

Character

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[0 : 00] It's our first Sunday in 2025, and so we're starting something that we're going to be doing every year, Lord willing, and that is asking the Lord what he has to say about our church for the year.

If you look at the book of Revelation, there's seven churches in the beginning of the book of Revelation, and Jesus has thoughts about all those churches. He has a lot of corrections.

He has some affirmations to some of those. But what he doesn't, you can't say that he doesn't have thoughts, okay? He has thoughts on all of those churches, and he has thoughts on our church as well.

And so what we want to do is seek the Lord and say, Lord, what do you think about our church? What do you have for us in this new year? So that's something we did together, prayed towards this new year, asked the Lord, what are three words that you have for us for this year?

And the three words that God gave us are character, family, and order. Character, family, and order, okay? And so I'm going to speak on all three of these.

[1 : 14] I'm going to start today by speaking on character, okay? We're going to talk today about character. You can turn to 2 Peter chapter 1 if you want to look at the main scripture we're going to come off of.

But one thing I wanted to say by way of intro as well is that something I've been thinking about is that a lot of times when people think of church, they think it's very complicated, very difficult.

And because so many churches don't grow or because so many churches close their doors, that it must be really difficult to have a healthy church and for having a healthy church grow and thrive.

But I think it's really important for us to look at it no different than you would look at anything else that's healthy. If something's healthy, it grows. If something that is alive always needs certain components to stay alive and to be healthy and to continue to grow, and the church is no different from that, okay?

The church is no different from that. And most often, we tend to overcomplicate this in our hearts and minds. And so what it does is it breeds unbelief in us when we're trying to be the church and do church together.

[2 : 22] And we just need to be transformed by the renewing of our mind because when it really comes down to it, church isn't all that complicated on what makes it healthy because Jesus, and it would be one thing if we just didn't know and we had to figure it all out.

But if you read the Bible, there are clear communications from the Bible on what it means to be a healthy church. There are clear components and different people, gifts that God has given to the church who are gifted in certain ways to build the church.

When apostles are apostling and prophets are prophesying and being prophets and pastors are pastoring and teachers are teaching and evangelists are evangelizing, the church builds itself up and it grows, okay?

That's just one aspect of it. That's just one verse. But there's multiple verses like that. There's multiple ways that the Bible says, hey, this is how you should build. There's multiple verses that say this is the way church should function.

This is what a healthy church looks like. This is the components necessary. This is God's will. And it's important for us to get faith around the building blocks of God's kingdom in the context of his church.

[3 : 26] And instead of having our kind of default be, oh yeah, church is really hard to be healthy. Church is really hard to grow in a healthy way. Church is really hard to thrive. Well, is that true? Is it really as hard as we make it out to be? Or is it just that very often we're just missing the components that God so specifically, clearly gave us in his word to build the church his way?

Does that make sense? I think it's an important question to ask. And it's something that I think God was stirring in my heart even this morning to ask you. And to ask you, where is your faith when it comes to the church?

And is it based on what you have seen? And not to mention that so much of our faith ends up being on what has been called church and how successful or unsuccessful it's been.

When most often in our culture, what has been called church is not church in fact. It's not. It's not the way God wanted it to be. It's not the way God prescribed it to be.

[4 : 31] It's not the way God's laid out in the scriptures for the church to be. And therefore, we should not let those churches in name only that end up being very weak, very feeble, that end up closing their doors, that end up not being thriving, alive churches, determine whether or not we're going to have faith that this church, Christ's church, is going to be in an alive and a thriving church.

If you're doing that, I got a word for you this morning. It's a different word from the three words. Stop. Stop doing that. Okay? Don't do that. Don't think that way. Change your mind.

Repent. And start thinking in faith according to the word of God, according to the ways of God. All right? So, 2 Peter 1, 3-10.

So, character is one of those things that's very important to a healthy church. Character is extremely important to a healthy church. If you don't have character, you might say you.

I'm talking about the people of the church because the church is people. Okay? If the people that comprise the church don't have character, it's not going to be healthy. It's not going to thrive.

[5 : 40] Okay? Let's look at the main text on this. 2 Peter 1, starting in verse 3. Okay? His divine power is granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

Through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desires.

Okay? Verse 5, He says, For this reason, so all that He just laid out there, now He says, For this reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue.

Virtue with knowledge. Knowledge with self-control. Self-control with steadfastness. Steadfastness with godliness. And godliness with brotherly affection. And brotherly affection with love.

All character issues. Okay? Verse 8, He says, For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[6 : 57] Whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he's blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election.

For if you practice these qualities, you will never fall. Wow! Right? That just lays it out there. Some really direct, specific things.

All right? Some really direct, specific things. First, it starts off by saying these great things we've been given. His divine power has granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

So, most often people say, Well, I just don't feel like I have everything I need for life and godliness. Well, your feelings betray you.

What does the Bible say? Will you submit to your feelings when the Word says something different? What is your standard? Your feelings or the Word? God's Word says that his divine power has given you most things?

[8 : 04] No. All things that pertain to life and godliness. Well, I'm trying to do my life. I'm trying to be godly. Both things are difficult. Sometimes I don't feel like I have what I need.

Well, the Bible says you have all you need for life and godliness. Do you believe that? Right here. And he said that that's through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.

He's revealed himself. He's shown himself. Have you seen Jesus? Have you seen the Father, he said? The exact representation of the Father is Jesus. He's God in bodily form so that we could know him and see him and understand what he is like.

Okay? Through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, and then it says in verse 4, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature.

Wow. Okay. Now he's saying you have everything you need, then I'm going to give you these promises. I got these promises for you. It helps you become partakers of the divine nature, which goes with what Judah was sharing when we took the Lord's table.

[9 : 12] I can't do it on my own. I need to partake of the divine nature, because my nature is not getting me anywhere. Right? So of course I need to partake of the divine nature, which what does it do?

That is what's caused me to escape from the corruption that's in the world because of sinful desire. Now in light of all this, because he says for this very reason, essentially he's saying, now that I've laid that all out, for this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith.

Now this is where a lot of times you have the two ditches in Christianity, right? There's the ditch where it's just like, oh no, the Lord has done everything. I don't need to do anything. I'm not going to get into your workspace religion.

You know, it's Christ. It's all Christ. It's Christ, Christ, Christ, Christ. It's Christ church, man. That's what we call it. Right? But he says in light of all this, make every effort.

Whoa, whoa, whoa. Effort? Doesn't depend on man's effort, but God's mercy. Don't you know that verse? Yes, but take it into, that's, that's not the only verse in the Bible though. There's a lot of other verses like this one.

[10 : 16] Okay? So it's both of us. The other ditch is that, oh, it's all on me. I don't need, I just need to do everything. And I'm constantly feeling anxious. And I'm constantly like, I'm not doing enough.

And did I do enough? Am I pleasing? And no, it should be somewhere in the middle where you're saying, listen, I can't do anything apart from Christ, but I have to do things because of Christ.

Okay? And that's what he's saying. In light of all this stuff, for this very reason, make every effort. So I would assume that probably everyone who professes Christ in this room is making some effort, but is everyone who professes Christ in this room making every effort?

It's a good question, right? He didn't say, you know, give a little effort in this. A little spit and polish. Right? He says, no, make every effort. Make every effort.

To what? Supplement your faith. Why does he start with faith? Because that's where it all starts. Without faith, it's impossible to please God, Hebrews 11, 6 says. Okay? So, grace comes through faith.

[11 : 21] Faith is where it starts. But he's saying, you've got to make every effort to supplement. You guys know what a supplement is. Many of you take supplements, right? We take supplements. Why? Because we're not getting what we need in our food, so we take a supplement to add to it.

Okay? We're adding to our faith and saying, okay, I'm going to supplement it with virtue and knowledge and self-control and steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, love, which all these things, in essence, are really saying, character.

Character. Make every effort to supplement your faith with the character attributes, with things that are noble things to pursue. And then, he gives this, in verse 8, it's such a great statement.

This is what I'm talking about when I'm saying, you know, sometimes we overcomplicate church and our life together because he says, if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We know of people in churches who are ineffective or unfruitful in their knowledge of Jesus Christ. Some of us are saying, yeah, that's me. Not just that I know someone, that's me a lot of times.

[12 : 34] I feel ineffective, unfruitful. And you might say, well, what do I do about that? It lays it right out here. If these qualities, these character qualities, are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Okay? How do you, how are you kept from being ineffective or unfruitful? Have these things in increasing measure. keep going. Keep going. He endures to the end we'll be saved.

Matthew 24, 13, right? You don't just start. It's not just about starting. You got to persevere. You got to keep increasing. You got to keep pursuing. Say, God, I want you more than the things of this world.

I don't just start with you and then I just live this selfish, comfortable life and expect that that's Christianity. No, no, no, no, no, no. I possess these qualities in increasing measure. I'm making every effort to supplement my faith with these things.

This is a focus of my life. We put a lot of effort into a lot of things but do we put a lot of effort and maybe even go even further to say every effort into supplementing our faith with the character qualities that God wants?

[13 : 43] And again, please hear me. I'm not saying you just muster it up, pull yourself up by your own bootstraps and get it together, man. I'm saying you realize you don't have it together.

You'll never have it together on your own. You trust with everything within you, God's power working within you. You partake of the divine nature and then you give everything you got towards it in light of it.

Right? And you make every effort. This keeps us from being ineffective or unfruitful. Everybody hates when they're ineffective. Everybody hates when they're unfruitful.

What are you doing about it? Sometimes we complain about it. Sometimes we whine about it. Sometimes we're bummed about it. Sometimes we're even depressed about it. Sometimes that's all we can think about is how ineffective and unfruitful we are.

Or we could do something about it. Bible lays it really straightforward, pretty clear. Right? I mean, am I missing something here? It seems really straightforward right here.

[14 : 42] Right? It says, if you, if you, these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. I'm looking at that.

I'm saying, this is good info. this is important stuff right here. I don't want to be ineffective. I don't want to be unfruitful. And so if you have an area where you are ineffective or unfruitful, ask the question, is it because I've grown complacent?

That I've just, I've let a specific area of my life not be increasing in the virtue of Christ, the character of Christ.

I'm just going through the motions. And this is the great reminder is verse 9. Forever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he's blind. Why? Because he's forgotten that he's been cleansed from his past sins.

That's why we take the Lord's table every week. Why? So we don't forget that we've been cleansed from our past sins. Because when you forget that you've been cleansed from your past sins, you're nearsighted and blind.

[15 : 41] And when you're nearsighted and blind, you stop increasing. increasing. And when you stop increasing, you're ineffective and unfruitful. When you remember who Jesus is and what he's done for you.

When you remember the gospel, glad tidings of great joy that we just talked about this Christmas season. You remember the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That there's nothing in you that's good.

That everything, that all the things you do are for your own glory and fall short of the glory of God. No matter how much you attempt, you can never be good enough. It's never, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever enough so Jesus came, paid the price, lived the perfect life, was the perfect sacrifice so that in trusting in his atoning sacrifice and his resurrection from the dead, we could be made new and Jesus Christ could live inside of us, live through us, and we could be saved.

We could be saved. We could be saved from the penalty of sin. We could be saved from the power of sin and we trust and get excited about being saved from the presence of sin when he returns.

We trust these things. Have you forgotten these things? If you're not increasing or you've forgotten the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, these things will cause you to become blind, ineffective, and unfruitful in your knowledge of Jesus Christ.

[16 : 57] Isn't it interesting that it says in the knowledge of Jesus Christ because most people would say, oh, if I have the knowledge of Jesus Christ, I'm good. Uh-uh. Not according to this verse. Do you see how it says this will keep you from being, it doesn't just say they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful, period.

It says they will keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you thought that you can have knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ, and still be ineffective and unfruitful?

Don't just be comfortable because you say, oh, I've known Jesus for a long time. I've been saved since I was a kid. I've been professing Christians for a long time. You can have knowledge of Jesus Christ for a very long time and still be ineffective and unfruitful.

That's clearly what it's saying here. But we don't want that. I don't want that. Do you want that? We didn't, we didn't start this church so we could just coast.

We wanted to, we didn't want to be ineffective or unfruitful. We want to see fruit. We want to see fruit. Well, then we got to do it God's way. That's why he says, therefore, verse 10, therefore, okay, after laying all this out, he lays out the reasons, says make every effort.

[18 : 10] These will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of the Lord Jesus. It makes sure that you're not so nearsighted that you're blind and forgot that you can cleanse from your past sins. He goes through all that and then he says, therefore, so because all that's there, now be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election.

For if you practice these qualities, you will never fall. Whoa! Another great promise. You'll never fall. How often do we confess falling or we're afraid of falling or we think, oh, I'm just afraid I'm going to fall into sin.

Here's the way. Be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election. If you practice these qualities, you will never fail. You never fall. Okay? Continuing to increase.

Trusting God to do it. Pressing in. Being diligent. Making every effort. This is the language that Peter uses. That's great stuff. Okay? So where are you at with that?

Where are you at with your relationship to this concept of character? Character. What is your attitude towards the development of character not in your friend, not in your spouse, not in your kids, although that's all important?

[19 : 33] Me. Where am I at with pursuing character in me? Not just being consumed with everybody else and all their problems. My problems. Galatians 2.14 says, when I, this is Paul talking about Peter, he said, when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas, he saw that their conduct wasn't in step with the gospel.

This is just like what Peter's saying. He said, you've forgotten that you've been cleansed from your past sin. Paul saw that Peter was living that way and he confronted him. He said, I saw that your conduct wasn't in step with the gospel.

James 3.13 asks the question, who is wise and understanding among you? Then he says, by his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. And they say, well, are you wise?

Do you have understanding? Prove it. By what? Your character. Your good conduct. It always shows. It always shows. 1 Thessalonians 2.9-12 For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil.

We work night and day that we might not be a burden to any of you. While we proclaim to you the gospel of God, you are witnesses and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct towards you believers.

[20 : 55] For you know how like a father with his children we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. Okay?

You are witnesses how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct. How is your conduct? How is your character? How is it when people are looking? How is it when people are not looking? Someone once said your character is who you are when nobody is looking.

We love doing things to be praised by people, to be thought well of by people. Everybody wants to be thought well of by people. But what's most important, what will be most motivating is when you want to be thought well of by God, when you want to please Him.

God, I want my behavior, my character, my conduct to please You. I want to live in a manner worthy of the gospel, the good news, the free gift of eternal life that You gave me. I want to live in a manner worthy of that.

And Paul's saying, you're our witnesses and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct. How holy and righteous and blameless is your conduct? How holy and righteous is it not just on a Sunday morning or some gathering during the night of the week?

[21 : 59] How holy and righteous is your conduct when nobody's looking? 1 Peter 1, 15-16. He says, But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, You shall be holy, for I am holy.

1 Peter 2, 12 says, Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

And 1 Peter 3, 1-2 says, Wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by what? The conduct of their wives.

When they see your respectful and pure conduct. Okay? Again, same principle. Conduct, character is very powerful. Very powerful. So if we think of conduct for us as a church, I want to look at 14 specifics for us as a church.

These are 14 things, I think, knowing the different people in the church, these are 14 things, I think we should be asking the Lord, are these things, character issues, that we could increase in, be diligent in.

[23 : 17] Okay? Don't worry, I'm not going to spend a ton of time on each, but first one. Number one, being self-controlled. Being self-controlled. There's so many verses on self-control.

Proverbs 25, 28 says, A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls. If you plant a church or you have a church and the people in that church are not self-controlled, it's not going to be a healthy church.

Okay? It's like a city broken into without walls. It's not going to stand. It's going to fall. It's going to fall. Again, it goes back to what I was saying in the beginning. It's like, how do you have a healthy church?

It's not rocket science. It's not super complicated. You build his way, he'll grow it his way. You build his way, he'll breathe life into it his way. That's what he does. He loves to do that.

He's not apprehensive about that. But we got to get down to the nitty gritty and say, are we self-controlled? Are we steady? Are we erratic and prone to extremes?

[24 : 16] Up and down constantly? Are we saying, no, I'm self-controlled. My emotions are controlled. My self is controlled. I'm controlled. I'm not, I'm like a person, like a city broken into and left without walls.

I have self-control. It's a fruit of the spirit. So as I deny myself and live towards the spirit, the self-control will become more and more evident in my life. But is there specific areas where you're not self-controlled in that you're just kind of letting go and just become something you've been comfortable with?

Sometimes what happens is we become comfortable with character, with bad character. Like little things. We just become comfortable with them.

We just say, well, this is just my thing. We've to God that he would, that he would make us holy and he would set us apart and he would put his finger on those things that all of us, every single one of us, that he would put his finger on those things and say, I want to purify my church.

I want my church to be holy. I don't want them to have any area where they're not self-controlled. I want them to be self-controlled. Number two, commitment or being committed, right?

[25 : 28] Not flaky. Psalm 15, verse 4 in the CSB says, who may ascend the hill of the Lord? He who keeps his word whatever the cost.

He who keeps his word whatever the cost. Are you someone, character-wise, who can be counted on? Are you someone who keeps his word no matter what the cost? Okay?

This means you don't keep your word unless something else becomes more enjoyable, including sleep, including other relationships, including other things you'd rather do.

Okay? Let's be honest. That's the stuff that keeps us from keeping our word. Something we'd like to do better. Right? It's typically not some horrible thing. It's just something that we would rather do.

And so, we flake out. We don't keep our commitment. We can't be counted on. We can't truly be a partner who can be counted on because the commitment we weighed, well, there's something else more important to me.

[26 : 27] And sometimes, it's just as simple as sleep. Sometimes, it's just as simple as my own laziness. Just say, no, I want to be counted on.

I want to be a committed person. I want to have that as a character attribute. I want to be the kind of guy who truly can ascend the hill of the Lord because I keep my word even when it hurts. Okay? I keep my word whatever the cost.

Right? Are you someone who keeps his word that way? Are you someone who can be counted on? Sometimes, we end up developing a reputation for being counted on to be flaky. That's not the kind of counted on you want to be.

All right? Don't be counted on to be flaky. Don't be counted on to be late. Don't be counted on to not be counted on. Don't be counted on to be a person who doesn't keep their word. Don't be counted on to be a person who doesn't do what they say they're going to do.

Be counted, be a person who can be counted on to do what you said you were going to do. You can be counted on to do what God wants them to do. Be a committed person. Okay? That's a character attribute that, again, if you have a church that isn't committed, that can't be counted on, this is why we call our membership partnership. This is why we even have that as a part of our church. Why?

[27 : 39] Because how in the world? I mean, I've had people over the years, they've criticized the concept of membership or partnership. And I'm always like, hey, I'm all ears. I would love to hear how you would attempt to do church without the basis of people who are committed. Tell me. I'd love to hear. I've yet to hear a good answer to that question. And I've yet to be in one quote-unquote healthy church that has ever been filled with a group of people who are not committed. It can't be counted on. I don't know that one exists. I don't know how it could. There's a reason God calls us to keep our word, even when it hurts, even when it costs. Number three, good stewardship.

Good stewardship. 1 Corinthians 4 verse 2 says, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. That they be found faithful. All of us have been given gifts, stuff, things, things, and all these things. Every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of the heavenly lights, James 1 17. Okay. 1 Peter says, each person should use whatever gift they've received to serve the Lord. Okay. Stewardship. What are you doing with the gift you've been given? Are you using it? Do you know that you have gifts, but you just know that it would be a lot of work to use your gifts so you don't use them? What about the way you steward your finances? What about the way you steward your time? What are the way you steward just the talents that God's given you? Some of you are very talented in specific areas. Are you being a steward? Are you being faithful to the Lord?

Again, imagine, I mean, just looking around this room, there's not a lot of people in this room. It's a very small group of people. A lot of very gifted people. A lot of very talented people. A lot of resources here. A lot of awesome things in this one room. Again, it doesn't matter if you have a room full of talent and giftings if there's not stewardship. You don't get a healthy church by just getting a bunch of talented, gifted people because what you build with your gift, you'll destroy with your character. You don't build with giftings. You build with character. You build with character. Okay? And character stewards giftings. But don't be impressed with giftings.

We could go down a whole list of people who seemed very impressive with their giftings, even in recent celebrity Christianity. Okay? It looked like, wow, that person's really gifted. How impressive is their gift?

Not very impressive when they don't have character. When you have Bible teachers who are known for their Bible teaching and speak all over the country because of their Bible teaching, you find out they had a secret life of adultery.

[30 : 23] You think, isn't their gift impressive? No, I'm not impressed. You think their family's impressed that dad's sleeping with somebody else and found a younger, better model because mom was older?

I mean, that's the kind of stuff that happens. This is why character matters. You don't build church on gifting. God gives tons of gifting. Okay? Where's the character? Where's the character that can carry gifting?

When you combine those two together with stewardship, it's an amazingly powerful thing. When you have gifts combined with character, stewarding the gifts that you've been given by having character, undergirding them, foundationally established below them, now you have a healthy church. You have a healthy church.

Number four, being unafraid or not being anxious. Okay? Philippians 4 verse 6 says, don't be anxious about anything.

Don't be anxious about anything. Well, come on. Surely I could be anxious about some things. No, don't be anxious about anything. But in everything, by prayer and petition, offer your request to God. Okay?

[31 : 36] Anxiety is so rampant and so accepted and so medicated nowadays, it's become totally acceptable behavior that even in the church people think nothing of it. And we've turned what the Bible calls a sin into just an acceptable form of our everyday life.

When the opposite of anxiety is trusting in God. Right? And so when we have an anxious culture, people are anxious about all kinds of things, there's no health to that church.

When we lack the character of trusting in our God and are filled with anxiety, don't be anxious about anything. But offer your request to God. Why? Because God can be trusted.

Because God can be trusted. Do you know that? Do you believe that? Which brings me to the fifth one. Be trusting and not controlling. Psalm 37 verse 5 says, commit your way to the Lord, trust in Him, and He will act.

See, what happens is if we become anxious and we're not trusting in the Lord, we end up thinking that it's on us. And we have to control our circumstances. We have to control our situations.

[32 : 47] If I see, oh, that, if I start to worry about my finances, then I gotta control. If I start to worry about my spouse and how they're acting, I gotta control.

If I start to worry about my kids and what's gonna happen to them, I have to control. If I start worrying about my church, then I have to control. No, no. If you know that God's in control, that He is kind and good and sovereign and loving and faithful, and we could go on with a million other things He is, if you know that, then you trust.

But you trust to the degree, a friend of Manning once said, you trust to the degree that you know that you're loved. When you have the character of trusting in God, you're unshakable, you're unmovable.

You're only as strong as what you put your hope and your trust in. If you put your trust in something that can be taken away from you, if you put your trust in something that can be shaken, then you will be shaken. If you put your trust in the one who is unshakable, the unshakable King who gives us an unshakable kingdom, and you build your house on the rock, then when storms rage and the wind blows, your house and this house, this church, will stand.

What is this church built on? Is it built on anxiety, control, fear? Or is it built on trust in God, who makes all things grow for His glory?

[34 : 12] Number six. This is a different one, but I think it's an important one. Holistic. Okay? What do I mean by this? Well, Matthew 7, 18 says, A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.

Okay? So what I mean by this is, you ever see a person where it seems like they have a, you look at their life and you say, wow, tons of fruit in this area, and a bunch of bad fruit in this area?

I always ask the question, is the good fruit as good as it seems to be? Because the Bible says, a healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.

And we've almost kind of normalized this unholistic, uneven behavior and think, oh, this is a good thing. No. When you see that, that's a sign.

That's a sign for you to say, be concerned. The fact that there is so much lack of consistency in their life is telling you that maybe the good isn't as good as it seems to be.

[35 : 25] Because wisdom is always proved true by her actions. Right? We just read that before about how, who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct, let him show.

And so it seems like, wow, this person has a lot of wisdom, but man, they have a lot of bad conduct. You might say, maybe they don't have a lot of wisdom. And I've seen over and over again, this scriptural truth proved true multiple times, where it seems like, wow, there's over the top development in this particular area, but severe underdevelopment in the other area.

It makes you wonder how overdeveloped they actually are in that area. Oftentimes you'll see this with someone who knows the Bible extremely well. It seems like they can teach and know everything about the Bible, and yet they have no self-control in their life.

And they'd say, how in the world can they know the Bible so well and have no self-control in their life? I would say, well, maybe they know the Bible, but they probably don't know God. They know the words of God, but they don't know God himself.

They search the scriptures looking to find life, but they don't come to Jesus to have life, just like the Pharisees and Sadducees. Okay? So we need to have, when there is a holistic approach to character, because basically what it is, is what essentially happens and what it usually is when you see this, a bunch of good fruit and a bunch of really bad fruit in the same person, that means what you're seeing is, is ornaments on a dead tree.

[36 : 49] It's like a Christmas tree, right? It's like, it's dressed up by the person. It's not the natural fruit of the tree. Okay? It'd be like you have a dead tree out in your yard, a dead apple tree, and you start hanging alive apples on your tree.

You know, it's like, wow, it looks like a really good apple tree. It doesn't have leaves, but it has a lot of apples on it. It's really weird. A lot of apples, but no leaves. Surely it's good, right?

It's got a lot of apples on there. No, there's no leaves. That's probably because somebody attached to those apples. In the same way, when you see a life that's not holistic, that's not consistent, typically what that is, is evidence of self-made religion.

It's propping yourself up. It's building yourself up and presenting your own kind of good or religious version of yourself rather than yielding to the power of the Spirit to birth and transform you into the character and nature of Christ.

Okay? Number seven, being teachable. One of my favorite direct verses, I love direct verses, is Proverbs 12, verse one.

[38 : 04] He who hates reproof is stupid. Right? You don't get any more direct than that, right? He who hates reproof or hates correction is stupid. Don't be stupid. You know?

You might say, man, I don't know how you have a good, healthy church. Well, you hate reproof, you'll have a pretty stupid church, right? People who are corrected but just don't listen. People who have heard the truth and just don't obey it.

People who hear the Word and forget, you know, it's like looking in a mirror and forgetting what you look like. James 1, 22 says, you know, don't be hearers of the Word only, but be doers.

Okay? Be teachable. Someone brings something to you and there's multiple people saying, hey, I think this is something you need to work on. We need to work on those things. We need to work on those things.

We need to supplement our faith with whatever character attribute they're saying I need to work on. We need to be teachable. Number eight, selfless. Luke 9, 23 says, he said to all, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

[39 : 08] Like, how do I have a healthy church? Well, let's flip it around. How do you have a really unhealthy church? Have a bunch of selfish people. Have a bunch of people not denying themselves. Like, we could do a little experiment and figure out what would Christ's church look like after the end of this year if we all just gave in to ourself.

Would anybody want to be a part of this church? Any of us. Do you have to think about that for a long time to answer that question? Why? Because it's essential to be selfless. Do you see what I'm saying?

I'm saying that so often we complicate things that are so simple and what is really just missing from a healthy church's character. is character. It's us making every effort to just say things like selflessness.

It's like what Seth was just talking about with the kids. Like, imagine how transformed all of our kids would be if they just had this one attribute that they were really making effort in.

Being selfless. Like, Seth was saying, how many times is there strife and fights and crying and whining and all this because of one thing? I want what I want now and I don't care what anybody else wants.

[40 : 14] I'm not going to look to other people's needs first. I'm looking to me, old me, number one. Right? It's the same in the church with adults, right? Number nine, gentle. Philippians 4 verse 5 in the NIV says, let your gentleness be evident to all.

Let your gentleness be evident to all. Okay? I have offended, hurt, and sinned against people multiple times in my life because I wasn't gentle. All right?

That's a bad character attribute of myself. That's an area where I have to make a stronger effort to be gentle. Okay? That doesn't mean I can't be strong. It doesn't mean I can't be forceful and convicted.

But like someone once said, it's like being a velvet brick. Okay? There should be gentleness with it. And you should let your gentleness be evident to all. If your gentleness is only evident to you, it might be a problem there.

Okay? But again, if you have a church that's not gentle, you think a lot of new people are going to be like, I really like this church. They're really harsh. No.

[41 : 21] They're very gentle. They spoke hard truths in a gentle way. Number 10, mature. Hebrews 6.1 says, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturities.

Okay? Immaturity is a lacking in character that causes all sorts of problems and the root of all kinds of problems.

Maturity is knowing when. Maturity is having the wherewithal to know what is appropriate for that particular time and place. Right? It usually comes through experience. It usually comes through knowledge of what God wants and the truth.

But maturity is huge. And again, you might look at different churches and you might say, wow, that church is really unhealthy. How many churches do you say that church is really unhealthy because they lack maturity?

Probably a lot. If we're mature and the way we, if we, if we make every effort to add to our faith maturity, that's going to make a big difference.

[42 : 24] Number 11, sexual purity. Ephesians 5.3 in the NIV says, among you, there must not even be a hint of sexual morality or of any kind of impurity or of greed because these are improper for God's holy people.

Again, you're thinking about a church, you're thinking about how do we build a healthy church together? If I'm going to build a healthy church together, I can't give myself to that which is improper for God's holy people because the church is made up of God's holy people.

And if it's made up of God's holy people, then a healthy church would not be made up of people who are doing that which is improper for God's holy people. And God says that what is improper for God's holy people is to even have a hint.

It's to even have a hint. Have you ever had the beverage that's called hint where it just has a hint of a, it tastes like water. You barely have anything in it. It's like, well, this is raspberry.

Is it though? I mean, it's basically water. Okay? That's the whole point. It's a hint. It's just a little hint. A hint is not much. He's saying, among you, there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality.

[43 : 32] So he's not saying, you know, well, you can have a little bit. He's saying, not even a hint. Not even a little bit. It's not an option.

Christians in a church who say sexual immorality is not an option. It's not an option. The problem is, a lot of times, Christians actually believe it's an option.

You might say, well, yeah, but that's just the way people are. It's like, well, no, because there's certain things that every single person thinks are not an option. I would assume most of you think murder is not an option, right?

Like, it's not something you're entertaining about committing. You're probably not plotting to kill anybody right now. And if you ever even thought about it at one point in time, you quickly just said, no, that's not an option, right?

Okay? It's not an option. We have things like that. Rape is typically something you think, no, not an option, right? There's all kinds of sins like that.

[44 : 30] Well, what if we said all kinds of sexual immorality are not an option? Looking at pornography, not an option. It's just not, it's not, I can't do it. Now, you can't, like, avoid seeing images in this world because they're everywhere.

But, you can have the character that says, no, no, not an option. I'm not going there. Yes, very attractive person, moving on.

And it's important to know that being attracted is not a sin, okay? Finding a woman attractive, finding a man attractive, that's not sin. That was actually a gift given by God to you, okay? Some people are so defeated by their attraction that they give in to sin because the devil has defeated them by lying to them about attraction, being attracted to an attractive person being sinned.

No, you can notice that someone's attraction, don't lust over the person. Oh, that person's really attractive. That person has a really attractive body. Not going to lust. Moving on. Not even a hint.

Not even a hint. That's the kind of character. Sexual morality is one of the number one things in the Old Testament, spoken of in the New Testament, and in our modern day culture.

[45 : 44] How many leaders, how many prominent people in the church, outside of the church, in business, in politics, how many people have been taken up by this one sin of sexual morality? Character matters.

Character matters. Three more. Number 12. Kind of four, because this is like a double. Marriage and parenting. Okay? Marriage and parenting.

1 Timothy 3, 4-5, I'm talking about the qualifications of an elder, says, he must manage his own household well, with all dignity, keeping his children submissive. For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

Okay? I really could have just said this is household management, would have been maybe a better way to word it. That includes if you're single, just managing your household well. If you're married, managing your marriage well.

And if you have children, managing your kids well. And you say, well, that's the qualifications of an elder. Well, first of all, we should all ascribe to the nobility of the character qualities of an elder. D.A. Carson says one of the most remarkable things about the qualifications of an elder is how unremarkable they are.

[46 : 50] You know, is it really that remarkable to say that we should have healthy families? Not really. Well, that's just for elders. Everybody else can have a bad family. No. Right?

Because he says that he puts a principle in here that supersedes just eldership. He says, he asks a rhetorical question. He says, if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

Okay? And again, if you have a church where people don't have good marriages and they don't have good parenting and they don't manage their single life well, they don't manage their households well, are you going to have a healthy church in that context?

No. How could you possibly? If you can't even take care of your own household, how will you take care of God's household? We've got to start with our household. How's it going in your household? Is there a character there?

Good management, good stewardship, good faithfulness, doing the work. Doing the work in your marriage, doing the work with your kids, doing the work as a single person to be godly and for the glory of Christ.

[47 : 52] Okay? Number 13. Diligent, hardworking, not lazy. James 4, 17 in the NIV says, if anyone then knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

If you know the good you ought to do and don't do it, sin. You sin, right? This is like the ultimate verse on laziness in my opinion, right? Because isn't that not what laziness is? I know the good I ought to do.

But I'm not going to do it, right? I know the good I ought to do, but I think there's something I'd rather do. But I know the good I ought to do, but I'm not going to do it.

Well, the Bible just says real straight, you know, people get so hung up on all the things in the Bible that seem cryptic and hard to understand. There's a lot in here that's not. That's just a little disclaimer I wanted to make there.

Like a verse like this. If you know the good you ought to do, but you don't do it, that person sins. Well, that's pretty straight talk right there. And what sin is it? It's the sin of laziness. Laziness sees what needs to be done, knows what needs to be done, and says I'm not going to do it.

[48 : 59] And that kind of lack of character in a church is a big deal. Because there's a lot of things that need to be done. A lot of things that need to be done in our own households, a lot of things that need to be done in the church, a lot of things that need to be done in the world, a lot of things that need to be done just for practical things like making money and taking care of putting food on the table.

There's a lot of things that need to be done. And when you know the good you ought to do and you just don't want to do it because that would cost you more, that's called sin. And if any of you in this room have one of those things or a couple of those things, things you know you should do, things that God's been telling you to do, things that the Word's telling you to do, things your spouse has been telling you to do, things your friends have been telling you to do, and you just won't do it, you're in sin and you need to repent.

Repent of your laziness. Last one, 14. Faith, not unbelief. Hebrews 3 verse 12 says, Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God.

It's so easy to get an unbelief. It's so easy to have more faith in things not happening than things happening. It's so easy to have... Most unbelief really isn't a lack of faith.

It's just faith in the wrong direction. Have you ever thought about that? Right? If you have unbelief, you typically really have a strong faith that something's going to go bad. I have a strong belief that something's not going to work out.

[50 : 21] It's not that you lack faith. It's just you're placing in the wrong thing. You actually think there's more sense in putting your faith in something going poorly based on what you've seen rather than something going the way God says it's going to because of God's power and promise.

Where does your faith lie? Be careful that you don't have a sinful, unbelieving heart. When it comes to the church, we need faith. Faith is the substance of things hoped for. It's the substance of things not seen. Faith is looking into what you don't see and trusting that it's real.

It's more real than what you don't see. Can we have faith for this coming year? Can we have faith for our own character and make every effort to have these qualities in increasing measure so that we're not ineffective and unproductive in our knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Not forgetting that we've been cleansed from our past sins. being diligent to make our calling and election sure. If we practice these qualities, we will never fall. That's a great way to look at this next year.

And again, one last time just to be clear. Please don't do this in your own strength. This isn't some you-ra-ra, be a better person for the new year. This is you-ra-ra, you're a really bad person and you can't be a good person for the new year.

[51 : 32] But Jesus, by His strength, His power, and His Spirit, is giving you everything you need for life and godliness. And if you believe that, then you make every effort to supplement. Amen?

Amen. Let's stand. Amen.