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# HEALTHY CHARACTERISTICS IN YOUR CHURCH

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

If size alone is not a legitimate indicator of spiritual health (since political conventions, Mormon temples, and stock car races all attract crowds), are there other more telling signs of well-being in church?

Here are some of pulse points I keep my finger on in my congregation:

- **Leaders' Lives**—Like Old Testament prophets, are the true leaders in my church experiencing the strange and marvelous reality of *living out* stuff that God is doing in the whole church? For instance, this last week four different men told me of their desire to volunteer one afternoon a week at the church. Coincidence or God-incidence? What is happening in leaders is especially diagnostic of seasons God may be bringing our way; look for changes in the prevailing winds...
- **Post-service Conversations**—Do people want to stick around after “church” is over, and what are the subjects of their conversations with one another? If the same groups of friends are just chitchatting or tacking down details, I’m not nearly as excited as if I notice the normal groups are split up among newer people, and they’re talking about what God has recently done in their lives.
- **Expectant Worship**—Regardless of the piano player or song selection, I’m curious about the atmosphere in times of corporate celebration of the Lord. Are people leaning in or back? I thrill when many individuals seem to form their own little pockets of personal intimacy with the Lord in the midst of the whole congregation—not doing their own thing apart from the rest of us, but “lost” in communion with the Lord in the midst of us.
- **Stories**—The more I hear testimonies about what God is doing or saying in people’s lives (as opposed to just the normal goings-on), the happier I am. And when the talk around

church moves a bit further toward friends' and neighbors' encounters with God through evangelism, the more certain I am that we're healthy.

- ***Affection Levels***—I think that godliness (the whole hope for church goers) shows up more in qualities like kindness, patience and tenderness than in thunderous pronouncements and self-righteous judgments. People on whom God has been working tend to manifest soft hearts—and Jesus' trade secret says, *He who has been forgiven much, loves much* (see Luke 7:47). Beyond what is normal for friends in a Rotary Club, what signs of affection do I pick up in my church?
- ***Cheerful, Heartened Buzz***—Forgive the pagan allusion, but the best way I know to describe this attribute in church is to call it *pixie dust*. When that stuff gets sprinkled on a congregation it creates an excited joy, a sense of expectation about the future, coupled with such enjoyment of the present that no one is in a hurry to move on. It's like enjoying a fabulous meal, and spying at the same time the desert tray with its exquisite possibilities. Such timelessness and inability to contain the entire blessing is a touch of Heaven to come.