

WHEN GOD BUILDS THE HOUSE
Psalm 127:1, I Corinthians 3:10-15

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Let me begin this sermon on a personal note. This time last year I was a patient at Vanderbilt Hospital feeling much too weak to either eat or pray. Through that dark night of the soul, the looming question of my ability to continue as pastor of this great congregation weighed heavily on my heart and mind. Last fall seems like a long time ago now. As we pause to celebrate a building milestone in the history of this congregation, I want to thank God for the privilege of being able to be present. Life is a gift. And I am grateful to God and to all of you.

At last the dreaming, the planning, the capital campaign, the budgeting, the prioritizing, the change orders, and the surprises of the largest building and renovation adventure in the history of the Church is nearing completion. So it is a good and right and proper thing that we pause today to give thanks to God for the things he has done. Let the church rejoice and say 'Amen.'

When King Solomon completed the elegant temple in Jerusalem for the children of Israel, he wrote a song of ascent which is Psalm 127. Here's what he says: *UNLESS THE LORD BUILDS THE HOUSE, ITS BUILDERS LABOR IN VAIN.* That's what I would like for us to think about today.

WHEN THE LORD BUILDS THE HOUSE, THE FOUNDATION IS FIRM.
Paul using the same analogy in I Corinthians, Chapter 3 says *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid, that foundation is Jesus Christ.*

When I was feeling especially exuberant at the opening of our new building, a church member reminded me that "buildings don't mean a darn thing—it's what happens inside them that matters." Of course he is right.

Facilities facilitate. Christ alone can transform a life. We can have an ad campaign that rivals Nike. We can have a music program that equals the symphony. We can have preaching superior to Billy Graham. We can have a building like the Crystal Cathedral. We can have more community hype than the Titans. But without Christ, we are nothing more than noisy gongs and clanging cymbals.

When John Wesley sent Francis Asbury to America to evangelize the frontier, he sent him forth with these words 'OFFER THEM CHRIST.' May we never forget our heritage. May we never forget our calling. May we never forget our purpose for being. Offer them Christ.

The Werner Art Center on the campus of Ohio State University is a fascinating

building designed with a post- modern view of reality. The building has no pattern. There are staircases that go nowhere. There are pillars that support nothing. The architect designed the building to reflect his view of life that was mindless and senseless. A visitor to the center asked the guide, “Did they do the same thing with the foundation?” “No way,” replied the guide. “You can’t risk that kind of nonsense on an infrastructure.” The foundation had to be solid.

*The Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is his new creation, by water and the Word.
From heaven He came and sought her, to be his holy bride;
With his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.*

Let us never forget our foundation. Or as G. Campbell Morgan put it:

The church of God apart from the person of Christ is a useless structure. However ornate it may be in its organization, however perfect in all its arrangements, however rich and increased with goods, if the church is not revealing the person of Jesus Christ, lifting him up for all to see, then the church becomes a sham, a blasphemy, a fraud, and the sooner the world is rid of it, the better. We must remember our foundation.

When the foundation is right, everything else falls into place. It took a lot longer to get the foundation out there than it took to get the drywall in. When the foundation is right, everything else falls in place. And when the Lord builds the house, the foundation is firm.

WHEN THE LORD BUILDS THE HOUSE, THE BUILDERS CAN REST IN PEACE.

Let me explain what I mean. I am not suggesting that building programs will send you to an early grave, although there is some evidence to back that up.

George Barna suggested a few years ago that there is a high correlation between church building programs and the transfer of the senior pastor. I questioned his research until I realized that I moved on two of my last three building programs before we ever entered the new facilities. Don’t get your hopes up. I have not come to pass, I have come to stay. The good Lord willing and my health doesn’t fail, you are stuck with me for a while.

There is a verse in Solomon’s psalm that I have overlooked for a lifetime. It’s verse 2—*In vain you rise early and stay up late toiling for food to eat—for God grants sleep to those he loves.* Did you know that was in the Bible? God grants sleep for those he loves.

Do you have problems sleeping? Do the worries of the day and the stresses of life haunt you in the night? Do you toss and turn over the responsibilities you are going to face tomorrow? Can the Lord do something about your insomnia?

A woman for years had trouble sleeping at night for fear of burglars. One night she and her husband heard a noise downstairs. So the husband went down to investigate. Lo and behold he found a burglar in their living room. “Good evening,” said the husband to the intruder, “I’m pleased to see you. Come upstairs and meet my wife. She’s been anxiously waiting to meet you for ten years.”

I’m not intending to make light of sleep disorders or real phobias. I am saying it’s possible to bring our burdens to the Lord and leave them there. When we worry about the things we cannot change we are destined to become weary in well doing.

Whether building a life or a church, build it the best that you can. Time will reveal the materials you use. There is a difference between silver and straw. One is refined by the fire. The other is destroyed by it. Make sure when you build your life and make your contributions to the world, whatever they may be, that they are things that will last and stand in the storms of time.

In 1992, hurricane Andrew destroyed thousands of homes in South Florida. In one area where the wreckage looked like a war zone, a house remained standing, fully anchored on its foundation. A reporter asked the owner, “Why weren’t you blown away?” The owner replied “I built this house myself. I built it according to the Florida hurricane code. Where it called for 2 x 6 roof trusses I used 2 x 6’s. It stood the storm.”

Are you building your house that way? Are you building your home that way? Are we together building a community of faith that will stand in the fire, that will last in the day of the storm? Are you constructing your life with good stuff? Are you doing your best each day? Do you live by the golden rule? Are you engaging in things of value? Is it easy for you to sleep at night? When the Lord builds the house, the builders rest in peace.

WHEN THE LORD BUILDS THE HOUSE, IT STANDS THE TEST OF TIME.

I’ve made a discovery the last few years. I’m not going to get everything done in my lifetime. My In box will not be empty when I die. And by the way, yours will not either. You are not going to get it all done in this lifetime. It’s just not going to work that way.

Jim Collins in his book From Good to Great says the difference between a good leader and a great leader is that the great leaders empower their companies to thrive after they are gone. The real test of leadership is what happens after you are off the scene and you and I are but a distant memory in history that has too quickly slipped by. You are not going to get everything done in this life but what you do on the stage of life has an impact on eternity. Randy Travis puts it this way: “It’s not what you take when you leave this world behind you, it’s what you leave behind you when you go.”

At the entrance to Disney World's Epcot Center there is a "Leave a Legacy" sculpture. For \$35 you can have your digital photo etched on the sculpture. You can also have your image, along with your hopes and dreams for your family placed on a special web site. Is that what a legacy is all about really, to get your picture put somewhere?

Max Jukes lived in New York state back in the 18th century. Max did not believe in Christianity and married a woman who shared his disbelief. A study of more than a thousand descendents from their union reveals that 300 died prematurely, 100 were sent to prison for an average of 13 years, 190 were public prostitutes, 100 were drunkards. The Jukes family cost the state of New York 1.2 million dollars and made no noticeable contributions whatsoever to society. You're going to leave something behind. What's it going to be?

Jonathan Edwards also lived in New York state in the late 18th century. He was a devout Christian and married a wife of like mind. Their 729 descendents reveals this family has produced 300 preachers, 69 college professors, 13 university presidents, 60 noted authors, 3 U.S. Congressmen, and 1 Vice President of the United States.

Only one life will soon be passed. What are you going to do with it that lasts? You have a legacy to give to the world. We have a moment of time, a sliver of opportunity. Will we seize it for God? It's not what you take when you leave this world behind you, it's what you leave behind you when you go.

I was up in Lexington, Kentucky, this week making a fund-raising speech for Wesley Retirement Village, a state of the art, multi-level retirement community owned and operated by the Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church. I couldn't believe what had happened there in 13 years. You see, I did the research and planning for that community. The last thing I did before leaving Lexington in 1991 was to sign an agreement on a piece of land that was projected to someday be a retirement community. Now that Village provides nearly 200 people a wonderful life.

I've dreamed many dreams that never came true
That vanished with the site of dawn.
But I've had enough of my dreams to come true
To make me want to dream on.

I've prayed many prayers where no answer came
Where God seemed distant and gone.
But enough of my prayers have been answered, thank God
To make me keep praying on.

Elton Trueblood put it this way. "A person has made at least a start on discovering the meaning of life when he plants shade trees under which he knows full well he will never sit." Time spent with our children and grand children has

eternal consequences. Investments made in generations to come will reap dividends long after we are gone.

Paul wrote *The work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, the fire will test, what sort of work each has done.*

In our church Lord, be glorified today.

In our buildings Lord, be glorified today.

In our lives Lord, be glorified, always.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

