

Blueprint for
**SPIRITUAL
MATURITY**

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*Building Vibrant Church Ministries
by Christ's Design*

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Contents

Preface 7

Chapter 1 Building the Church 9

Chapter 2 Building toward the Goal 19

Chapter 3 Building by Design 27

Chapter 4 Building with a Crew 37

Wrap-up 47

Preface

There is something captivating about building projects. Watching a structure take shape on a piece of property where no building previously existed is intriguing. A high-rise building under construction in the heart of a major city always captures the attention of passersby. People bend their heads back, straining to watch the cranes lifting heavy loads and the steel workers crawling like insects over the skeleton of girders.

No one is more interested in a construction project than its architect. While others watch the progress out of curiosity, he observes every detail. His project and his reputation are at stake. He wants the structure built the way he envisioned. The enormous investment of finances and effort that gives substance to the architect's original design comes to fruition when the building is finally completed and occupancy is granted.

For the child of God, no greater building project exists to capture his or her attention than the church of Jesus Christ. It is God's primary project on earth at this time. The church is so important to Jesus Christ that He was willing to leave Heaven, become a man, and ultimately give His life that the church might be built. It is so precious to Christ that He calls it His Bride, whom He is preparing for a wedding day. The church is so close to Him that He calls it His Body, which He is growing. It is so necessary to Him that He calls it His temple, in which He is dwelling. It is so dear to Him that He calls it His family.

God desires that every believer value the building of His church as being of paramount importance. He expects more from every child of His than just watching others do the work of construction. He wants every believer to take part in building His church.

God's church is currently under construction. God has a plan revealed in His Word for how His church is to be built. Every true church composed of believers in Christ has an obligation to build His church according to His plan. This book and the BuildUP series it introduces are designed to assist you in building your church according to Christ's plan. Believers have no more important work to give themselves to than the work of building the church of Jesus Christ.



CHAPTER 1

Building the Church

The supreme building project of all ages is the church of Jesus Christ.

Come with us on an imaginary sightseeing tour. We are viewing history's finest building projects: the Pyramids, the Great Wall of China, the Roman Coliseum, the Eiffel Tower, the Taj Mahal, the Brooklyn Bridge, and the Hoover Dam. Our eyes widen and our mouths gape in amazement as we view these marvels of human engineering and construction.

Though each of these architectural wonders has unique features, they all required certain essentials at the time of their construction. Each project necessitated an architect, who conceived the original concept and drew the plans: a durable design to withstand the ravages of time, nature, and attack; appropriate building materials and tools to accomplish the construction; and a competent crew of craftsmen and workers.

The structures named above are impressive, yet one project surpasses them all. It has been under construction for nearly two thousand years. This supreme building project is the church of Jesus Christ. The Lord announced His intentions regarding this project when He told His disciples, "I will build My church"

(Matthew 16:18). True to His word, Christ initiated the construction. On the ground-breaking Day of Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2, the church building project commenced. The church was built initially in Jerusalem, but it soon was under construction in Judea, then Samaria, and eventually to the uttermost parts of the earth. The vision Christ cast in Acts 1:8 was coming to fruition. This church construction project continues today across the world and in your community through your local church.

AN EXTRAORDINARY ARCHITECT

Like other building projects, the church has an architect. Its Architect, Jesus Christ, is superior to all other designers. Christ is the planner of the church; He is the final authority on how the church is to be constructed. He is fully qualified as the church's designer. Consider this impressive description of Christ's construction and supervisory competencies: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence" (Colossians 1:15–18).

We must ensure that Christ remains the sole Architect. Church history records deceivers who have presented themselves as architects of the church. They proposed their own plans. The apostle Paul warned of this danger: "Beware lest anyone cheat you through

philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8). Other architects may present faulty plans based on cultural and personal ideologies rather than on Christ’s design. Christ has entrusted to believers the work of building His church; He must be our sole Architect. “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught” (Colossians 2:6, 7).

Christ used a parable of construction to underscore the importance of following His plans exclusively. To follow any other plan would result in an eventual collapse of the building. He said,

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall. (Matthew 7:24–27)

Question to ponder: What evidence exists that your church is being built according to Christ’s plans?

BUILT TO LAST

Remember the construction story “The Three Little Pigs,” which you learned as a child? When the pigs set out to build a house, they each took a different

approach. One pig used straw as his construction material. It didn't take much huffing and puffing from the big bad wolf to blow that house down. Another pig used sticks, only to experience similar consequences when attacked by the formidable foe. The third pig wisely used bricks. No matter how hard the wolf tried, he could not blow the house down. The brick house was built to last.

The test of quality construction is a building's ability to withstand destructive forces. Will the building succumb to the fury of high winds? Will the structure leak when it rains? Is the construction vulnerable to fire? Is the structure capable of enduring temperature extremes? Can it survive a hostile attack? The church of Jesus Christ is designed to withstand the most severe destructive forces. Jesus described the durability of His building project when He said, "The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Though churches are always at risk and must take precautions to guard themselves against damaging spiritual forces, the true church of Jesus Christ will ultimately endure the worst that Hell can launch against it.

Hell's attacks against the church are inevitable. Paul warned the leadership of the church in Ephesus of the threats that were sure to come: "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:29, 30). Peter delivered a similar warning: "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the

Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction” (2 Peter 2:1).

Though these threats are real and can be damaging to churches, believers who adhere determinedly to the faith can resist these menaces. Note the construction term in Jude’s admonition, “But you, beloved, *building* yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (Jude 20, 21; italics added).

The ultimate durability of the church is assured. Though the challenges to building a church may at times seem overwhelming, Christ’s promise that the gates of Hell will not prevail against it reminds us that His church will ultimately be built. Not even Hell’s fury will stop the construction.

Question to ponder: What preparations is your church making to resist Hell’s attacks?

CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS

Typically the materials used to build a structure are concrete, steel, bricks, and lumber. However, the church of Jesus Christ is constructed of an unusual building material: people who have trusted Christ as their Savior. Peter referred to believers “as living stones, [who] are being built up a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5). Paul described the believers composing the church in Ephesus as those “having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling

place of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:20–22).

As believers we may meet in a brick, stone, or other structure called a church, but we must always recognize that the real church is built of people who have trusted Christ as Savior. The focus of our ministries should not be on our facilities but on people who have placed saving faith in Jesus Christ. The church is built as people believe the gospel and are saved and grow in their faith.

Questions to ponder: Is spiritual construction taking place in your church?

Are people believing the gospel and growing in their faith?

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Have you ever started building something and discovered that you didn’t have the right tools? The project might have easily failed. To successfully complete construction, the right tools—shovels, trowels, saws, hammers, pry bars, tape measures—are necessary. Without them it is impossible to build a structure.

Construction on the church of Jesus Christ likewise requires the right tools. Paul challenged the pastors of the churches in Ephesus to always use the right Tool in their work. He told them, “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). The Word of God is the primary tool for building lives. Without the Word, people will not grow spiritually.

With the Word, people grow in their faith, and the church is built up.

Second Timothy 3:16 and 17 explain the inherent potential of the Word of God to build lives: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” In contrast, when the Word of God is omitted or resisted, growing stops. “Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was” (2 Timothy 3:8, 9). The preaching and teaching of God’s Word must take preeminence if genuine building is to take place in the church.

Question to ponder: How is the Word of God used as the primary tool in building your church?

A CONSTRUCTION CREW

When God conveyed to Moses His blueprint for the construction of the tabernacle, the plan entailed utilizing a skilled crew of workers to complete the job. God equipped individuals such as Bezalel and Aholiab not only to do the work of design and construction but also to teach others the necessary technical skills. In this way He created a large competent workforce.

Exodus 35:30—36:1 describes the construction crew that was recruited and trained to build the tabernacle:

And Moses said to the children of Israel, “See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom and understanding, in knowledge and all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, and bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of artistic workmanship. And He has put in his heart the ability to teach, in him and Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. He has filled them with skill to do all manner of work of the engraver and the designer and the tapestry maker, in blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine linen, and of the weaver—those who do every work and those who design artistic works. And Bezalel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan in whom the LORD has put wisdom and understanding, to know how to do all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, shall do according to all that the LORD has commanded.”

Such a large group of people working together at that construction site must have been amazing to observe. The workers’ combined, coordinated efforts resulted in the completed tabernacle.

In a similar fashion as with the tabernacle building project, Christ utilized a skilled crew of workers to construct the church. Second Timothy 2:1 and 2 describe His strategy for assembling a competent workforce: “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” As trained Bible teachers equipped others to teach God’s Word, the church began to expand to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Paul expressed this church-building strategy in terms of construction in 1 Corinthians 3:9–11: “For we are God’s fellow workers . . . you are God’s building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

As Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, he envisioned himself in the role of a church builder. He was addressing a crew of church construction workers. Through his teaching of the Word, he laid the foundation for the church in Corinth. By skillfully crafting Biblical instruction, those trained workers would continue the project of building believers’ lives that Paul had begun in that community. In contrast to skillful instruction, he warned against shoddy workmanship of teaching that was neither built on the foundation of Christ nor fastened to the Word of God. A church that is being built properly recognizes the importance of a trained crew of teachers who know how to teach the Word of God to the children, youth, and adults of its congregation.

BUILDING INSPECTION

Paul followed up his challenge to the crew of teachers by reminding them that their work would be inspected one day by the church’s Architect:

Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s

work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are. (1 Corinthians 3:12–17)

This anticipated inspection will focus on the quality of workmanship that the church workers have done in building lives by God's Word. The work of church construction through Biblical instruction must be taken seriously. It would be tragic for us to stand before the church's Designer, Jesus Christ, and have our work go up in flames because we had not been building properly.

Question to ponder: What evidence is there that your church is being properly constructed?

Considering church construction and inspection may intimidate us—it is meant to! James acknowledged the sobering obligation of those who instruct others in the Word of God. He warned, “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (James 3:1). It is a great responsibility to build the church.

Read on to learn how to build Christ's church His way!