

A Spiritual Wellness Plan for 2018

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Preacher: Fred Stone

[0 : 00] Well, did you make any plans for personal improvement this new year? It's a good thing to do, and the first of the year is a good time.

A lot of people do. Most of us, whether we did or not, we do things like that from time to time, don't we? We make plans to improve ourselves, what, physically, financially.

We make plans to improve vocationally, academically.

Some parents here wanted me to say that academic part. It's the beginning of the new semester. Don't get behind this semester, they wanted me to say.

We make plans. Sometimes we'll even write them down. Develop a well-thought-out plan for improvement in some area of our life.

[1 : 06] Let me ask you this. Have you ever made plans to grow spiritually? Have you ever thought about, actually maybe wrote down a spiritual wellness plan?

Well, that's what I want us to look at this morning. I want us to think about that, and if that might be helpful to you, write it down.

Now, what we're going to do, we're not going to just pull something out of thin air. We're not going to make it difficult. What I want us to do is look at something.

I want to use a model that's in the newsletter every week. That's at the bottom of the order of service every week. It's our church's mission statement.

You can see it there. It's on the screen now. Pickens First Baptist Church exists to be a worshipping, evangelizing, learning, and loving family of faith to the glory of God.

[2 : 06] You see in the newsletter that it's based on several different passages of Scripture, mainly the Great Commission in Matthew 28 and Acts chapter 2.

I want you to turn with me, if you would, to Acts chapter 2 this morning because that's where we're going to just camp out. In looking at that statement, there still on the screen, I want you to keep in mind, when you see Pickens First Baptist Church, we're not talking about a building.

Because the church is not a building, as you well know. The church is people. Right now, Pickens First Baptist Church is gathered collectively.

Part of us was in the 8 o'clock service. Some that are not in here now were in Sunday school. But right now, a large number of our church family members, we're gathered collectively right here in this building on Main Street.

But most of the time, we're scattered. Most of the time, Pickens First Baptist Church is scattered throughout Pickens County and beyond. It might surprise you.

[3 : 22] A lot of weeks, part of this church family is not just in other states. Part of this church family is even in other countries.

And that's not a rarity. Well, the acronym WELL. We are a WELL, or we desire to be a WELL church.

That acronym helps us as a church to remember who we are and to stay focused on these God-given priorities of worship, evangelism, learning, and loving.

Well, today, I want us to say that that little word WELL, that acronym, can help us either begin or stay focused on our own personal spiritual wellness plan.

Turn to Acts 2, beginning in verse 42. I want you to see where those words, worship, evangelism, learning, and loving come from.

[4 : 28] They're being lifted right out of, not exactly those words, but as you'll read the passage, I'm going to look at one other thing before we dive into it. You'll see that our purpose statement is based on what the early church was doing.

Let's read it. It's the first summary statement of what was going on in the early church in its infancy. And they, that is the believers, over 3,000 people were converted prior to this.

You can read just a few verses above it. But the church, the people who trusted Christ, the church family there in Jerusalem, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

And awe came upon every soul. And many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common.

But note the next verse. They still owned their stuff. This is not communism or socialism. Look at verse 45. And they were selling their possessions and belongings.

[5 : 57] They were doing it because they wanted to. They were doing it because they chose to sell their possessions and belongings and distribute the proceeds to all as any had need.

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.

And the Lord added to their number day by day, those who were being saved. This is the first summary statement of what was going on in the life of the early church.

John Hammett teaches theology at Southeastern Seminary, says that this is the most appropriate text in the New Testament for identifying and understanding the ministries that the Lord's church should be involved in.

He says this passage. And he also quotes Richard Longnecker, a New Testament scholar, in his commentary on Acts. He also says they describe the habitual, ongoing practices of the early church.

[7 : 10] What many people who study this, John Stott, some of you have read his books, another New Testament scholar. Many people look at this passage of Scripture and say, this is not just something they were doing at this point in time.

This is an example of how the people of God gathered together as a church, made up of individual Christians. This is how they lived.

This is how they developed and grew spiritually. They worshiped. They evangelized. They shared the gospel. They learned.

They studied God's Word. They listened to the apostles. And they loved. One another in a great, life-giving kind of way. But also other people.

I put together several years ago a chart that shows how several respected pastors of various denominations look at what we're looking at in this section, Acts 2, 42 through 47, and identify what they call either the priorities or purposes or objectives of the church.

[8 : 22] The chart is not as big as I wanted it to be because I wanted it there all at one time. But you notice on the very end, if you go back to that last slide there, on the very end, Greg Laurie and Harry Reader, they actually use the acronym WELL to describe what's going on in the early church.

Worship, evangelism, learning, and loving. Rick Warren, the first slide there, he describes those things using five words. Worship, evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, and ministry.

James White does something very similar in the middle. Chuck Swindoll just uses four words. Look at it. The second column, worship, evangelism, instruction, and fellowship.

When Swindoll writes about that, he actually says the purpose of the church or the priorities of the church, he uses the word WIFE. Worship, instruction, fellowship, and evangelism. Now, I'm pointing that out to say this is not something that I or some obscure person thought up a catchy little phrase or something.

As we think about what God has called us to be and do as a church, and the church is made up of people, what God calls you and me to do as priorities in our spiritual relationship with Him, in our growth and our maturity.

[9 : 47] We're going to grow and mature. We need to focus on worship, evangelize, learning or discipleship, loving, which is fellowship, and service or ministry.

Let's look at it now. Let's look at the passage, and what I want us to do, is think about it. These are spiritual priorities for every Christian. As we go through this, and we think this is what was happening in the lives of those first Christians in that early church in Jerusalem.

And that is how Christians have grown and matured ever since. It's what God expects of us. It's the way He intends for us as Christians, to know Him better, to know how to please Him, to serve His purpose.

So, these are spiritual priorities for all Christians. They can serve as the foundation for your personal spiritual wellness plan if you don't have one, if you want to begin one today.

Let's look at it. Let's look at it in the order in which they come in the passage. First of all, it's a priority of learning. Look back now at verse 42. It says, And they devoted themselves, excuse me, to the apostles' teaching.

[11 : 12] This phrase is more literally translated, in the New American Standard, they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching. This was not something they just did occasionally.

This was something that they considered a way of life. They were serious about it. They were devoted to listening to the Word of God as it came through those apostles.

Look at the object of their devotion, the apostles' teaching. That's what we have in our New Testament. A good way to just think about the apostles' teaching here in verse 42, well, we've got it now. What God wants us to have in the form of the New Testament.

And most of you know the Old Testament was the apostles' Bible, and they quoted it liberally in their writings in the New Testament. So we can apply this, the idea of devoting ourselves to the apostles' teaching.

We need to devote ourselves to the Word of God. We need to be serious students of Scripture. Now, as a church, we need to make sure that we are teaching the Bible.

[12 : 23] That's our playbook. It's our primary source for what we believe and how we're to live as Christians. But as individual believers, we need to make sure that we are reading and studying and actually learning what God is saying to us through His Word.

Note, this is the first thing mentioned in this passage because it's the Word of God that informs us how to do everything else.

How we worship. How we love. How we express love. How we practice evangelism. Think about worship. Sometimes we will say, and well-meaning, and I understand what's being said when someone says, maybe in a prayer, maybe around the 4th of July, I thank God that in this country we can worship God as we please.

I understand. That's being thankful for freedoms to assemble and worship. But I want you to understand something. We do not worship God as we please. We worship God if we worship Him in an acceptable way.

We worship Him as He has revealed Himself and as He tells us to in Scripture. We need to make sure, and some people may not think about it this way, but we need to make sure that what we think about God, our image of God, is not something we just dreamed up or just heard somewhere.

[13 : 55] We need to make sure that our understanding of who God is, how He is, how He works, is the way He has revealed Himself to be in Scripture and specifically in Jesus.

God calls us, and He enables us to be well Christians. He instructs us through His Word, and then He enables us or empowers us through His Spirit.

Now, in our full church mission statement or purpose statement, we go on to explain how the only way we can do what God's called us to do is through His power, the power of the Holy Spirit.

Look at it. We say in this statement, through the power of the Holy Spirit and prayer. Prayer is how we access God's power. Sometimes we, as Jesus Himself said, we do not have because we do not ask, or James tells us that.

Sometimes we miss out on some things, spiritually speaking, we miss out on some things that maybe God would give us, but we don't ask. We don't seek, as Jesus said.

[15 : 09] We don't really care enough to talk to God about it and be serious in our asking Him about it. But it's through the power of the Holy Spirit and prayer. We will seek to accomplish our purpose through a vital worship encounter with the living God, evangelistic outreach to the unsaved, learning experience with the Word of God, and loving involvement with both our family of faith and the world.

Now, I want you to think. Do you need to make the priority of learning a part of your spiritual wellness plan for this new year?

Are you consistently reading, seeking to understand what God's saying in His Word? I'm going to say, if you are not, it's because you don't want to.

Now, I know, life is busy. And it may be that you don't read the Bible, you're not really into the Word as much as you want to. You just can't put in the time that you would like.

There's not enough hours a day. I could understand that. But if you rarely pick up the Bible, if you just sort of give it sort of a casual glance, five minutes a day, I'm going to say, that's what you want to do.

[16 : 38] Because deep down, bottom line, we do what we want to do. We make what is important to us a priority. We may not can do everything we want to do, as much as we want to do.

I make time to spend with my wife. I make time to spend with my grandchildren every week. There's people that I'll say, no, I can't do that.

Because I'm going to be doing something with my grandson and granddaughter maybe. Because they're a priority. And I'm going to make time for them. And you do that. You make time for people in your life.

Maybe not all the time you would like. But you make time for people and even things in your life that's important to you. And if we don't spend any time with God, virtually no time with Him and His Word just because we don't want to.

But if you think, I want to want to. I would like to have a greater desire. I know I am a Christian.

[17 : 41] I want to know God. But maybe you're just a lazy reader. Maybe you're easily distracted. I want to encourage you right here. It's just still the, what, the 14th day of a brand new year.

Ask God to give you a greater desire. to know Him better and develop your relationship with Him more deeply by being able to spend time in His Word, reading it, and listening to Him.

Ask God to help you to find that time to put forth the effort to stay awake, to stay alert so you can read and listen and just look at your Bible reading as an opportunity to get to know God better, to discover how to please Him, to discover how to enjoy, I mean really, enjoy a relationship with Him as your Heavenly Father.

Now, if you are just reading the Bible, to say you're reading it, I want to caution you here. as great as it would be to read through the Bible this year, if all you're going to do is read a large portion of Scripture and just check it off, or you're just going to read and try to just fill your mind with more factual information, that's not really going to help you grow spiritually.

I want to encourage you to ask God to help you to not just be a reader of the Word, but as James tells us, be a doer of the Word.

[19 : 23] Read it with the idea, I want to understand what God wants me to believe, because there's all things, all kinds of things competing for your belief right now in this world. Ask God to help you understand how to actually put what He's teaching into practice in your life, in your home, where you work, in school.

Make being a learning Christian by studying, listening to God, studying His Word, listening to Him as He speaks to it, it's vitally important for you as an individual and for us together as a church to be learning Christians.

The next priority is the priority of loving. Look at verse 42 again. They devoted themselves, later on, to the fellowship look at verses 44 and 45. And all who believed were together and had all things in common, and they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need.

And then the first part of verse 47, and having favor with all the people. Now you know the idea of loving here comes from the word fellowship. It's referring to what we have in common.

And these people, small walks of life, what they had in common was their common commitment to love for Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

[20 : 48] They had a common commitment to one another because they were brothers and sisters in Christ. They had the most important relationship in all their life, their relationship with the Lord Jesus. That brought them together.

And what we see in these verses is love in action. No one forced them to sell their possessions.

No one forced them to take the money they got for their possessions and give it to the church, so to speak, to give it to other people. They had such a love for one another that when they saw people in need, people doing without food maybe, people who couldn't, who were not getting their basic needs met and they had more than they needed.

They were selling some of the things that they had, not everything they had. They were selling things and giving the money to make sure that real needs were being met in that fellowship, in that church.

That was real love, sacrificial love in action. And it was taking place among the believers. It was taking place there among the Christians, but it impressed all kinds of people.

[22 : 01] As that last verse we looked at, having favor with all the people, even unbelievers were impressed. Wouldn't you be impressed if you knew a group of people in a church or in any kind of organization that they so loved one another that they gave of their finances.

They gave of their wealth. They gave up something so that other people could have their needs met. It was powerful. The apostles emphasized love as the priority, character, quality of Christians.

Paul wrote that great chapter in 1 Corinthians 13 on the priority of love, and he explained what that was, 1 Corinthians 13. They learned that from Jesus. Note what Jesus told his apostles.

A new commandment I give to you that you love one another just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. And by this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

That's how we're supposed to be known as Christians, by the love that we have for one another. The question is, are we as a church?

[23 : 16] Are you as an individual? You know, one of the best definitions of love that I've ever heard, simple, is love is meeting needs.

If you love somebody, you're going to try to meet their need. And that's exactly what was going on here in this early church. I see it sometimes, or you do too. We see it sometimes in our church.

Some of you, some of you, your gift, your spiritual gift, your ability, you're just a real empathetic kind of person.

you have what might be called the gift of mercy. You can identify with somebody who's hurting. And you can just be there with them, encouraging them, helping them.

You're just that friend who just stays there. And just your presence is giving a gift to somebody. Some of you have a gift, hands-on kind of gift.

[24 : 19] When you know someone's in need, there's actual things you can do to fix something, to take care of a particular need. Some people have the financial, or have the financial resources to give and meet a need.

And some people do it in our church, and they don't let anybody else know it. You don't have to do it in honesty. I'm not saying that. But more of that is done than you might realize. There is real love and action taking place among God's people everywhere, including in this church.

The question we need to ask ourselves now, is you need to ask yourself personally. Do people see such love in me? Am I demonstrating practical, need-meeting love to other people as a priority in my life?

If not, then you need to make it a greater priority in your own personal spiritual wellness plan. And the way to start may be for you to just pray and ask God to help you to take more interest in other people.

It may be that you need to pray and ask God, Lord, help me to not be so self-aware help me to be aware of people around me. Help me to notice needs, especially needs I might could meet.

[25 : 42] Help me to have genuine concern, empathy, sympathy for people around me. Take an interest in other people.

Open your eyes. Don't be afraid to see needs and then step forward and try to meet that need. One way to do that is to pray for people. Focus on them by praying for them.

And if you are a loving person, don't get complacent. Like I said, a lot of people in our church, they love, they demonstrate it in all kinds of ways. Sometimes we can sort of get complacent in it, sort of, just sort of, I've done my part.

Look at what Paul reminds us of in his letter to the Thessalonian Christians. He's being very encouraging. He's affirming them in what they're doing.

Look at it. Now concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write you for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another for that indeed is what you are doing.

[26 : 49] He's affirming them. They're doing great. But we have a tendency in things we do great to slack off, to become complacent. So he says, but we urge you brothers to do this more and more.

Keep on, he's saying. Let's look at the third priority we see in this passage, the priority of worshiping. It says, and they devoted themselves to the breaking of bread and the prayers and all came upon every soul.

Then in verse 47, praising God, that little praise. I want you to note two things in verse 42. The breaking of bread most likely is a reference to the Lord's Supper. A part of their worship was celebrating the Lord's Supper together on a regular basis.

The prayers were prayer gatherings, corporate prayer, church family prayer, and it may have included regular prayer times in the temple. But what I want us to see is what is being described here is these Christians were focused on God.

They prayed, and they praised as a church family and as individuals. They truly experienced the presence of God in their lives.

[28 : 04] And it was an awesome experience, it says. Is worship a priority in your life? Is the worship with God's people like we are right now, is this a priority?

I mean, being here on a regular basis, participating when you are here. You know, just because we come doesn't mean that we worship. We can come and we can count the columns, we can count the grooves in the columns.

When I was growing up in church, I have to be honest with you, when I was growing up in church, there was some kind of dental mold in the back of the church where I grew up. There were 27 pieces that came down like this.

I counted them a hundred times. I didn't worship. You come in here, and let me say this, if we're going to worship on Sunday morning, it's got to start before we walk in this room.

You can't stay up half the night on Saturday night, get up at the last minute, rush in here, and sit down and catch your breath, and truly worship God.

[29 : 17] We've got to prepare. We've got to come here wanting to join together with others and focus on God and actually praise Him for who He is and thank Him for what He does in our lives, in our church, is worship, corporate worship.

Is it a priority to you? By your attendance, by your attention? What about private worship? Do you spend time with the Lord? Maybe just quiet time there at home somewhere, riding down the road, maybe listening to some Christian music.

You really get into praising God. Do you ever worship God in such a way here at church or privately, at home, out somewhere, however you like to do it, and you're just in awe of who God is, His greatness, His goodness, His sovereignty, His power, His personal presence and some details in your life.

Real worship will be about God. It'll be God-focused. Real worship won't be music-focused, it won't be preaching-focused, it won't be person-focused.

Real worship is always all about God. Focusing our praise, our love, our thanks, whatever it is, to Him. Because we realize who He is, what He has done and is doing.

[30 : 54] Does making worship a greater priority need to be a part of your personal spiritual wellness plan? I'm talking about your personal private worship, your corporate church family worship, maybe even your own family worship in your house, you and your spouse and your children.

That needs to be an important part of our lives as Christians. Well, if we're going to be spiritually healthy, personally, and as a church, we've got to make much of worshiping God along with learning and loving.

But I want us to look at one more thing, the priority of evangelizing. Look at verse 47. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. The priority of evangelism is different from the others.

In one way, we can think the people did nothing in this passage. In one way, when you read that, you can think the growth of the early church, the Lord added, God was saving people, that it was an overflow of everything else the church was doing.

It was an overflow of their learning and loving and worshiping. That certainly is implied by the way it's expressed in verse 47. But we also see in other parts of Acts that nearly everything that the church was doing, nearly everything these Christians were doing, it had an evangelistic emphasis to it.

[32 : 32] They were living like Christians and they were talking about what God had done in their life. They were sharing the gospel. That's what Jesus told us to do. That great commission that you're familiar with in Matthew 28, one way to think about that is, Jesus said, as you go, make disciples.

As you go, make disciples. Evangelism is not just a responsibility that we have, it's a privilege. Think about it, God uses us, who we are, how we live.

He uses our words, sharing the gospel. He uses us in his process of changing people's lives. Do you need to make the priority of evangelism a part of your spiritual wellness plan?

If you're not involved, you do. And the way to start is demonstrating the difference that Christ makes in your life. If our lives are not credible testimonies to how God works in someone's life to save them, we can't be, we aren't witnesses.

Or we're poor witnesses, put it that way. We need to demonstrate by the way that we live, the way we treat people around about us, the way we do our job, the way we go about whatever it is that we do.

[33 : 53] We need to demonstrate that we do what we do for the glory of God. We do other things. We do what we do to make a positive impact in other people's lives. We're going to make evangelism a priority.

We've got to develop relationships with people who are not Christians. Develop relationships, meaningful relationships. We need to learn to share our testimony, how the Lord saved us, the difference He makes in our lives.

We need to learn to actually explain the gospel. One way to make evangelism a greater priority is to pray for people you know who are not Christians. Pray for them.

Pray that they'll be convicted of their sin. They'll be open to your witness. Invite them to church. Invite them to Sunday school. Invite them to anything. Just invite them to be a part of your life.

Let me ask you. Do you plan to grow spiritually? Do you plan, do you desire to become a more faithful follower of Jesus, a more Christ-like person in this new year?

[35 : 01] Are you seeking God's guidance as to what you need to do for that to happen? Well, if you don't have your own plan, I want to encourage you to develop a spiritual wellness plan that includes what we see in the lives of these early Christians.

Seek to be, ask God to help you, show you how to be a worshiping, evangelizing, learning, and loving Christian. And together, we need to be seeking to be this worshiping, loving, or worshiping, evangelizing, learning, and loving family of faith that glorifies God by the way we do this and the people's lives we impact this way.

I want to encourage you to make the same kind of commitment we see in these people. They were devoted to this. I want to encourage you to devote yourself to being a well Christian or develop your own plan.

But right here, just in the, what, 14th day of the new year, let's plan personally. Let's pray. Let's put forth the effort to grow spiritually as a child of God because that will please God.

And if we're really Christians, that will please us. And if we grow as Christians, we're going to positively affect and influence people around us.

[36 : 38] Both other Christians will encourage them, but also unbelievers. God will use us to touch their lives and we pray change them for all eternity.

Let's pray together. Dear God, show us right now how we should respond to you and what you're saying to us about our own spiritual wellness.

Father, give us the desire to be more like Jesus, which is what we're talking about. Give us the desire, dear God, to make you knowing and doing your will our priority.

Father, show us how we should respond. Help us to make that kind of commitment.

Father, for some people in this room, what they need to do is to admit they are not believers, repent of their sin, change their mind about it, turn from the way they're living.

Help them, dear God, to do that and to put their trust in Jesus and really understand and depend upon that when Jesus died on the cross, He paid the penalty for their sin.

[38 : 04] He took their punishment. Help that person, man or woman, boy or girl, to call upon Jesus right now to save him or her. And let's just stay in an attitude of prayer, all of us, and respond to the Lord as He speaks to us.

I'd be happy to pray with you during this time if you'd like. I'll be here at the front and just would consider it an honor. So let's just be still and quiet and listen to the Lord and obey Him.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.