



The Church Planting Workshop  
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## **The Building Snare**

The Sears Roebuck company was once the largest retailer in the world. They built the tallest building in the world (tallest for awhile) to declare to the world they were number one. Success seems to be connected to buildings. This goes for churches and for businesses.

I work with hundreds of churches and most of them are considered small by any mega standards. One of the most challenging issues before the church small or mega is the building. From churches all over the world I am constantly hearing, “We need a building.” My heart goes out to them because the need is everywhere. A building will continue to be the great need, the greatest financial investment and the goal and aim of most pastors and churches.

**We have to have a home for our church, our people deserve it.**

Why didn't the church, for the first three centuries, have buildings? Thousands saved on the Day of Pentecost where did they gather? In homes all over the city and countryside? Why didn't Peter start a building program? Today if someone had a few thousand saved in one day they would have a multi-million dollar building program going before nightfall. Buildings impress us today and the future generations who want to go see the ancient structures.

We think of a building as a financial investment. In many ways that is true. Yet, in Europe and the Eastern (older areas) of America, denominations are stuck with old buildings that are not functional today and they can't afford to maintain them.

### **What can you do with a Crystal Cathedral?**

The ultra mega Crystal Cathedral in Orange, California stands as a monument of our mega ministry generation. Dr. Schuller stands out as one of the first mega-ministries and was a pacesetter displaying what this generation has come to believe is success for the church. There is no doubt that Dr. Schuller was a great man and has kingdom rewards awaiting him in heaven. Being one of the first mega-ministries he faced the challenges of the long-term effects of the mega costs, mega upkeep and how to replace a mega leader. In October 2010

Crystal Cathedral filed for chapter 11 bankruptcy. Later the property was sold to the Catholic Dioceses in Southern California. I am in no way criticizing Dr. Schuller, I am just sharing as an example, since he is one of the first mega-ministries that operate on the mega-debt system. His situation may be a foretaste of what will happen eventually for many.

### **Here is a generation repeating what the previous generation did.**

This massive Crystal Cathedral is a modern structure no different than the ones built a century ago in Europe and parts of America. Buildings that today are empty or have a small, dying congregation burdened with upkeep and costs. What can you do with a Glass Cathedral? Perhaps a museum for the future generations to admire?

In Hesperia a town just north of where I live there was an empty unfinished church building that was being built by a large church when the economic downturn of 2009 happened. So they had to stop building and they lost the property. The bank came in and finished the building, but now who can buy it? It is not really suitable for anything but a mega-church.

You can travel throughout Asia and Europe and see the left-over buildings of each generation. We stare in awe at the beauty of their architect, the art and stained glass windows.

What I am talking about here, most everyone knows but we keep on the same track. A popular saying is, "Keep doing what you doing and you will keep getting what you get." For those who are living in the present glory of the mega-boom then all blessing to you. I pray that you are blessed and fruitful. For me, after over forty years of ministry I do not want to leave a legacy of a building. I want to leave a legacy of church planting, pioneering, world missions and a method that will multiply.

### **Temples, Churches, Arenas and Coliseums**

During the time of Christ and the Apostles there were mega religious temples and Roman coliseums throughout the countries. Jesus could have built a temple or some type of building in Jerusalem to accommodate his young church, but he did not. The understanding the New Testament writers had was, "And what union can there be between God's temple and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said: 'I will live in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people'" (2 Corinthians 6:16, NLT).

Did Jesus deliberately leave out any instructions about the future need His church would have for temples or buildings? Jesus must have known that buildings would become the priority for his church and the most expensive expenditure financially throughout the ages. So, why is the subject of buildings for the church totally absent in the New Testament?

### **Why are buildings the goal and priority of the church today?**

As soon as the church was free from persecution around the third century, they built mega-buildings. Some still stand as museums today. You can go to Turkey and see what used to be the mega-center of Christianity. Visit Rome and walk through some of the first mega-church buildings. Tour Europe where the mega-center of Christianity flourished and you will see the buildings that they spent fortunes on a few centuries ago that today are dinosaurs being sold off as museums, community centers, apartment buildings and in too many cases, mosques. Every generation where the church has experienced freedom it has succumbed to the building pull. You would think we would learn better. But, like so much of the world we prefer to live in denial.

Yet, we do it again and again. It's like Christian freedom and buildings go together. Yet, century after century the end is the same; empty buildings that no one wants and the next generation with very little spiritual legacy.

### **Am I saying that we should not have church buildings? No I am not.**

I am saying that church buildings have not proven to be what the church truly needs to focus on. The entire life of most churches is focused on building their buildings. I work with small churches ranging in size from pioneer to a few hundred people. Most of their funds go toward buildings in one form or another. They are either in a building and wanting another one. Or, they are renting a building and wanting to build or buy one. Or, they are raising and saving money for something building related.

The church is not interested in simply filling a need for a meeting place - every generation wants their buildings to be like temples. God's house must be beautiful and have the best. How many times have you heard that during the fund raising campaign? Is the building really for Jesus? Would Jesus spend his lifetime of ministry focusing on a building? Would a building be the crowning achievement of his ministry life? I don't think so. Jesus left disciples. If we

could simply compare the amounts of money that goes into buildings rather than evangelism, missions or mercy ministries we might wake up.

Cathedrals of the Middle Ages were massive structures often taking up to a century or more to build. Somehow during these centuries the people felt God was connected to the Cathedral. Today, one company that specializes in building church buildings has as their goal, “Our main goal is to minister to your church and bring Glory to God.” Does a building bring, “Glory to God”? In the Bible and in the history of the early church, we do not find any evidence that special buildings were built to bring glory to God.

### **The Building Burden**

To the majority of believers and non-believers “church” means a building. If we study church planting and Christian multiplication movements through church history they ceased to accelerate when they begin to add paid staff and church buildings to their mission efforts.

I work with hundreds of small churches. We have been pioneering churches for 40 years. We always have a large number of pioneer churches. I am convinced that buildings are our greatest hurdle especially in cities. The majority of Praise Chapel churches in America are centered around Southern California at this time. We are dealing with the challenges of pioneering churches in the city. The cost of infrastructure in a global city increases the need to incorporate approaches to church planting that are able to reproduce naturally within the cultural setting.

When the Apostles wrote the letters that make up our New Testament, they were writing to the churches. These churches were not in buildings. They were not large weekend gatherings. They were small groups meeting all over the city yet united as one church in vision and purpose.

Many ministries are being wise and building facilities that can easily be transformed into something other than a church.

### **We perpetuate the same errors.**

During the beginning of our ministry, Janet and I preached a lot of meetings in the Charlotte, North Carolina area. It seems that a man named A.G. Garr experienced an exciting move of God there. He was touched at the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles. In 1933 he built Garr Memorial Church (at least most

don't name their building after them today.) By the time Janet and I came along it was an old building downtown with his tomb in the basement and a few people attended. I was reading the news a few years ago and caught a clip, Garr Memorial Auditorium was torn down.

I know of three ministries that have been very fruitful. It is interesting to me that all three are building massive buildings. One costing over 70 million. One of the pastors is 90+ years old, another in his 70's, the other is around 70. I'm thinking to myself, why? There seems to be something about monuments and legacy a person wants to leave behind. I'm not prophesying but if history repeats itself sometime in the next 40 or so years those buildings most probably will not be needed.

I go to downtown Los Angeles to Azusa Street and there is a street sign that reads, "The birthplace fo the Pentecostal moment." There was no fancy building ever built at that sight, but the greatest revival movement was birth there and the effects of that revival are still alive today around the world. That is the legacy I would love to leave.