

I want to begin with a couple of questions. 1) If you meet someone this next week who is looking for a “good church,” what churches would you recommend? 2) What criteria did you just use to put those churches in the “good” category?

Here are the four most attractive features of “good churches.” 1) Preaching. 2) Music. 3) Programs. 4) Facilities.

Based on those four criteria, the church we are reading about in the book of Acts, the church that changed the world, would not qualify as a “good church.” They had no facilities, programs or music and their preaching was just ok. If you’re looking for a “good church” this church does not fit the bill. But, if you are looking for a GREAT church, here it is. One of the big differences between the church today and the church in the book of Acts is the difference between the state of the art and the state of the heart. Eugene Peterson describes what happens when we focus on the state of the art. “The pastors of America have metamorphosed into a company of shopkeepers, and the shops they keep are churches. They are preoccupied with shopkeeper’s concerns — how to keep the customers happy, how to lure customers away from competitors down the street, how to package the goods so that the customers will lay out more money.”

In Acts 4:32-38 we discover that it was the state of the heart that made the early church great. Fellowship is a good church. The question this morning is, “how does a church go from good to great?” The answer in these 7 verses...Read it...

A great church enjoys great unity...v. 32. They were “one heart and soul.” This may be the greatest miracle of all in the book of Acts! This is a poetic way of saying that the early church enjoyed a common commitment to the things that matter most **in spite of their differences**. If you want to see diversity, look at Acts 2:5, “Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven....(now look at vv. 9-11) Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, Judeans and Cappadocians. Folks from Pontus (Pontificators?), Asians, Phrygians and Pamphylans. Egyptians and Libyans and even Romans, both Jews and non-Jews (proselytes) along with Cretans and Arabians—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.”

What were “the mighty deeds of God?” I have to believe this is in reference to the whole biblical narrative but specifically the story of Jesus presented in the gospels. Good churches agree on the means while great churches agree on the mandate –

the gospel must be preached, in word and in deed. And every one of us has a part to play in that mandate.

Good churches do a good job talking about all the **good** things that God has done for **good** people. Great churches focus on taking the stunning message of the gospel to those God misses the most. Ever been in a church with gorgeous stained-glass windows? They tell the story to the already convinced inside the church. Sometimes I want to turn those windows around so that the world can be stunned by the greatness of God and the glorious message of the gospel.

Unity is a convincing sign of the presence of God. When God conceived the church, He didn't envision a random collection of solo performers all trying to make a name for themselves. He wanted to show the world a diverse group of people sharing a common commitment to make His name great. He envisioned a symphony orchestra.

A great church experiences great power...33a. Luke uses the prefix "mega" with the word power. The word "power" is "dunamis" in Greek. We get the word dynamite from this Greek word. And dynamite should be handled with care. So should power. Henri Nouwen says, "The temptation to consider power an apt instrument for the proclamation of the gospel is the greatest temptation of all." Church history tells a sad tale about the decline of a people stunned by the power of God to a church stunted by a lust for power. A great church seeks power from the right source for the right purpose.

Power comes in different forms. Gas can...there is power in this can. It can be demonstrated in a couple of ways. The most obvious way is to set a match to it! You will see an impressive display of power. The less conspicuous way is to pour this gas in a gas tank and use it to propel a 4,000 lb. car 300 miles down the road.

A great church exhibits great grace...33b-35. Here is that prefix again, "mega." "Great grace was upon them all." The grace we give is a response of the grace we have been given. It is God's unmerited kindness to us. A gracious church is kind to all with no regard for who they are, where they come from or how they live their lives. A gracious church is an inviting church. People are drawn to grace because it is so unexpected. I see this often in my work with Mercy Ships. We are commonly asked, "Why are you doing this? Why have so many of you who have so much come to this country to do for us what we could never do for ourselves?" The answer of course is Jesus.

A great church keeps reminding itself of the same thing Paul reminded Timothy of in 2 Tim. 2:1, “Timothy, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” He then gives him some instructions on how to pastor which conclude with the words, “Remember Jesus Christ.” How could we forget? But we do. Surround yourself with people who are Christ-centered. People like my friend Matt...\$10...

A great church ensures great care... 36-37. Luke does an interesting thing here by introducing a man named Barnabas. His real name is Joseph, but he has earned the reputation of an encourager, so he is nicknamed “son of encouragement.”

It was Barnabas who vouched for the apostle Paul in Acts 9:27.


It was Barnabas who was sent to the Gentiles in Antioch when the apostles heard that they too had experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. “When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose,²⁴ for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.” Acts 11:23-24

It was Barnabas who took John Mark with him after Paul fired John Mark for not following through on an assignment in Pamphylia. As a result, John Mark grows in his faith and eventually reconciles with Paul. In fact, in his dying days, Paul calls for John Mark to be by his side.

Herein lies the Achilles heel of most churches today. We are so busy chasing the world’s definition of greatness – great music, great preaching, great programs that we fail to prioritize great care. The quest for greatness in this world will diminish our capacity to care. Jesus declared that the quality of our faith is directly tied to the quality of our care.

‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?’³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?’³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’ Mt. 25:34-40

What do we do with this? Play your part. I haven’t told the story in a long time, but I will never forget my first symphony...JUST DING.




"The pastors of America have metamorphosed into a company of shopkeepers, and the shops they keep are churches. They are preoccupied with shopkeeper's concerns — how to keep the customers happy, how to lure customers away from competitors down the street, how to package the goods so that the customers will lay out more money."

EUGENE PETERSON



The image features a white background with a central text block. At the top and bottom, there are decorative horizontal bars in various colors: orange, yellow, blue, green, and purple. The text is centered and reads:

A GREAT CHURCH ENJOYS GREAT UNITY.



32 Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.

ACTS 4:32 ESV



5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.... 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."

ACTS 2:5, 9-11 ESV

The image features a white background with four horizontal, rounded rectangular bars. Two bars are at the top: an orange one on the left and a yellow one on the right. Two bars are at the bottom: a green one on the left and a purple one on the right. The text is centered in the middle of the page.

A GREAT CHURCH EXPERIENCES GREAT POWER.



33 And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

ACTS 4:33 ESV





“The temptation to consider power an apt instrument for the proclamation of the gospel is the greatest temptation of all.”

HENRI NOUWEN



The image features a white background with a central text block. At the top, there are three horizontal bars of rounded ends in orange, yellow, and blue. At the bottom, there are three horizontal bars of rounded ends in green, orange, and purple. The text is centered and reads:

A GREAT CHURCH EXHIBITS GREAT GRACE.

33 And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold 35 and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

ACTS 4:33-35 ESV




"You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

2 TIMOTHY 2:1



The image features a white background with a central text element. At the top and bottom, there are decorative horizontal bars in various colors: orange, yellow, blue, green, and purple. The text is centered and reads:


A GREAT CHURCH ENSURES GREAT CARE.



36 Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, 37 sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

ACTS 4:36-37 ESV





23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, 24 for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

ACTS 11:23-24 ESV



34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

MATTHEW 25:34-40 ESV