "...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call..." So back to that idea of Christ being worthy of all the credit. "...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift." So this is beautiful. The whole book of Ephesians is written about the church. The first four chapters are theological, deeper, foundational, and then it moves on from there and gets into the practical. "Husbands, this is how you treat your wives. Wives, this is how you treat your husbands. Children, this is how you obey your parents. Parents, this is how you beat your children when they don't obey you." It kind of goes through the practical applications of what it means to be men and women of God, living under that lordship, walking together in the unity of the Spirit. This is a beautiful text that honestly sits in contrast to most of our experiences. So now if you're not a believer in here today, it's a great day to be here because I'm going to tell you why we fail, why the church fails, why you've seen things that are goofy, why you've felt at times judged. I'm going to explain it to you and in that, hopefully we'll see where we're healthy and where we're not.

I've got ten things I want to talk to you about. Number one: A healthy church is a church that's filled with men and women who at the end of the day see Scripture as the final authority on all things. [Psalm 119, 2 Timothy 3:14-17, 2 Peter 1:19-21] Let me tell you why that's healthy when we do that and it gets dysfunctional when we don't. Everyone, even the most secular pagan, operates under an authority. Most of the time the authority is "It's just what I think." So what you think and what you decide and your opinion is authoritative, which means it governs your actions and the direction of your life. Now we believe that the Scriptures are that authoritative piece. Let me explain to you if a church doesn't have the Scriptures as the final authoritative piece, you're going to have dysfunction. Something has to sit there as ultimate.

If it's not the Scriptures, all of the other options are easily flawed. Let me give you examples. You, me as the ultimate authority? Okay, I'm 34 years old. Ten years ago, I was 24 and had just finished my degree. I was teaching on Tuesday night to about 2,000 students. I was traveling, I was working a little bit at a church. This is what my life was. And at that time, I thought I was pretty sharp. I'm not going to lie to you. I thought I saw well, and I thought I understood the world. Now here I am a decade later, and 34 year old Matt Chandler looks back at 24 year old Matt Chandler and thinks that kid was a moron. Like I'd give anything for somebody to actually come up with a flux capacitor, go back there, grab 24 year old Matt by the face and go, "Please don't do that. That, don't do that. And could you avoid all of this." But if you would have tried to tell 24 year old Matt that, I was convinced that I was right. I was convinced that I saw a certain way. Can we all agree that that's all of us? All of us, regardless of age, can look back 10 years ago and say, "I saw incorrectly, I believed incorrectly and I walked in certain things incorrectly." Now, what about last year? Can we agree that last year, some of that was true too? If you could get a time machine would you be able to go back to last year and go, "Please don't do that. Please don't make that decision. Please don't go here. Please don't walk in that." Is it safe to say that if you were dumb last year and even dumber ten years ago, that you compared to five years from now might be dumb? Is that

safe to say? Now don't get me wrong. You are a beautiful, mature, well put together human being, but could it be that five years from now, ten years from now, twelve years from now, you'll look back on you now and see that your reasoning and your decision making was horribly flawed? So why in the world would you let your opinion ever be ultimate? Since we've just proven historically, why would you ever go, "Well I think I'm doing this," when we've already established that you're dumb? Unless you're saying that right now you've entered into the pinnacle of knowledge. And if you want to say that, that just means that for the rest of your life, you're what they medically call "retarded," which means you've ceased to grow. So I think we would all say that we can't be the final authority. So what if we get a group of really sharp dummies, put them together and let them be the final authority for us, because maybe in a group of dummies, those dummies will identify each other's dumbness and be able to lead us onto the path of wisdom? Because that historically has happened. No, really the more dumb guys you get in a room, they'll actually not be able to point out each other's dumbness. They'll agree upon each other's dumbness, and the dumbness will just deepen. So we can't let a group of men be an ultimate authority.

What about culture? Do we let culture set authority for us? Does the church take her cues from culture? Do we look at culture and go, "Well everybody's doing that now, so we had better to figure out how to soft sell what we believe?" Absolutely not. Culture every ten years looks back on itself with disdain, looks back on how we view things with disdain. Watch how people talk about the 80's now, about the greed that was there. Someone should have intervened on the fashion part of it for sure. That was just a train wreck. All of that is now looked at in 2009 with disdain, particularly the greedy, get yours, you've earned it mentality. Even secularly, it's looked at with disdain. So we can't let culture be the ultimate authority. So anytime you leave the Scriptures as the authoritative piece of governing our life and actions, you've set yourself up on a trajectory that's going to end badly. Because you've entrusted life and action to fools.

Number 2: A healthy church is filled with men and women who are pursuing Jesus as the ultimate treasure. But let me clarify one thing. [Luke 18:1, Acts 17:11, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Ephesians 5:1-21] The spiritual desert is a reality for a lot of people. We shouldn't be surprised at it, because it happens in the Bible all the time. God comes to Hosea and goes, "Look, I'm going to drag you out into the desert. It's going to be horrible. Let's go. But I'm going to bring you back, and you'll quit calling Me master and you'll start calling Me husband." So the desert experience, that dark night of the soul is a biblical spiritual reality. So I'm not saying that all of us had this Shekinah glory moment this morning where we woke up and talked to God face to face like Moses did. That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying that there's pursuit there. Through Scriptures, through prayer, through spiritual disciplines, we're pursuing a spiritual relationship with Christ. Once a people and once a place stop seeing worship of Jesus as primary, they will replace Jesus as the ultimate treasure with something else as the ultimate treasure. More often than not, it's some obscure morality. So not longer is it, "Chase Jesus, know Jesus, worship Jesus," but it's, "Don't do this and do this." That's a common switch out. So a healthy church is filled with people who see Christ as the ultimate treasure and are pursuing Him. They're growing, it's not stagnant and dry.

Number 3: A healthy church is filled with men and women who follow in obedience after Christ in regards to the ordinances. [1 Corinthians 11:17-34] Where the gospel is preached, men will be converted. So there's baptism, there's a celebration of God saving us from our sins and then there's a constant celebration of the cross of Jesus Christ and what was purchased for us in that. That's communion. A healthy church always remembers the gospel, always. It's the center message of what's taught, embraced, sung about and worshiped. Even in our songs that we sing here, do you see the Scripture verses at the bottom? This is where we get this. This is what we're singing. We're singing truth. This isn't just a catchy song. No, we're teaching. What? The gospel. It's the center piece.

Number 4: A healthy church is a church that's filled with men and women who genuinely love another and love participating with one another in biblical community. [Acts 2:42-47, Hebrews 10:23-25, Titus 3:14] So it's an unhealthy

place where you wake up and are going, "Oh, I hate those people. Should we go?" Or it's an unhealthy place where you go, "Well, I'm going to the Saturday night service because I know such and such goes to Sunday morning services. And I don't even want to see her. If I saw her, I'd just vomit." That's unhealthy. It's unhealthy where there are sects and factions within a covenant community or when you could take it or leave it. That's when you get this kind of ecclesiological buffet that we're talking about where you belong nowhere and go everywhere, where community becomes more showmanship than it does belonging and being challenged and pushed in your faith. A healthy place is made up of men and women who are there, they want to be there and are doing life together.

Number 5: A healthy church is an open handed church. [Matthew 25:14-30, Romans 12:1-2, 2 Corinthians 8-9] This means that a healthy church is filled with men and women who understand that their time, energy, resources, talents and gifts were given to them by God, for the glory of God, not to be used simply to terminate on themselves. They give freely of their money, they give freely of their gifts, they give freely of their time. Now, what's the option? The option is what we see in Dallas, which is a catering to capitalism. The opposite of this is men and women who go, "The church exists to give me a pleasant experience, so I want it to be easy to get into, I want it to be only as long as I want it to. I've got a nine minute attention span. That's how long you've got. I want egress, ingress. I want all of that. I want to walk in to a latte, with a shot of mocha in there. I want to sit down on a chair that vibrates. I want the music to be poppy. I would like some fog and a laser to draw a picture of the cross while you sing and I listen comfortably from my chair. Then I would like a message anywhere from twenty to twenty-two minutes. Don't make me feel uncomfortable about my life. In fact, let's not even talk about Jesus; let's just reference something that we all have issue with. So let's talk about the fact that we're in a recession and we need to walk together and encourage one another through that recession. But don't talk about sin, don't talk about the cross, don't talk about anything where I might actually have to repent and confess and do business with the deep levels of my heart. I'd rather not have that. And then dismiss in a timely manner. Get me out to my car and get me home after you retina scan me and launch my kid down the slide. I would like my children to have face paint on, a new t- shirt and for SpongeBob SquarePants to have actually taught my kids how not to lie to me and obey me. And then I'll get out of your hair." That's Dallas evangelicalism. There's nothing required of you, nothing asked of you, nothing but your attendance. Now unfortunately, that's not biblically church at all, and they need to take "church" out of their name because they're something else, but they're not biblical church. This is the opposite. This is unhealthy. It's Christless, expounding on nothing. It's not church, and it's the opposite of open-handed doing life together for the good of one another, for the glory of God and the furthering of the kingdom.

Number 6: Healthy places take take holiness seriously. [1 Peter 1:13-16, 1 Peter 4:1-3] I'm going to take two pieces here. They take holiness seriously by setting a high standard of it and then by working actively to put sin to death in their lives. So let me put two pieces there. The first piece – never trust a place where everyone's pretty. Do not trust a place where you walk in and everyone's put together and they skip into the building with their perfect family and the husband and wife hold hands as they sit down and have a giant Bible. And then they read and go "amen" and everything's fine. And then they all go back out in a group singing and skipping to their car that has a bumper sticker of all of them as stick figures bowing down before a cross. If that's everyone, if it's Stepford like, get out of there out of there. Because if everyone there is mature to that level, then that's actually not maturation because they've given birth to nothing behind them. It will only be a decade before that place is dead. Plus it has been my experience that, outside of very few men and women, most of us still struggle. So where there has not been an environment cultivated where we can say, "I'm struggling with that one...That one's owning me...I just can't break this one," then I think what you've got is fake holiness where everyone is pretending externally to be okay when their heart isn't.

The second piece of that is if they're not serious about holiness at all. There's this weird thing that's happening with grace. Some people take grace to mean that you can do whatever you want and God's okay with that because He's gracious. So if you hold anybody to any kind of standard, they'll go, "Oh, legalism! That's legalism asking us to live

holy like Jesus asked of us." Can I just make you painfully aware of Romans 6:1 that says, "Shall we sin all the more so that grace may abound? May it never be." Read that in the Koine Greek and it's much harsher than that. It says, "You're damned if you do." Translation: if you think like that, walk like that or walk in that, you are not a believer in Jesus Christ. You might have some kind of head knowledge of who He is, but if you're walking in that, that's an objective evidence that you have not been regenerated. So you can wrestle with that, sent me a dirty e-mail, you can do whatever you want with that, but the Bible says that if you're a man or a woman that says, "I'll do whatever I want and God will just have to forgive me," that's an objective evidence that you are not converted. You're not a believer. I probably thinned out our herd a little bit with that one. So where you've got places of grace that are, "Just do whatever you want. God loves you," that's not grace. Grace is that Christ went to the cross and was absolutely slaughtered because of the wickedness of your sin and that kindness leads us to repentance, not as an act of legal exchange but as an act of worship. Healthy churches take holiness seriously. Where it's not taken seriously, you're going to have some dysfunction.

Number 7: Healthy churches are filled with men and women who take seriously the areas of life that Scriptures would deem foolish. [Romans 14:14-23] Here's what I'm trying to say by that. My six year old daughter, who is the joy of my life, we pray for her a lot. The Lord's really going to stretch me with her. She's very much a skeptic, which I was that way. So she's the one who at the dinner table when I'm like, "Do you want to pray? No? Okay, I'll pray." And then I was reading her this children's book on the Trinity. It was such a horrible illustration, but the guys says that the triune God created out of an overflow of joy within the Trinity and the little tag line after it was "because no one likes to create alone." And my daughter immediately went, "I like to create alone." So I had to go, "Yes, I know. It's a dumb illustration. Let me show you. You've got the Trinity here, and it works in such a way that you've got..." And I had to explain it that way because it was a bad illustration. She's a skeptic. I honestly like that because there will be no coercing her or setting her up for some false decision. She'll have to wrestle through it. She's already doing it. I say that because my daughter is one who does respect the rules. We're old school. We do have rules and we spank you if you defy them. And so, she does understand that if she obeys, good things happen and if she disobeys, bad things happen. And so what she does is she'll get as close to the line as she can without stepping over it. So she understands the letter of the law, but she'll defy the heart of it. So things like this happen in our house all the time. "Audrey, don't get up on the counter to get stuff off the top of the refrigerator." "Okay, no problem." I leave the room and come back in and Audrey's on the floor and Reid's on the counter getting something off of the refrigerator for her. So I'm like, "Boo!" And she goes, "You said not to get up on the counter. I don't know what Reid's doing." This is my daughter. It's also true of a lot of immature believers, where instead of just staying away from what the Bible calls foolish but not outright sin, they'll just try to get as close to it as they can. This is immature, which leads me right to the next one.

Number 8: A healthy church is filled with men and women who take the responsibility of Christian freedom seriously. [1 Corinthians 8:1-13] Let me tell you the generation I grew up in. And we have our issues, we just can't see them through the trees; our kids will point them out to us. I'm 34 and we grew up under this really weird cloud that had a real legalistic bent to it. Let me give you an example. When I come to know the Lord, I'm immediately taught that there's certain music I can listen to and certain music I had better not listen to. Anybody else in that church? They called it "secular music." I couldn't listen to it, and the list was long and included no one I was actually listening to. Like don't listen to Journey because apparently Steve Perry will make you want to kill your folks, and don't listen to this, don't listen to this. And then there were certain movies that we shouldn't go see. And don't even get me started on beer. Because if you drink a beer publicly, everyone in the room who had any interest in Jesus Christ at all will immediately go, "I knew He was not real. Is that a Michelob Light that guy's drinking? Jesus, pfff." That's that half of the room. The other half of the room is former alcoholics who watch me drink a Michelob Light and go out and get slammed. So that was what we were sold. Now, what happened as we got older is we started being able to flip through the Scriptures and go, "Wait a minute. Some of this is extra-biblical." We started to be able to go, "Wait a minute. That's not even in the text at all. In fact, them even quoting this is prooftexting. It's not what Jesus is even talking about." And so here's what we did. Do you know what happens

when somebody cuts the cord of legalism? You fly right into license. And so now we're going, "Man, you can have a beer if you want a beer. Drunkenness is a sin, but you can have a beer. What do you mean I can't watch rated-R movies? Man, I'm free to watch rated-R movies. What do you mean I can't go here or I can't do this? There's nothing in the Scriptures that would forbid me. In fact, there seems to be, in some context, encouragement to participate in some of those things." And you move over to license.

Let me tell you the gist of what's healthy in a healthy church concerning Christian freedom. In a healthy church, Christian freedom will be seen through the lenses of hope for our brother. Which means that my concern for you and your spiritual growth is more weighty to me than my freedom and that I will at times forgo what I am free to do so that you might not be confused and are able to grow in maturity. So can you? Yes. Should you? I don't know; you need to wrestle with that. Who's there? So can you have a drink? Yeah. Should you be aware of your surroundings? I would be. Can you dance? I don't know, God answered that one for me. He was like, "You're not going to wrestle with that one, buddy. Your struggle will be elsewhere." So I have a congenital defect called uncoordinated lankyness. We struggle with this one here at the Village because we're young. You have a lot of guys really enjoying their freedom. Sure, but just be careful with your freedom. The second you prefer your freedom to the health of the brothers in your body, I think you've erred into sin.

Number 9: A healthy church is filled with men and women who are willing to engage one another over sin and are also willing to be engaged. [Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, Hebrews 12] So a healthy church is filled with men and women who, if they see their brother and sister struggling, they engage them. "Hey, what are you doing here? What is this?" But they're also willing to receive that. After six years of pastoring, I believe that there's no higher level of love than to call someone out who is blatantly sinning. So you've got to ask yourself, "What about the guy that's just some sort of spiritual Baptist Nazi who's just beating the drum? What if they're just attacking me and there's no truth to it?" Okay, let's talk about that. I read this story once in the Bible where God used a donkey to talk to a man. What if a donkey came to you and said, "I see this in you, I see this in you and I see this in you?" You can do two things. You can argue with the donkey, but let's face it, they're a donkey. Or you can thank them, leave and go pray, go ask your friends, "Is any of this legitimate? Is any of this true?" And if some of it turns out to be true, then the objective evidence of love is not their love for you but God's love for you in that He would intervene through a donkey. We should love to be confronted. I know we don't, but we should love being confronted.

Let me tell you our culture here. I'm the lead pastor here at the Village. What I noticed early on in church life was that the lead pastor was kind of this untouchable guy who wore a cape fluttering in the wind. If anyone saw something that didn't add up biblically and someone actually confronted the pastor on that, he would just vanish. I don't think they killed him; I don't know. I just that they just didn't work there long. So they just confronted the pastor and you don't question the pastor. So that kid just disappeared. He got traded to the Episcopalians or something. Why in the world would you ever build an ivory tower around yourself when all of us are prone to wander? Do you know how old of an idea that is? Don't we sing that in "Come Thou Fount," a song hundreds of years old? "Prone to wander. Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. Here's my heart. Lord, take and seal it. Seal it for Thy courts above." This is every day human life. Why would you ever build defenses around yourself that would keep out those who might be able to engage you back onto the narrow path? So here an intern can come into my office and go, "I've got a biblical problem with that," and we get to talk through it. And then we fire him, but we talk through it first. That's my point. Interns are very expendable. They're very cheap. No, we've created a culture where everybody can be called out. I have no idea why you wouldn't want to do that. Well because most of us don't like people pointing out our weaknesses, but in the end that's necessary to grow. The reason this one is so important is, where you're willing to watch a brother or sister of yours struggle with sin to the point of dropping off the map and you do nothing but be silent, you've just revealed that you're indifferent to them, which is not the mark of a community of faith.

Number 10: When we fail at all of that (an we do), we are quick to confess it to God and to one another, to repent and to seek to put that sin to death. [Romans 8:13, Col 3:5, James 5:16, 1 John 1:6-10] And where that doesn't occur, you have a bunch of people pretending. How many times have you heard me say that church is a really lame hobby? I don't know why you would have church as a hobby. It's like Halloween once a week. Dress up like good Christian people who don't struggle with anything, don't have any problems and aren't walking in any darkness and come pretend for an hour. Only to go home, take all that off and get back to real life. I just don't know why you would want to do that, and I don't know why you would want to build a church on that. You know sin will find you out. The Bible guarantees that. You only get to walk in darkness for so long, if you're of God, before God rips the roof off and lets everyone see. Why? Because He loves you. Now, here's where it's heartbreaking for me. I know some of you are out there right now and you're thinking, "Not me. It's not going to find me out." Yes He is, and when He does, my prayer is that you'll remember what I just said. God busting you publicly, ripping it open so all your friends and family know, that's an unreal act of love meant for your salvation. I prefer to confess so He doesn't have to hug me that hard. I'd rather come clean early than have God going, "Alright, I'm going to give you the God hug." I would rather not have the God hug. The Scriptures say it this way, "Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up vs. Him burning you down."

So this is healthy church. This is what it looks like. Are we there? No, we're not. Can we get there? No, we can't. You're a sinner, so am I. We're going to have seasons where things go dark. This is why we need one another so badly. This is why it's not enough for you to simply go to church. The question is not if we will ever get to this, because we do actually get to this. I always say there is no such thing as the glory days, but there is coming a glory day. That's when all this will be right and good. Until then, we strive for it, we run towards it, we pick each other up when we fall because it will eventually be our turn to stumble. And we do this until He returns or until He comes and gets us. God help us.

Let's pray. "Father, I thank You for our time together this morning. I'm hoping to just see what parts of our heart are healthy and vibrant and growing and what parts of our heart aren't. I pray that You might heal the broken parts and that You might allow us to walk in genuine repentance. Help us. We need You. I pray for the Village as a whole, and I pray that we might be healthy. We strive towards it. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."